

The Power of the Spirit

Parameters of an Ecumenical pneumatology in the 21th century

A. The wind blows where it chooses. An ignored reality?

One of the most remarkable - but also relatively unknown - features of Christianity in the 20th century is the unprecedented growth of the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement. Coming from almost zero at the beginning of the century they now number an estimated 533 million Christians. In the last 30 years the movement has grown with an average of 15 million new believers per year¹ and it currently accounts for more than 25 % of world Christianity. If growth continues as it is, the Pentecostals/Charismatics will certainly outnumber any other Christian group by the middle of next century.²

It is important to emphasize that this movement is wider than what is traditionally called the Pentecostal Church. Hollenweger distinguishes between three different groups that can be considered part of the modern Pentecostal/Charismatic movement.³

1. First of all there are the traditional Pentecostal churches, which trace their origin back to the revival of the beginning of the 20th century in the USA. Charles Fox Parham and William J. Seymour are seen as pioneers of this revival and Seymour's church in Azusa Street in downtown Los Angeles is well known for the unfamiliar events that took place there between 1906 and 1908. Central to this traditional Pentecostalism is the (dogmatic concept of) Baptism with the Holy Spirit as a second experience after conversion, the so-called second blessing, and speaking in tongues as the mark of the true Spirit-filled Christian.

2. Secondly we can identify the so-called Charismatic movement, a revival movement that started in the fifties and sixties within the traditional churches. Views on Baptism with the Holy Spirit are not uniform and speaking in tongues is not necessarily a sign of the true believer. Central to this movement is the emphasis on the charismata (gifts of the Spirit), from which the movement derives its name, and the renewal of the Christian life. We can range the so-called 'third wave', a neo-Pentecostal movement in the nineteen-eighties and nineties, that asked renewed attention for signs and wonders, under this Charismatic

¹ Estimated numbers:	1970	2000	Expected in 2025
	72 million	524 million	812 million

Source: D.B.Barrett, T.M.Johnson, "Annual Statistical Table on Global Mission: 2001" in: *IBMR* 25/1 (2001), p. 24, 25.

² The numbers of other denominations:	1970	2000	Expected in 2025
Roman Catholic Church :	670 million	1.000 million	1.350 million
Orthodox Churches:	140 million	215 million	250 million
Protestant Churches:	210 million	340 million	470 million
Anglicans	50 million	80 million	115 million
Evangelicals:	95 million	210 million	325 million
Islam:	550 million	1.190 million	1.785 million

Source: D.B. Barrett, T.M. Johnson, "Annual Statistical Table", p. 25.

These figures may be slightly misleading, since we are not comparing denominations. The Pentecostal/Charismatic movement is to a certain extent part of these denominations, so there is an overlap in the figures. Nevertheless, the majority of Pentecostals is part of separate churches, especially on the Southern Hemisphere.

³ Cf. W.J.Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism. Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997), p. 2; See also W. Grudem, *Systematic Theology. An Introduction to Biblical Doctrine* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994), p. 763 n. 2; A. E. McGrath, *Christian Theology. An Introduction* (Cambridge Massachusetts: Blackwell, 1997²), p. 124-126.

movement. The main group within this 'third wave' is the Vineyard movement, of which John Wimber was a pioneer.⁴

3. Finally Hollenweger points to the non-white indigenous churches as the third group within the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement. Mainly located on the Southern Hemisphere these are churches that have arisen over the last few decades as grass-roots churches, which have purposely become independent from the missionary churches of the last century. In general these churches would not call themselves 'Pentecostal', but they share many features with the Charismatic and Pentecostal groups.

When we look at these numbers and compare them with those of other denominations, we can only be encouraged by the promise this movement holds not only for the Church worldwide, but for the world community as well. It is likewise clear that a movement like this cannot be ignored by the Christian community and poses a major challenge to the Ecumenical Movement.⁵ Since these churches and groups represent an experience of the work of the Holy Spirit that differs distinctively from that of the traditional mainline churches, the challenge is first and foremost a theological one. Growing contacts between the different traditions will motivate and urge the Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal churches alike to rethink their respective views on the Holy Spirit. An ecumenical pneumatology today is both inescapable and indispensable.

It is encouraging to see many positive signs in this direction. Over the last decades there has been both a renewed interest in the work of the Holy Spirit⁶ and a rapprochement between many mainline churches and the Pentecostals. In 1991 the WCC chose in an unprecedented way a 'Spiritual' theme for its seventh assembly - *Come Holy Spirit, renew the whole creation* - and decided at its eighth assembly to form a WCC-Pentecostal joint working group to consolidate and broaden existing relationships with the Pentecostal movement.⁷ In a similar way we have seen growing relationships between Orthodox churches and the Pentecostals and between the Roman Catholic Church and the Pentecostals⁸

Despite these positive signs, however, the contacts between the WCC and the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement seem to be primarily on a formal rather than a material level. The absence of a substantial Pentecostal contribution to the 11th conference on world

⁴ The term 'third wave' was first used by C. P. Wagner. He classifies the traditional Pentecostal churches as the first stage of the Pentecostal movement, the Charismatic movement as the second and the 'signs and wonders' movement as the 'third wave', cf. Grudem, *Theology*, p. 763 n.2, McGrath, *Theology*, p. 125. This classification will do as long as we limit ourselves to the Pentecostal movement in the West. However, the growth of the movement is primarily in the non-Western world.

⁵ Cf. General Secretary of the WCC Konrad Raiser: "The present growth of Christianity is almost entirely due to Pentecostal and Evangelical churches.... This means for the World Council of Churches that it has to open itself to these new manifestations of Christian Existence, Christian church, and Christian witness.", cited in Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, p. 3. Hollenweger emphasizes the need for the WCC to seek the cooperation with the Pentecostals, since it did the same with the Orthodox Churches (that forms a much smaller segment). Cf. also J. Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life. A Universal Affirmation* (London: SCM press, 1992), p. 4.

⁶ Cf. D.L. Migliore, *Faith Seeking Understanding. An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 166-168. H. Berkhof, *The doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (London: The Epworth Press, 1965), is already sympathetic to the Pentecostal challenge and tries to express this theologically, cf. p. 24, 25. Cf. also Moltmann, *Spirit*, p. 4.

⁷ Cf. D. Kessler (ed.), *Together on the way. Official Report of the Eighth Assembly of the World Council of Churches*, (Geneva: WCC publications, 1999), p.168.

⁸ The official contacts between the RCC and the Pentecostals have existed for almost 30 years, dating back to 1972, cf. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, p. 165.

mission in Salvador (Brazil) in 1996 is striking⁹ and it is remarkable that both the reports of the moderator and the general secretary to the eighth Assembly of the WCC lack any reference to Pentecostalism. Likewise in academic theology the Pentecostal contribution seems hardly taken into consideration, notwithstanding the growing number of academic Pentecostal publications. It can accordingly be questioned whether there is a real cross-fertilization of ideas between the different movements.¹⁰

What exactly is the challenge that we are facing? Pentecostalism can have many different forms and ideas.¹¹ Some Pentecostals/Charismatics emphasize the baptism with the Holy Spirit as a second blessing, while others would prefer to speak more generally about a (repeated) filling with the Spirit, which should be part of every believer's experience. All however will acknowledge the importance of the renewing and empowering work of the Holy Spirit in the Christian life.

Some Pentecostals would hold that speaking in tongues is the mark of a true believer, while others would say that it is only one of the gifts that Christians *can* but do not *have* to receive from the Spirit. All however will accept the continuing presence and importance of the charismata in the true Christian life, including the gifts of healing, speaking in tongues and prophecy.

In general, although most of the Pentecostals and Charismatics will not deny the role of the Spirit in the act of faith, conversion and baptism, the stress is essentially on the empowering work of the Holy Spirit.

This emphasis contrasts with the more sober theology of the mainline churches. Although they might in general not deny the possibility of wonders and signs, many will nevertheless be uneasy about Pentecostal theology and claim that the gifts of the Spirit have ceased to be in operation.¹² The emphasis in general is more on the work of the Spirit in creating faith, in baptism, in church leadership, in creation and in the struggle against injustice.¹³

⁹ Cf. W. van Laar, "Missiologische thema's op de drempel van een nieuw millennium" in: *Theologia Reformata* 42/2 (1999), 91-110, p. 100

¹⁰ Even though several member churches of the WCC are Pentecostal, the hesitation is understandable: 1. Many (Orthodox) churches within the WCC have very often experienced proselytism from the free evangelical and Pentecostal groups and therefore are not eager to treat them as equals. 2. Besides that there also seems to be a real fear for the unknown and the uncontrollable, especially since many people tend to highlight the excessive manifestations they see within the Pentecostal movement. 3. Thirdly, the Pentecostal movement itself has not been very eager to establish contact with the ecumenical movement, because it suspects the WCC of liberalism and syncretism. Ecumenism with non-Pentecostal churches is simply not on the agenda. 4. Another element in the separation between Ecumenicals and Pentecostals could be the persistent presence of Western (and may be traditional Church) ideas and interests in the ecumenical movement. Not only the Orthodox Churches have by repetition pointed this out, cf. Kessler, *Together on the way*, p. 68, but also the absence of the Pentecostals could be a sign in a similar direction. 5. Finally it is not easy to establish relationships with a movement like the Pentecostals that is clearly not unified in ideas and structures and does not have a central representation.

¹¹ According to Hollenweger there are e.g. Trinitarian and non-Trinitarian, infant and adult baptizing Pentecostals/Charismatics and many other variations, cf. *Pentecostalism*, p. 18.

¹² Cf. e.g. R.B. Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost: Studies in New Testament Teaching on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (Phillipsburg, N.J., 1979); J.F. MacArthur, jr. *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); O.P. Robertson, *The Final Word* (Edinburgh and Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1993). Cf. the discussion in Grudem, *Theology*, p. 1031-1038; J. Deere, *Surprised by the Power of the Spirit* (Eastbourne: Kingsway Publications, 1998⁹), p. 229-266.

¹³ Cf. e.g. M. Kinnamon (ed.), *Signs of the Spirit. Official Report Seventh Assembly* (Geneva: WCC Publications and Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1991), p. 67, 789, 126, cf. B.J.G. Reitsma, *Geest en Schepping. Een bijbels-theologische bijdrage aan de systematische doordenking van de verhouding van de Geest van God en de geschapen werkelijkheid* (Zoetermeer: Boekencentrum, 1997), p. 15-20.

There are two features of the past and present Pentecostal movement respectively, which I think should be taken into consideration, since they might hold significant potential in the present context. First of all there is the fact that for William Seymour, the *black* minister of the Azusa Mission Church in Los Angeles, the most important feature of ‘Pentecostalism’ was not the work of the Spirit in signs, healings and speaking in tongues, but the race- and denomination-transcending power of the Holy Spirit. In the Church in Azusa Street, black and white (from different denominations) were able to worship together. Very soon this feature disappeared because of race segregation, but in my opinion it still is (or should be) an essential and integral element of the challenge of Pentecostal faith.¹⁴

A second remarkable feature of the movement is that the majority of the newer Pentecostal Churches has grown from the grassroots. They are the churches of the poor and the marginalized. To people that have lost all hope for a better future, the Pentecostal faith provides a new perspective, comfort and expectation.¹⁵

Seeing the different approaches to the work of the Spirit the question is where and how we can see the Spirit at work, in and outside the church. What does the empowering work of the Spirit imply?

I want to take up this challenge by looking at a central New Testament passage on the Holy Spirit, Romans 8, and see if Paul’s exposition in this chapter can help us to find certain parameters for an ecumenical pneumatology in the 21st century.¹⁶

B. Biblical theological reflections; Romans 8

1. The Spirit as God’s eschatological gift

Paul’s exposition on the Holy Spirit in Romans 8 is dominated by the contradistinction between two dispensations, the so called old age/eon, that finds its beginning in Adam, and the new, that started with Christ (Rom. 5:12-14, 17).¹⁷ Although he is differentiating two genuine periods of *time*, the emphasis for Paul is on the element of power and dominion that is connected with these eras.¹⁸ Through Adam sin has entered the world and through sin

¹⁴ Cf. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, p. 18-24, 397.

¹⁵ Cf. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, p. 18 mentions as well the following elements of the origin of the Pentecostal tradition that contribute to the strength of the movement: orality of liturgy, narrativity of theology and witness, maximum participation at all levels, inclusion of dreams and visions as a kind of icon, an understanding of the body/mind relationship that is informed by experiences of correspondence between body and mind.

¹⁶ I will not use Romans 8 as a kind of proof text, since this would ignore the distance between Paul and the present challenges. I will try to understand Romans 8 in its context and see how we can be inspired by it to find principles for a pneumatology of the 21st century. Romans 8 seems to be very suitable for this purpose, since it is one of the few chapters in the NT in which the Spirit is explicitly dealt with in relation to the reality of creation.

¹⁷ Paul does not use the terminology of the two eons, as it is used in e.g. 4 Ezra 6:7, 7:12-14, 7:50. The contradistinction between the dominion of sin and of the Spirit, nevertheless reminds us of the transition from one eon to the other, cf. Rom. 7:6, 12:2, 1 Cor. 1:20; 2:6, 8; 3:18; 2 Kor. 4:4. This antithesis is - less distinctive - also present in 2 Bar. 44:8-15; 48:50; 51:3, 16; 81:1; 83:4-9; 1 Hen. 71:15; 2 Hen. 50:2 and in Rabbinical Literature, cf. M.C. de Boer, *The Defeat of Death* (Sheffield, 1988), p. 22, 191 n. 4. A similar dualism is present in some of the writings of Qumran, cf. A.E. Sekki, *The Meaning of Ruah at Qumran* (Atlanta, 1989), ch. 5 p. 145-171; F. Nötscher, ‘Geist und Geister in den Texten von Qumran’ in: *Mélanges Bibliques. Rédigés en l’Honneur de André Robert* (Paris, 1957), 305-315, p. 312-315. Cf. For the two eons M.E. Stone, ‘Apocalyptic Literature’ in: M.E. Stone (ed.), *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period* (Assen/Philadelphia, 1984), 383-441, p. 412-414. Cf. Reitsma, *Geest en Schepping*, p. 69-80.

¹⁸ Cf. 5:14: death *reigned*, 5:17 the believers *reign*; cf. J.C. Beker, *Paul the Apostle* (Edinburgh, 1989), p. 214; De Boer, *Defeat*, p. 173, 180, 181.

death; since all people have sinned (cf. Rom. 3:10,11; 5:12), death has *dominated* the whole world. Sin has taken up residence in the flesh and these three powers together, sin, death and the flesh, form an alliance that rules and controls the old age. Their power was so absolute, that not even the holy law of God was able to break its dominion. What is more, even the law was forced to take sides with them and serve the purposes of sin, leading to death.¹⁹

In opposition to this old regime we now encounter the new life of the Spirit (Rom. 8:2). The Christ-Event is a turning point in history; a whole new era has begun. Through Christ the grace of God has entered the world to overflow many (5:15). God has acted decisively in history by sending his Son, doing what the law was not able to. By condemning sin in the flesh (Rom.8:2, 3) the condemnation (*katakrima*) that was so distinctive of the life 'in Adam' (cf.5:16, 18) has been eliminated and the power of sin has been broken. The new eon is controlled by the power of the Spirit that brings life. Instead of sin, now it is the Spirit that is residing in the believers (cf. Rom. 7:20 and 8:9, 11). He is the guarantee that the new life will be really lived. The just requirement of the law that could not be fulfilled under the old regime of sin is now being fulfilled in those who walk according to the Spirit (8:4)²⁰. In baptism they have with Christ died to the powers of the old age so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, they too might walk in newness of life (Rom. 6:4). They are dead to sin and alive to God (Rom. 6:11). Instead of serving in the old way of the written code they now serve in the new way of the life of the Spirit (7:6).

Paul emphasizes that these two regimes mutually exclude each other. A person is either a slave to sin and death, or a slave to obedience and righteousness (6:16). For when someone is a slave to sin he is free from righteousness and when he is a slave to obedience he is free from sin (6:16, 20). A person is either living in the flesh or in the Spirit (Rom. 8:5-9) and the mind that is set on the flesh cannot please God (cf. 8:7, 8).

The way in which Paul describes this new regime of the Spirit in Romans 8 reminds us of certain passages in de LXX, esp. Jer. 38 (31):31-34 and Ez. 36:27. Rom. 8:4 echoes Jer. 38 (31):33, that in the new covenant God will write his law on the hearts of his people.²¹ The promise in Ez. 36:27, that God will put his Spirit within his people almost literally returns in Rom. 8:9. In both Ezekiel and Romans the presence of the Spirit results in a life that is in line with God's statutes and ordinances. In Joel 3:1-5 (2:28-32) the gift of the Spirit on all flesh is promised on the day of the Lord, which in Acts 2:17 is interpreted as: in the last days. In other words, it seems that the Spirit is God's gift at the end of times, when the new covenant will be established.²²

¹⁹ In Romans 7 Paul explains how it is possible that the holy, just and good law of God has sided with the powers of the old eon. The reason is the supremacy of sin in the old eon. All who are of the flesh (7:14) may be able to wish to do good (7:18), but are not able to really act on this desire. Even the law of God is not able to break the dominion of sin (cf. 7:24). It can only point out the trespasses and accordingly proclaim the just judgment, which is the death sentence (6:23). Cf. Reitsma, *Geest en Schepping*, p. 71-73.

²⁰ The passive voice in the context most likely points to the Spirit as the one that fulfills the just requirement in the believer, cf. Reitsma, *Geest en Schepping*, p. 77. This implies a kind of liberation of the law itself as well, since the law was imprisoned by the powers of the old age.

²¹ 'Serving in the new way of the Spirit (7:6) reminds us of 'the new covenant' (Jer. 38 (31):31). In both Romans and Jeremiah the new covenant is also based upon the removal of sin and unrighteousness, cf. Jer. 38 (31):34 with Rom. 4:7,8; 6:13; 8:1, 3. The link with Jeremiah is the more likely, since Paul is also quoting (from) Jer. 38 (31):33, 34 in Rom. 2:15, 33 and Rom. 11:27.

²² We find a similar expectation that the Spirit of God - which at present had ceased to operate - would be poured out in the last days, in the literature of the Second Temple period, cf. Reitsma, *Geest en Schepping*, p. 79, 80 for references.

The remarkable feature of Paul's theology in this respect is that in his view the age to come, the new eon, has already come. The Spirit is the sign that the last days have already begun.

Summarizing we can say that for Paul the Spirit is first of all the power of the new eon, realizing the new life in Christ. The Spirit represents the age to come and makes it a present reality; the end of times has begun. He is God's eschatological gift to his people (and through them to the world).

2. *The Spirit present in weakness.*

With his triumphant proclamation of the Spirit as the power of the new eon Paul does not close his eyes for reality. Even though the powers of the old eon have been decisively conquered and their power broken, somehow they continue to exist. For the believers their influence is still felt in two ways.

- a. First of all, although in Christ they ought to consider themselves dead to sin and alive to God, their bodies are still dead because of sin (8:10) and therefore mortal (8:11). This can only be regarded as a continuing consequence of the reality of the powers of sin and death. The believers participate in the new life of the Spirit, since they have died with Christ to the old age (Rom. 6:4-8). Nevertheless through their bodies they are still connected with a world from which the powers of sin and death have not disappeared yet. Therefore they are still awaiting the delivery of their bodies (cf. 8:23)²³.
- b. Secondly, the Spirit is the sign that the believers are children of God, which implies that they are heirs of God as well; together with Christ they will share in God's inheritance (8:17). However - and this is where we feel the continuing presence of the old age - they have not inherited this inheritance yet. They have received the Spirit of adoption (lit. 'sonship', 8:15), through which they have become true children of the most high, yet this *huiiothesia* is subject to further expectation as well (8:23). As a result of this the believers still suffer with Christ in the present time. In the light of Romans 6 we can assume that this suffering *with* Christ is related to Christ's suffering and death on the cross.²⁴ It is suffering as a result of the power of death that is still manifesting itself as mark of the old age, the consequence of what Paul wrote in Rom. 8:10 (cf. a.). Death makes itself felt in suffering.

It is important to realize that the powers of the old age are now no longer present in the same way as they were before the coming of Christ. Paul does not want to give the impression that the old and new eons are in any way in balance (cf. 8:18). The bodies of the believers are not yet delivered fully, but the Spirit of him who raised Christ from the dead is already at work in them. And therefore the future resurrection of the body is guaranteed by the Spirit (8:11). Likewise, the suffering of the believers with Christ is in no way a sign that the new eon may be defeated. On the contrary, this suffering has come to serve the coming glorification with Christ. We suffer with Christ *so that* we will share in his glory (8:17). The

²³ Since Paul is expecting the resurrection of the body (Rom. 8:11), the genitive in 8:23 can not be a separative genitive, it is most likely an objective genitive. The children of God will not be delivered from their bodies, but their bodies will be delivered. Nevertheless we still find a separative element here, since the body will be really and radically separated from the conditions of the old eon. The body of death (7:24) will be transformed into the delivered body, cf. Reitsma, *Geest en Schepping*, p. 108-110.

²⁴ Rom. 6:4, buried 'with' Christ in baptism; cf. also Phil. 3:10: 'the sharing of his sufferings by becoming like him in his death.'

way to this inheritance with Christ is the path of suffering. As for Christ, there is no other way for the believers who are united with Christ to share in the blessings of the new age than by suffering, dying and rising with Christ (cf. Rom. 6).

This however also indicates that the glory is in a certain way already present in the suffering with Christ. The fullness of God's glory is about to break through and therefore eagerly expected. The sufferings have changed into announcements of the fast approaching glory. Creation is not suffering in agony of death but in labor pain (8:22). It is suffering in hope, eagerly and certainly awaiting the end.

Paul does not describe in detail what this future glory will hold, but by implication we may conclude that it will be a time in which the powers of the old eon will completely have ceased to exist. The body of the believer will be resurrected and the creation will be set free from its bondage to decay to be transformed into a new creation.

It is in *this* reality that the Spirit of the new eon is present. He makes the future glory a contemporary reality, filling the whole (to futility subjected) creation with hope. But by doing so he fully enters ('incarnates') into the world. This is clear from what Paul writes in Rom. 8:26. The Spirit as the power of the new age helps the believers in their present condition of weakness.²⁵ This weakness manifests itself in their inability to pray as they ought to. In the context of Romans 8, which tries to demonstrate how the present suffering is directed towards the future glory, this can only be understood as saying that the believers cannot pray as they should for the future glory to come. It completely surpasses their understanding and comprehension. God's glory is something that "God has prepared for those who love him", but that "no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the human heart conceived" (1 Cor. 2:9).²⁶ Here the Spirit steps in and prays on behalf of the believers²⁷ with sighs that are too deep for words.²⁸ In these sighs the Spirit unites himself with the sighs of the whole creation (cf. Rom. 8:22), the believers included (cf. Rom. 8:23), and accordingly shares in the suffering of the present time. This in turn implies that the sighs are transformed into expressions of hope. The sighs of the Spirit signify a longing for God's glory. Since the Spirit is part of the glory of God, he is able to do what the believers could not and prays for it in a way that matches the greatness of this glory.

Paul expresses this twofold presence of the Spirit, as the power and representative of the end of the times incarnated into a reality where the powers of the old age are still present, in a striking way by referring to the Spirit as the 'first fruits' (8:23).²⁹ In the Septuagint this

²⁵ Literally: 'the Spirit helps our weakness' which is best read as: 'into the situation the Spirit enters as an aid', O. Christofferson, *The Earnest Expectation of the Creature. The Flood-Tradition as Matrix of Romans 8:18-27* (ConBNT 23) (Stockholm, 1990), p. 113; cf. Reitsma, *Geest en Schepping*, p. 111, 112. For 'weakness' as mark of the old eon and sign of the continuing presence of the powers of sin and death, cf. Rom. 6:19; 8:3.

²⁶ '*Katho dei*' describes the norm for praying, 'as we ought', i.e. according to God's norm. In relationship to the hope, the believers cannot pray as they ought to, since the coming glory is not visible (8:24), which means that it is of a different kind.

²⁷ This implies that this prayer is different from 'praying in the Spirit' in e.g. 1 Cor. 14:14, 15, Eph. 6:18, since in that case the believers are praying with the help of the Spirit, here it is the *Spirit* who is praying (*auto to pneuma*), on behalf of the believers, but not the believers themselves.

²⁸ *Alaletos* could be translated with: unspoken (silent sighs), or with: unspeakable. The latter seems to be more suitable in the context, since the emphasis is not on the manner in which the sighs are spoken, but on the fact that human beings are not able to find words to pray for the coming glory, since their words always fall short of what the future glory comprises.

²⁹ There is difference of opinion whether Paul uses the genitive as an explicative genitive (the firstfruits which is the Spirit) or as a partitive genitive (the firstfruits as part of the Spirit). In the LXX and in Paul the genitive is usually used in the latter sense (cf. Ex. 23:19; Lev. 23:10; Rom. 11:16; 1 Cor. 15:20). In Rom. 8 however, this

expression is used to indicate the first part of the harvest, which at the Festival of Harvest has to be brought into the Temple.³⁰ An important aspect of the first fruits is that they in a certain way represent the full harvest.³¹ Against this background we can say that the Spirit in Rom. 8:23 for Paul is the first part and the representative of the inheritance of the believers, which is the glory to come (cf. Rom. 8:17, 18, 23). The expression shows that the Spirit is both the manifestation and the incompleteness of the presence of the future glory of God. This glory is really present, the end has come, yet we are still awaiting the time when the old eon will completely have ceased to exist.

3. Conclusion:

According to Romans 8 the Spirit is operative in the creation as the power of the new age that has been realized in Jesus Christ. While the powers of the old eon, sin and death, continue to manifest themselves, they have been decisively defeated.

1. In this context the Spirit first of all fills the creation with the new life of Christ. In the Spirit as the first fruits the end of times, the future glory of God, is a present reality. All who are in Christ are a new creation (cf. 2 Cor. 5:17).

2. Secondly, since the powers of the old eon have not ceased to exist yet, the Spirit can only be present within *this* broken reality. The Spirit participates in the weakness of the believers and shares in their suffering and through this in the suffering of the whole creation. Although the Spirit is the representation and the power of God's glory, in a creation where the powers of sin and death are still active, the form in which this glory is present is the form of suffering. The Spirit is the Spirit of Christ and marked by the Cross. The new age can only become a reality for the believer by his dying and rising with Christ (Rom. 6).

3. By being present in such a way the Spirit - thirdly - transforms the suffering of the present time into birth-pain. The new life is about to be fully realized and the sufferings have become proclamations of the fullness of the new age that is approaching. In the midst of suffering the Spirit is the pledge of the future glory, the full inheritance of the believers and the resurrection of their bodies. The whole creation is therefore eagerly awaiting the revealing of the children of God.

Concluding we can say that the Spirit has brought the created world in a critical situation. By revealing the new life of Christ and by making the glory of God a present reality the Spirit reveals the true character of the powers of the old age. The old age, that existed before the Spirit came, is now unmasked in all its evil. The cross reveals everything that does not belong to the new life in Christ and in this way is the key to understand the presence of the Spirit.

C. Parameters of an Ecumenical pneumatology

would mean that the believers have received only part of the Spirit, while awaiting the rest of the Spirit to come at a later point. Although not impossible, in the context of the expectation of the future glory it seems more suitable to read the genitive as explicative genitive. There is also no indication in Romans 8 that the Spirit is present in a partial way. So in this interpretation we have to see the Spirit as the first part of the blessings of the future glory.

³⁰ Cf. Ex. 23:16-19; Lev. 2:12; 23:10; Num. 15:17-21; 18:12; Deut. 18:4; 26:2, 10. In other passages *aparghe* is a technical term for offering, cf. Ex. 25:2, 3; 35:5, 6; Lev. 22:12; Num. 5:9; 18:8; Deut. 12:6.

³¹ Cf. E. Jenni, C. Westermann, *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament* (I) (München, 1971), Sp. 596. When 'first fruits' simply means offering, it still represents all the possessions someone could bring as an offering.

Having heard Paul's exposition on the Spirit in Romans 8 we will now have to try to understand the implications of our conclusions for the present context. I will do this by formulating some principles and questions for a 21st century pneumatology.

1. The power of the Spirit

When we define the Spirit as the Spirit of the new life in Christ and the presence of the future glory of God, the question should be asked in what way *this* Spirit is related to the claims and experiences of the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement. Many people hunger for a deeper experience of the presence of God and find that this need is addressed in Pentecostalism. Can we consider this to be a sign of the presence of the Spirit of God? Is the renewal many people have experienced through the Pentecostal movement a renewal by the Power of the Spirit?

This in step leads to a more specific question, whether it is really the Holy Spirit at work in the signs, wonders and healings the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement seems to witness. Is it really God speaking through the Spirit when many people claim to have prophecies from God? If so, how come these signs and wonders in general seem to be absent in the traditional churches? If not, how do we theologically interpret these phenomena within the Pentecostal churches?³²

Posed in a different way, how do we define the renewing work of the Spirit? In what way can the power of the Spirit be experienced and recognized in the church? It should be obvious that any renewal and the form it will take, can not be defined in general, nor imposed from outside. It has to be found anew by every tradition and in every situation.³³ The principle, however, of opening up for the presence of the Spirit is a challenge all traditions continuously face. The Spirit brings new life and will not be satisfied with simply repeating the past. He brings the future to the present and takes the present with him to the future. Every church is always in need of reformation, including the Pentecostal churches.³⁴ And the Spirit continuously moves on. The church is called not to linger behind.

A specific form of this church-renewing power of the Spirit could be the recreation of the Church as a race, gender- and church-denomination transcending community. This was a striking feature of the first Pentecostal church in Azusa Street (Los Angeles), where black and white worshipped together. It is in a different way a reality in the Charismatic movement, which brings people together from many different denominations (while not taking them out of their churches) and it is also the foundational principle of the WCC and other ecumenical movements. In this respect we are witnessing new challenges across the globe today. Tensions between black and white have widened to tensions between Westerners and Arabs, Christians and Muslims and many other cultures and religions. The church should lead the way in showing the unity in the Spirit. The new life is determined by our relationship to Christ, not by the color of our skin. It is unthinkable that in the future glory of God people will be classified according to their race or church-denomination. We can expect that in the fullness of God's glory all the different kinds of people that God has created will be united in

³² I have noticed that many people are able to point out the weaknesses and the failures of the Pentecostal movement and to criticize the phenomena, but very few have been able to present a sound theological interpretation of them. Grudem is one of the few that tries to do this for the so-called 'second blessing' or 'baptism in the Holy Spirit' that many Pentecostals experience after conversion, cf. *Theology*, Ch. 39, p. 763-787.

³³ This is a reason for Hollenweger to urge traditional churches not to copy the Pentecostal movement but to discern the Holy Spirit in their own context, cf. *Pentecostalism*, p. 399.

³⁴ Hollenweger's motivation to write his latest book on Pentecostalism is exactly his conviction that the Pentecostal movement as well is on a crossroads, cf. *Pentecostalism*, p. 1.

a way that does not threaten their uniqueness. This is through the Spirit already intended to be a visible reality in the church today. It should therefore urge the Pentecostals to open themselves for the Christian community that is present in non-Pentecostal churches and it should urge the traditional churches to look beyond the horizon of their own church-structures. It should urge all to recognize Christ in other denominations, not matter their race, gender or nationality. This will be a particularly difficult challenge for those Christians that find themselves in the camps of mutual enemies, like Palestinian Christians and Messianic Jews.

2. *The power of the Spirit in weakness*

Secondly, we have to emphasize that the new life of the Spirit does not exclude suffering. On the contrary, suffering is the framework in which the Spirit is present in the creation. When the Spirit supports the believers, it is by sharing in their weakness and by uniting himself with the sufferings of the whole creation. The Spirit will always remain the Spirit of Christ and therefore marked by the power of the cross.

This implies that in looking for a Spiritual renewal of the church, we have to carefully define our criteria of renewal. The Pentecostal/Charismatic movement should not claim to quickly the work of the Spirit for their own enthusiasm. We have to realize that the power of the Spirit is made perfect in *weakness*. The sign of the presence of the Spirit is not the number of church members, nor signs and wonders in themselves, but the life-transforming power of the cross of Christ. The Spirit manifests itself by making us children of God, uniting us with Christ's death and resurrection in baptism and by making us say 'Abba Father' (cf. Rom. 8:15) and 'Jesus is Lord' (1 Cor. 12:3).³⁵ There can be a Christ-less spirituality in which the Spirit receives attention in a way that does not honor the Spirit and contradicts his essence. Whenever a renewal does not lead us back to the cross of Christ it is not from the Spirit.³⁶

This is a challenge for Christianity as a whole. What does it mean that our savior is a crucified Lord? What does it tell us, that in the world that is at large still alienated from God, the power of the Spirit is present in weakness? It seems to indicate that we have to look for the Spirit where we least expect him. What in this world is called weakness might reveal God's power, what is called foolishness God's wisdom (cf. 1 Cor. 1:25).

There are several things in this context of weakness that need to be addressed.

a. First of all it seems to be in contrast with this character of the work of the Spirit that some Pentecostal churches have fallen for the so-called health and wealth gospel, in which faith in God unquestionably leads to prosperity and wealth.³⁷ This ignores the fact that we are co-heirs with Christ and that therefore the way to the future glory of God leads via dying to this age and rising with Christ, crucifying the patterns of this world and receiving God's new way of thinking (Rom. 12:1, 2).

b. In a similar way it seems to contradict the work of the Spirit that many Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal churches have fallen for the temptation of power. Whether it is the power of church-structures and organizations, or the power of money and importance, or the power of politics, as long as it is power defined by the structures of the world it is not in line with the character of the new life in Christ. There is a tendency within some Christian circles to identify themselves unconditionally with one particular kind of power and politics, especially in countries where Christians are a still a majority. The Spirit as the power of the new age,

³⁵ Cf. T. Smail, *The Giving Gift. The Holy Spirit in Person* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 1994), p. 30.

³⁶ Cf. Smail, *Gift*, p. 31.

³⁷ Cf. Van Laar, "Missiologische Thema's", p. 106, 107.

however, makes painstakingly clear that God's Kingdom is not of this world. Therefore his work can never be equaled with any kind of culture, structure or politics. Neither the fall of the Berlin wall, nor the changes that have taken place in South Africa has brought God's glory on earth. The same is true for the State of Israel or a future Palestinian State. Whenever the Spirit will be present in systems and structures it will be in a critical way.

c. It is remarkable that the growth of the Pentecostal movement is to a large extent among the poor and marginalized and it makes us wonder what this tells us about the work of the Spirit? Of course it is not being poor in itself that is a sign of the presence of the Spirit; even the poor can resist the Spirit and become self-sufficient in their suffering. Suffering is not a heavenly condition. Nevertheless, when so many poor people come to faith in Christ in a Pentecostal environment, could it be an indication that the Spirit has a preference for the poor and for the ones that have no chance in this world? Could it be an indication that the Spirit helps the ones that no else is helping, choosing what is foolish in the world to shame the wise and what is weak to shame the strong (cf. 1 Cor. 1:26, 17)?

d. The growth of the Pentecostal/Charismatic movement among the poor and marginalized shows the power of a theology that grows from the grassroots. This is not a matter of strategy, but a matter of theological principle. The Spirit incarnates *into* the reality of the creation to share in its suffering. *Into* the context the Spirit enters to help the believers to pray. Therefore it is essential that Christians are able to express their hope for the future glory of God in their own language, concepts and culture, so that the gospel becomes relevant for their particular context.³⁸

e. This contextual focus of the work of the Spirit also influences our thinking about mission. More than ever the local churches in the two-third worlds are finding ways to constitute independent communities. Many mission-related churches have lost their appeal and it seems to be the newer churches where the Spirit has chosen his residence. Now the majority of Christians is living outside of the Western world (60 %) the church worldwide has to rethink its concept of mission and its view on 'sending'. It has been stated before, that we have to speak about mission in 6 continents. Maybe the Spirit moves from the South to the North, from the East to the West instead of the other way around.³⁹

3. *The power of hope!*

As mentioned before, being poor and marginalized is not a heavenly condition. The Spirit is transforming our human suffering into signs of hope. The Spirit is not aiming to simply consolidate present suffering, but to reach the fullness of the glory of God in which there will be no more pain and anguish. This means we can never accept poverty and injustice in the world as a final condition. The church should not evade worldly realities in favor of a spiritual reality. 'Incarnation' (both in terms of Christ and of the Spirit) implies that God is not walking away for the realities of life.

At the same time we should also stress the fact that this promise in suffering can never be described in terms of Western Capitalism, in terms of money, wealth and prosperity. The vision of the Old Testament in which the future is projected as each person sitting under his own vine and fig tree (Mic. 4:4) is of a different quality than many modern ideals of well being. The struggle against unjust structures should not close our eyes for the finality of all

³⁸ 'Incarnation' implies that the context does not determine the gospel in such a way that we have a different gospel in every context. The Spirit brings the new life of Christ into the context. In this process it is not only the gospel that receives a distinct character, but the context is transformed as well.

³⁹ Cf. D.J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission. Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (MaryKnoll: Orbis, 1991), describes very accurately the crisis of mission and the different paradigm shifts within the theology of mission, of which the shift from West to East and North to South is only one shift, cf. p. 1-11, 181-189.

structures. Even more just structures can in the end not be fully equaled with the Kingdom of God

D. Conclusion

The presence of the Spirit of the glory of God reveals the provisional character of all our thinking and theologizing. Everything that is not at par with the future glory will be sifted out. We will have to realize that not one tradition is able to express the fullness of God's glory by itself. We should therefore not be surprised when the Spirit is where we least expect him to be. The Pentecostals might come to see the presence of the Spirit in the traditional churches, the Ecumenicals might be surprised to see the Spirit at work in the Pentecostal tradition. Acknowledging the presence of the Spirit is a humbling experience. The wind blows where it chooses and invites us to come along. In many Pentecostal churches we can witness the gift of prophecy at work. But - similar to Moses - we could wish that all would be prophets (Num. 11:29) and that all churches would be prophetic, sensing and following the direction of the Wind.