

IN THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT: THE HOLY SPIRIT

Luis Felipe Nunes Borduam, B.Th, STNB Brazil

Introduction

According to the Pew Research Center, approximately two thirds of Christians of Protestant origin in Latin America declare themselves Pentecostal.¹ That segment is known for the great emphasis given to the Person and the manifestations of the Holy Spirit. The interpretations and emphases of these groups on the Person and functions of the Holy Spirit have had a significant impact on the understanding and the pneumatological relationship of much of South America's Christendom and perhaps the whole world's, including non-Protestant traditions such as Roman Catholicism which, through charismatic renewal,² has given a response to the declining number of followers and the evangelical growth in the region, and which is a direct reaction to Pentecostalism. We use Pentecostalism in the plural, having in mind that analyzing the emphases given to the functions of the Holy Spirit within the Pentecostal branches is a great challenge, since it is a vast matter, and because the dynamic characteristic of this movement, as well as its constant changes, makes such analysis more difficult.³

The Holy Spirit as the performing agent of the Godhead⁴ is the specific Person of the Trinity through whom God acts in us.

Unlike creation and the provision of salvation, which are objective works of God, the application of this salvific work in us is a subjective aspect of God's action, which creates greater fluidity

¹ <https://www.pewforum.org/2014/11/13/religion-in-latin-america/>

² ORO. Ari Pedro. ALVES. Daniel. Renovação Carismática Católica: movimento de superação da oposição entre catolicismo e pentecostalismo? em *Religião e Sociedade*, RJ, 33(1): 122-144, 2013.

³ ROMEIRO, Paulo. *Decepcionados Com a Graça: Esperanças e Frustrações no Brasil Neopentecostal*. São Paulo: Mundo Cristão, 2005. p17

⁴ WILEY.H.Orton & CULBERTSON. Paul T. *Introdução à Teologia Cristã*. 2.ed.CNP.2009. p.255.

and complexity to the matter.⁵ He [the Holy Spirit] is the point that makes God personal to the Christian by actively acting in the lives of believers and by indwelling them.

Theology and sociology researchers also state that today's culture values experience more than the conventional rationalistic answers often used by theological traditions, whether liberal or conservative.⁶ Therefore, a study on the Holy Spirit, its interpretative schools, and its current practices, especially within Pentecostalism – which have achieved significant influence – becomes of great relevance.

However, when discussing the term “power of the Spirit” within Pentecostalism, there are very diverse perspectives that have outlined and shaped the current practices of Christian churches in South America. When pondering the “power of the Spirit” in Pentecostalism, one can consider the attempt of Sociologist of Religion Paul Freston in presenting at least three interpretative waves of the development of the Pentecostal movement in the 20th century.⁷ We will review these and other aspects of understanding about the function of the power of the Holy Spirit, as well as the importance of retrieving the sanctifying function of the Holy Spirit of God while trying to answer the question, “Power for what, after all?”

The Power of the Spirit to Receive and Exercise Spiritual Gifts

That which Paul Freston calls the *first wave of Pentecostalism*, also known as classic Pentecostalism, is the movement whose main characteristics include pronounced anti-Catholicism, the belief in Christ's imminent return, sectarianism and a counter-cultural posture⁸ and, most importantly, the baptism with the Holy Spirit unveiling a mandatory initial evidence of

⁵ ERICKSON, Millard J. Introdução à teologia sistemática. São Paulo. Vida Nova. 1997. p.343

⁶ CARVALHO, César Moisés. Pentecostalismo e Pós-Modernidade. 1.ed. CPAD. 2019.

⁷ FRESTON, Paul (1994) ‘Breve história do pentecostalismo brasileiro’, *Nem anjos nem demônios*: 67–162.

⁸ NIEBUHR, Richard. *Cristo e Cultura*. Rio de Janeiro. Paz e Terra. 1967. p. 61.

speaking in other languages, as well as the continuity of the other spiritual gifts. This perspective brought, at first, a significant evangelistic momentum due to the expectation of Christ's imminent return. As the parousia did not occur,⁹ glossolalia became an emphasis in itself, with the Pentecostal theology taking the center stage.¹⁰ This interpretation has generated in South America a myopic view of the Person of the Holy Spirit and limited the understanding of His other works in the life of a Christian, the church and His action in the world. It is very common to hear from individuals in this milieu that they go to worship to “seek power” and, consciously or not, they divert the purpose of the action and the baptism with the Holy Spirit and turn it into mere experientialism and a search for spiritual ecstasies¹¹ that do not result in real transformation of one's character and daily life. In a veiled way, one no longer seeks God, but rather the “power of God,” transforming Christian worship into a kind of idolatrous practice by yearning for mystical and transcendental cultic experiences rather than the search for and worship of God in and for itself.

The Power of the Spirit to Prosper

The so-called second and third waves of Pentecostalism¹², respectively deuteropentecostalism (the divine healing movement) and neo-Pentecostalism (autonomous Pentecostalism), as classified by Freston, point in another direction. Unlike the escapism characteristic of the first wave and its hope only in the “Kingdom To Come”, which nullified

⁹ Do grego parousia “volta, chegada, advento”. Volta de Jesus Cristo no fim dos tempos, para o Juízo Final, descrito como o último julgamento de Deus sobre os seres da Terra; parúsia.

¹⁰ ANDERSON. Robert Mapes. *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism*. Nova Iorque, Oxford University Press, 1979.

¹¹ SIQUEIRA. Gutierrez Fernandes. *Revestidos de Poder. Uma introdução à teologia pentecostal*. 1.ed. Rio de Janeiro, CPAD. 2018.

¹² FRESTON. Paul (1994) ‘Breve história do pentecostalismo brasileiro’, *Nem anjos nem demônios*: 67–162.

investment in this world, thus impacting social and educational areas that have been neglected by these churches, on the other hand, in a Hegelian dialectic, the neo-Pentecostalism emerges with its great emphasis on the “Kingdom Now,”¹³ no longer in a social and educational perspective, but with a desire to participate in the temporal power and enjoy the benefits and comforts of modern society, the famous prosperity theology.

Prosperity theology is based on a pragmatism that is very characteristic of this movement. Its logic is based on reasoning that if the Holy Spirit has the power to heal and work miracles (practices that have been exacerbated and systematized by churches following this branch), then God can also grant material prosperity. They base their theology very much on the promises of prosperity made to the Hebrew people (Israel) in the Old Testament and, disregarding exegesis and the historical context, they bring this right onto themselves in a strongly personal way: that, through the power of the Holy Spirit and “financial sacrifices” (tithes and offerings), they can achieve whatever they want.

The function and power of the Holy Spirit now become instruments not for the sanctification of the believer¹⁴, service to the community of faith¹⁵ and to glorify and present Christ to the world,¹⁶ but rather a means by which a Christian prospers and stands out from the rest. Biblical texts with statements that “we are the head and not the tail”,¹⁷ “I can do all things through Him who strengthens me”¹⁸ etc. are sung and used as “war cries,” and statements of faith that by the power of the Holy Spirit they are allowed to prosper and, if they don’t, that is due to lack of faith

¹³ MCGEE. Gary B. Panorama Histórico. Teologia Sistemática: uma perspectiva pentecostal. HORTON. Stanley M. org. Rio de Janeiro. CPAD. 2008 p.35.

¹⁴ 2 Ts.2:13; I Pe.1:2.

¹⁵ 1 Co.14:12.

¹⁶ Jo.16:8; 1 Co.12:3.

¹⁷ Dt. 28:13.

¹⁸ Fp.4:13.

and/or lack of fidelity in the financial aspect.¹⁹ The assurance of full health and the manipulation of the spiritual world in one's own favor²⁰ becomes paramount. There is an inversion in the Holy Spirit's work. He who is supposed to enable believers to align themselves with and submit to God's will and criteria²¹ now becomes just a means to satisfy one's own desires and achieve personal goals. Trying to use the power of the Holy Spirit to manipulate the spiritual world in one's own favor, instead of perceiving it as God's instrument to conform human beings to His will and nature, falls under the concept of witchcraft²² and is a perversion of the biblical message.

Another important characteristic to be highlighted in neo-Pentecostalism (also called post-Pentecostalism by Paulo Siepierski)²³ is the emphasis on the power of the Spirit as an instrument for spiritual battle.²⁴ Sociologist and Anthropologist Pablo Semán, in his article "Who are they? Why are they growing? In what do they believe? Pentecostalism and politics in Latin America,"²⁵ expresses how the spiritual battle movement has brought, in an extreme fashion, the tangibility of evil and Satan to the world, just as classic Pentecostalism retrieved the actual action of God in the world through the emphasis on the Person of the Holy Spirit. Even if the reality of spiritual warfare is acknowledged,²⁶ over-emphasizing the requirement of "knowing the enemy" to the point of having to know the hierarchy and names of demons goes beyond revelation and

¹⁹ STELLA. Maria de Lourdes Koerich Belli. Teologia da Prosperidade: riscos de uma teologia controversa. Revista: Teologia e Espiritualidade • vol. 5 • n o 09 • Curitiba • Jun/2018 • p. 43-64.

²⁰ HAGIN. Kenneth E. O nome de Jesus. Graça editorial. Rio de Janeiro. 1999.

²¹ Jo.14:26.

²² Gl.5:20

²³ SIEPIERSKI, Paulo. "Pós-pentecostalismo e política no Brasil". Estudos Teológicos, 1997, v. 37, p. 47-61.

²⁴ WAGNER. C. Peter. Espíritos Territoriais. Ed. Unilit. São Paulo. 1995.

²⁵ SERMÁN. Pablo. Quiénes son? Por qué crecen? En qué creen? Pentecostalismo y política en América Latina. Revista Nueva Sociedad 280. Marzo-Abril 2019.

²⁶ Ef.6:12.

biblical teaching, which, at most, warns us of the need to discern their intentions.²⁷ There are several cases and liturgical practices in Neo-Pentecostal churches that, in addition to asking the name of the alleged evil spirit, they also interview it by asking detailed questions during the deliverance session.²⁸

Magnus G. F. Fialho, in his review of the book “Territorial Spirits,”²⁹ which was organized by Peter Wagner, one of the bastions and greatest propagators of spiritual warfare theology, and Charles E. Lawless, in his article entitled “Spiritual Warfare and Evangelism,”³⁰ express their concerns with the developments and excesses that this type of theology has generated and how it has reduced the work of the Holy Spirit to the restricted function of identifying and driving demons out.

The Power of the Spirit to achieve social justice

Another movement that has spread through South America, although not as widely as Pentecostalism, are the social theologies. They recover the Old Testament prophetic characteristic of denouncing social injustices and iniquities, along with the importance of caring for the helpless and the needy. However, by focusing on structural sin, they end up neglecting personal sin and the need for conversion and transformation of the individual, as well as idealizing people, which is something Old Testament prophets did not do.³¹ Liberation theology in the Roman Catholic segment and the integral mission theology in the Protestant realm are the

²⁷ 2 Co.2:11

²⁸ Souza, Etiane Caloy Bovkalovski de. A imagem do diabo nos livros de Edir Macedo da Igreja Universal do Reino de Deus. Dissertação mestrado. UFPR. 2000.

²⁹ FIALHO. Magnus G. F. Resenha Revista Fides Reformata 1/2 (1996). C. Peter Wagner, ed. Espíritos Territoriais. São Paulo. Editora Unilit 1995.

³⁰ LAWLESS. Charles E. Spiritual Warfare and Evangelism. Journals · The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology · SBJT 5/1 (Spring 2001).

³¹ Santos entre taças de vinho. Entrevista publicada na revista veja. Jerônimo Teixeira Luiz Felipe Pondé. 31/07/2020.

main representatives of this group that emphasizes the power of the Spirit to denounce injustices and promote social justice.

After all, power for what?

It is elementary that the Scriptures present the Holy Spirit as a donator of spiritual gifts³² and of power to drive out demons.³³ However, we notice that there is a function that precedes them. Even in the Old Testament – which, due to its initial stages of progressive revelation causes some difficulty to identify the person of the Holy Spirit (so much more because the expression “Holy Spirit” is more typical in the New Testament, while “Spirit of God” and other variations are more common in the Old Testament) – we can notice Him [the Holy Spirit] being depicted as the generator of moral and spiritual qualities of holiness and kindness in the person to whom He comes or in whom He dwells. On the other hand, in the New Testament we see, in the Gospel of Mark, during the call of the twelve apostles from the crowd of disciples, that before sending them to drive out demons and heal the sick, they were summoned to “be with him [with Christ].”³⁴ This means that they receive authority and power first to be closer to Jesus and more intimate to Him. In the Gospel of Luke, we see Jesus full of the power of the Holy Spirit to overcome the temptations³⁵ and only after that [filling] He uses that power in Galilee, teaching in the synagogue.³⁶ In the famous priestly prayer of Jesus in the Gospel of John, we see Christ

³² 32 1 Co.12:11

³³ Mc.3:15

³⁴ Mc.3:14

³⁵ Lc.4:1

³⁶ Lc.4:14

praying first for their sanctification³⁷ and only after that does He talk about sending them to do God's work.³⁸

In the classic text of Acts 15, considered the first general council of the church,³⁹ we observe the apostle Peter interpreting the Pentecost of the Jews (Acts 2) and the Pentecost of the Gentles (Acts 10-11) as a pouring of the Holy Spirit evidenced by the purification of the hearts of those who received Him.⁴⁰ Paul, the apostle, also presents the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of holiness (Rom. 1:4). The writer of Hebrews makes a clear point that the first function of the Holy Spirit is purification in order that the living God may be served thereafter. Always *being* before *doing*.

In his book *Doutrina de Santidade (Doctrine of Holiness)*,⁴¹ Edgar Baldeón emphasizes that the Holy Spirit longs to bring a person to the condition of perfection and integrity (James 1:4) and to leave the condition of double-mindedness (James 1:8; 4:5-8). This means literally “having a double soul”, which implies the rabbinic psychology of two inclinations or urges that compete within the being, but which must be purified, according to this wise text by James, since the “double soul” clashes with the “simplicity” of the heart and to the firm stand that result from it.⁴²

We may also discern in the Petrine epistles that he puts a great emphasis on the sanctifying function of the Holy Spirit (1 Pet. 1:2) and that by that power of the Spirit we can and must be

³⁷ Jo.17:17

³⁸ Jo.17:18

³⁹ EARLE, Ralph & MAYFIELD, Joseph H. Comentário Bíblico Beacon. 10 volume 7. João a Atos. CPAD. 2017. p.317

⁴⁰ Atos 15:8,9; cf. Atos 20:32;26:18

⁴¹ BALDEÓN, Edgar. Doutrina de Santidade. Campinas. CNP. 2009

⁴² Bíblia de Jerusalém. Ed. Paulus. 2011. p.2107

holy, because God is holy (1 Pet. 1:15,16) and because there is a promise of we receiving power from God to be participants in His holy and divine nature (2 Pet. 1:3,4).

Therefore, we can notice that the power of the Holy Spirit also has this primary sanctifying mission both in His instantaneous act (purification of the heart) and in His continuous process of transformation of the moral and spiritual character in such a way that the Holy Spirit bestows power to mortify the flesh (Rom. 8:13), as well as to express positively the Christlike character (Matt. 5:48; 1 Cor. 11:1).

In this brief article, we will not be able to cover all the symbols of the Holy Spirit, such as fire, wind, water, dove, olive oil, and others. Nevertheless, the recurring use of the symbol “fire” stands out. It is customarily used in the Pentecostal scene as a badge of power and manifestation of spiritual gifts, especially the gift of speaking in other tongues. However, it is worth noting that many times in the Holy Scriptures this element is used in the liturgical context as a path to holiness (Lev. 6:12) and many times in the eschatological context it almost always points to purification and sanctification (cf. Num. 31:23; Isa. 6:6; Exo. 29:34).

Conclusion

It is obvious that no Christian theology will deny the sanctifying action of the Holy Spirit. Nonetheless, it is noteworthy that there is a huge gap in the understanding and practice of this doctrine in South America, since we historically experienced a direct jump in holiness influences from the historical Protestant churches to the Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal (post-Pentecostal) churches, that is, as if the nineteenth century and the Holiness movement had not existed in South American regions.

Even if Pentecostalism is historically a direct heir to the Holiness movement, the Pentecostal movement that arrived to that region was not the Wesleyan Pentecostalism of three works of grace as professed by William Seymour in Los Angeles, but the Chicago School with William H. Durham and his thesis of the finished work of Calvary,⁴³ that excludes the doctrine of the second work of grace and of the entire sanctification, revives the Lutheran concept of positional holiness, and still replaces it for the baptism with the Holy Spirit in tongues, notwithstanding the subsequent outcomes already mentioned in the text.

Statements such as “what is important is that God uses me,” commonly said by people that are used by God even if their life is debauched and they have no fruits of holiness, attest to the risk of depleting the sanctifying role of the Holy Spirit and embracing only a pragmatic perspective. On the other hand, we very often hear from many people that, when they get to know the biblical doctrine of holiness of the Church of the Nazarene, they declare several times: “I have always believed this way” and/or “I was a Nazarene and did not know it.” Experiences like those, multiplied in South America, pose a wake-up call for the urgency of proclaiming that the power of the Holy Spirit is also the power to live a holy life. We are urgently required to recover this awareness in South America, that, in general, still ignores the Holiness movement. Receiving spiritual gifts is very good and important, but, according to the Scriptures, this is a fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22), with His virtues that are the true proof that the Holy Spirit is operating in Christians. The apostle Paul even highlights that the power of love, granted by the Holy Spirit, is what must be mostly desired and is more spectacular than any gift that we may have (1 Cor. 13).

⁴³ KNIGHT III. Henry H.(org). De Aldersgate a Azusa: Visões de uma Nova Criação, Wesleyana, Pentecostal e de Santidade. Ed. Sal Cultural.2018.