

IN THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT: HOLY SPIRIT  
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*Introduction*

Recent publications in pneumatology raise several issues often neglected in the past but now slowly making their way into Biblical scholarship. Previous writings focused upon the interpretation of the role of the Spirit in the texts of individual authors, especially Paul, Luke, and John, and the development within the Christian tradition in general, without paying proper attention to the pre-Christian background of the Spirit or extra-biblical influences.<sup>1</sup> A renewed interest in the wider scope of pneumatology has resulted in reconsideration of religious experiences reflected in the Biblical texts and their appropriate contextualisation.<sup>2</sup>

Theologians express similar concerns and suggest moving beyond the understanding of the Spirit only in Christological and soteriological terms to seeing the creativity and the work of the Spirit in the wider world, while remaining firmly indebted to a trinitarian structure and eschatological framework.<sup>3</sup> However, we still need to reflect on hermeneutical issues involved in the understanding of the creative work of the Spirit.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Jörg Frey and John R. Levison, eds., *The Holy Spirit, Inspiration, and the Cultures of Antiquity: Multidisciplinary Perspectives*, Ekstasis 5 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2017).

<sup>2</sup> James D. G. Dunn, *Jesus and the Spirit: A Study of the Religious and Charismatic Experience of Jesus and the First Christians as Reflected in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997, early edition with SCM Press, 1975); Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2009); Luke Timothy Johnson, *Religious Experience in Earliest Christianity: Missing Dimension in New Testament Studies* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1998); John R. Levison, *Filled with the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).

<sup>3</sup> Wolfgang Vondey, "The Holy Spirit and the Physical Universe: The Impact of Scientific Paradigm Shifts on Contemporary Pneumatology," *Theological Studies* 70 (2009): 3-36.

<sup>4</sup> Andre Munzinger, "Creative Reason and the Spirit," in *The Spirit and Christ in the New Testament and Christian Theology: Essays in Honor of Max Turner* (ed. Howard Marshall, Volker Rabens & Cornelis Bennema; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2012), 353.

The task of producing a comprehensive view on the work of the Spirit requires us to bring a variety of views to the table. A wider perspective presupposes seeing things through other people's eyes and imagining the world alongside their visions.<sup>5</sup> A corporate vision of the work of the Spirit remains grounded in scriptural texts, engages with appropriate historical and theological questions, recognises a variety of experiences and voices, and promotes a general integration by overcoming barriers in a constructive dialogue.

While this short paper makes it impossible to offer a comprehensive view on the role of the Spirit working creatively in the community and in the world, let us still dedicate ourselves to a broad perspective on the Spirit by researching New Testament<sup>6</sup> texts canonically. The goal is to observe how the ideas on the Spirit progressively unfold in different ways in NT texts and what pneumatological hopes and expectations these texts offer to their readers.<sup>7</sup> Within this broader perspective, this paper, first, will establish the relevance of the role of the Spirit as the source for human togetherness. Second, it will argue that the question of how the Spirit enables the experience of togetherness involves an understanding of the language of revelation and fulfilment in the NT. Then the writing will examine the concept of the Spirit as enabling human togetherness surveying the Gospels, Acts, Paul and other NT books before drawing conclusions.

### *Toward the Spirit of Togetherness*

G. McFarlane, in his article "Toward a Theology of Togetherness," expresses a reasonable concern for increasing "human alienation – of humans *not* being together."<sup>8</sup> He is

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<sup>5</sup> N. T. Wright, *Paul and His Recent Interpreters* (London: SPCK, 2015), 4.

<sup>6</sup> From now on NT.

<sup>7</sup> As R. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 189.

<sup>8</sup> Graham McFarlane, "Toward a Theology of Togetherness – Life Through the Spirit," in *The Spirit*, 323.

correct in picturing our world as “alienated” especially in this COVID era when people become more isolated which in effect produces loneliness, negativity, and unrest. Alienation can take various forms, for example, when we blame others for injustice and political instability while being reluctant to act, or express our voices, for justice or peace in the world. Alienation includes a division between “us” and “others,” whether we are indifferent or ignorant about the needs of others on a smaller and larger scale, and especially if we are hostile and antagonistic to each other. In the words of McFarlane, we lack human togetherness which is totally inconsistent with the teaching of Scripture that calls us to belong together and to reach out to “the other.”

The call to togetherness provides an invitation to restoration, reparation, salvation that is “initiated through the neighbor-love of God, as Father loving his creation, as Son rescuing it, and as Spirit making this gift of togetherness possible in the here and now.”<sup>9</sup> This paper focuses on latter claim that the reconciling gift of the Holy Spirit provides the foundational notion of human togetherness. The claim does raise questions concerning the extent the Spirit makes the gift of togetherness possible according to Scripture and determining the best approach towards an understanding of Spirit-shaped togetherness.

*The Spirit of togetherness in the NT as fulfilled prophecies*

For the NT writers the belief that in Christ, God reconciled the world, answered the question of gathering people together.<sup>10</sup> In Christ, the kingdom of God arrived and the era of new order in the Spirit began.<sup>11</sup> The “last days” when the Spirit would be poured out on all flesh (promised by Joel, Isaiah and other prophets) has arrived, and all who are led by the Spirit are

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<sup>9</sup> McFarlane, 324.

<sup>10</sup> Rom 5:10-11.

<sup>11</sup> Mark 1:15; John 20:22; Acts 2.

adopted into God’s family as brothers and sisters with Christ.<sup>12</sup> In the words of Ben Witherington, the NT writers “envision the ultimate future happening in this world.”<sup>13</sup> Jesus’ “manifesto” in Luke 4:16-30, strongly influenced by the Jubilee concept, further explained this arrival.<sup>14</sup> Jesus filled by the Spirit reads from the Isaiah scroll about the good news to the needy, poor, and the oppressed and announces that today this scripture has been fulfilled. In John 5:39 Jesus boldly exclaims that the scriptures testify on his behalf.

The hermeneutical key to these intertextual connections calls for a figural reading, an approach put forward by R. Hays. Such a pattern of reading presupposes a discernment between earlier and later events “within a continuous temporal stream.”<sup>15</sup> The approach allows both a retrospective reading of the OT stories in the light of life, death and resurrection of Jesus and seeing them as deliberately predicting events in the life of Jesus who continues the story of God and his Spirit. A vivid example in relation to fulfilled prophecy appears in the picture of the Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus and the voice from heaven during baptism recognising Jesus’ divine sonship. The voice and the words resemble divine authority and love upon the designation of a king or anointed one that is notable in scriptures and now is summed up in Jesus.<sup>16</sup> The Spirit of God, already known as hovering over the waters of creation, accompanying Israel during the exodus and promising to assemble the whole people of God in a new way that would seal God’s faithfulness to his covenant, now anoints Jesus and signifies a new beginning.<sup>17</sup> The

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<sup>12</sup> Acts 2; Rom 8:14-15.

<sup>13</sup> Ben Witherington III, *Jesus, Paul, and the End of the World: A Comparative Study in New Testament Eschatology* (Exeter: Paternoster, 1992), 228.

<sup>14</sup> Lev 25; Isa 61.

<sup>15</sup> Richard Hays, *Reading Backwards: Figural Christology and the Fourfold Gospel Witness*. (London: SPCK, 2015), 93.

<sup>16</sup> Ps 2:7; 2 Sam 7:14; Gen 22:2, 12, 16;

<sup>17</sup> Zech 4:6; 6:1; Joel 2:28-3:2; Isa 59:21.

predictions about the anointed servant of the Lord, filled with the Spirit, who would teach not only Israel but the nations, and would establish justice in the earth, now come to fulfilment in this story of baptism and are recognisable throughout Jesus' life.<sup>18</sup> In other words, the Spirit reveals not only Jesus' identity and the holy intimate togetherness between God and Christ, but the Spirit also depicts the end of the exile and an exciting new beginning for Israel and all the nations.<sup>19</sup> All NT writers contribute their own voices to the composition of this new beginning.

*The Holy Spirit in Christ and those who belong to Christ*

All the Gospel writers shed light on the unity and mutual indwelling in the Holy Trinity and manifest how the Spirit creates liminal spaces for those who are somehow deeply interwoven with Jesus, helping them recognise God's revelation in Christ for the sake of Israel and the Gentiles.<sup>20</sup> Mark, however, does not comment on how the disciples' life looks like when Jesus is not with them anymore.<sup>21</sup> His readers must rely on the story, promises, ministry and life of Jesus recorded in Mark to make sense of what is to come. Mark leaves it for his readers to understand and to remember how everything that Jesus said and did must come to fulfilment after the resurrection, including his promise to rely upon the Holy Spirit and to baptise them with the Holy Spirit.<sup>22</sup> "You will see him, just as he told you" are almost the last words in the Gospel.<sup>23</sup> In a

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<sup>18</sup> Isa 42:1-4.

<sup>19</sup> For example, John 16:7-15; Rom 8:1-11; Heb 9:14.

<sup>20</sup> A vivid example comes from Luke 2:30-32, when upon seeing Jesus, Simeon is guided by the Spirit and says, "my eyes have seen your salvation, which you have prepared in the presence of all people, a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel." See also Mary, Elizabeth, Anna, and others who follow Jesus.

<sup>21</sup> I am starting with Mark taking a common view that he is written first among other Gospels. R. Burridge, *What are the Gospels: A Comparison with Graeco-Roman Biography* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004).

<sup>22</sup> Mark 1:8; 13:11; 16:7.

<sup>23</sup> Mark 16:7.

sense, the abruptness of Mark's story is an opportunity for his readers to recall their relationship with Jesus and start living their lives in the presence of his Spirit.<sup>24</sup>

Matthew has a different ending explicitly urging the readers to make disciples of all nations and to baptize them in the name of the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit.<sup>25</sup> It appears that Jesus' ability to baptise with the Spirit is transferred to the disciples who are to do Christ's work in the world. The concept of transferring the Spirit is evident among Israel's prophets<sup>26</sup> but the function of the Spirit in Matthew is to proclaim God's kingdom beyond Israel by uniting the nations around Christ.

Luke and John provide further evidence that the Spirit, promised by God the Father, is intensified in Christ and, through Christ, is given to the disciples for the empowerment of their mission. Jesus Christ literally breathes the Holy Spirit upon the disciples during his post-resurrection appearance.<sup>27</sup> In both John and Luke, Jesus assures the disciples who rapidly expand beyond the twelve<sup>28</sup> that the Holy Spirit will teach them everything and reminds them of all that he said to them.<sup>29</sup> But only Luke among all the Gospel writers contextualises this experience in the lives and mission of the disciples in his book of Acts.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Mar 16:8 is the end of the story in the early manuscripts. The longer version of Mark affirms in a nutshell that followers of Christ went out and proclaimed the good news with the Lord's help.

<sup>25</sup> Matthew 28:19-20.

<sup>26</sup> Elijah to Elisha in 2 Kg 4:29.

<sup>27</sup> John 20:22.

<sup>28</sup> Especially in Luke (10:1-12). See also Jeffrey W. Aernie, *Narrative Discipleship: Portraits of Women in the Gospel of Mark* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2018).

<sup>29</sup> John 14:26; Luke 12:12.

<sup>30</sup> I take a common view that Luke and Acts are written by one author.

*The Power of the Spirit as a Driving Force to Expand the Family of God*

In Acts the role of the Spirit is described as the fulfilment of prophecy.<sup>31</sup> The precise expectation concerns the outpouring of God's Spirit literally upon all flesh. For Luke, these last days have arrived at the day of Pentecost when the Spirit descends on all present in Jerusalem in Acts 2. The idea of getting together and receiving the promise of the Spirit is significant for understanding a proper togetherness.

First, Acts 2 ties the outpouring of the Spirit with the idea of people being shaped together through this event as a new messianic family – the Church. The significance of experiencing the event together has implications for the collective memory of Christ's followers – something that forms personal perceptions of the event in a community and creates a common narrative that shapes their identity.<sup>32</sup> They are presented not as separate or single witnesses but as a body of witnesses.<sup>33</sup>

Second, those who belong to the crucified and resurrected Messiah come together in obedience to Christ Who commands them to wait in Jerusalem for the promise.<sup>34</sup> Thus, they become part of the transformational process. Their obedience, devotion and genuine fellowship has tremendous consequences for the community as a whole. They share resources, take care of each other and welcome others. They truly experience a deep sense of unity in the Spirit and

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<sup>31</sup> Acts 2:17 referring to Joel 2:28.

<sup>32</sup> Jan Assmann and John Czaplicka, "Collective Memory and Cultural Identity," *New German Critique* 65 (1995): 125-133.

<sup>33</sup> Acts 2 is heavily debated in scholarship. See William and Robert Menzies, *Spirit and Power: Foundations of Pentecostal Experience* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 2000); James Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism Today* (London: SCM Press, 1970, 2010); W. P. Atkinson, "*Spiritual Death*" of Jesus: *A Pentecostal Investigation* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2010).

<sup>34</sup> Acts 1:4.

others are drawn to them and their numbers are multiplying. In that Luke draws an ideal picture of togetherness.

Third, the coming of the Spirit signifies the restoration of their abilities to communicate with one another. If at Babel in Gen 11 humankind is separated by the lack of mutual understanding, then Acts 2 celebrates the reversal of the confusion. The Spirit equips disciples to speak beyond their local context. In Acts 2 they are witnesses in Jerusalem, but they are empowered to speak beyond the city to the end of the world. The first audience gathered at the Day of Pentecost are representatives of Jewish origin, but soon they realise that God's vision is truly bigger than they even imagine.<sup>35</sup> The Holy Spirit empowers the disciples to speak to the Jews and to all unbelievers because the Holy Spirit indwells in them and in the Gentiles. It takes a while for the disciples to see God's cosmic plan. Peter, for example, only changes his perspective after God revealed himself in a vision to him.<sup>36</sup>

We find the confirmation about this misunderstanding on the part of the disciples in Galatians where Paul confronts Peter in relation to his indecisiveness.<sup>37</sup> Peter was eating with the Gentiles but after some people from James came, he separated himself from the Gentiles again. We do not see the resolution of this confrontation in Galatians but in Acts Peter testifies to those Jews who criticise him for going to the uncircumcised, "The Spirit told me to go with them and not to make a distinction between them and us."<sup>38</sup> In Acts 15 Peter addresses the council in Jerusalem and passionately announces that God gives the Holy Spirit to the Gentiles just as he

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<sup>35</sup> They are identified as devoted Jews (Acts 2:5). Further discussion in F. F. Bruce, *The Book of the Acts* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, rev., 1998), 54-55.

<sup>36</sup> See Acts 10:9-16, 28.

<sup>37</sup> Pauls calls it hypocrisy in Galatians 2:11-14.

<sup>38</sup> Acts 11:12.



gave the Spirit to the Jews. The idea of embracing others under the guidance of the Spirit beyond one's close and desirable circle prevails in Acts.

In 1 Peter the author sounds quite inclusive of the Jewish and Gentile Christians when he addresses those who are scattered in Asia Minor as being set aside by God the Father and sanctified by the Spirit for a special service to be holy as God is holy.<sup>39</sup> Peter is concerned not about the distinction between Jews and Gentiles but about people of God together living out holiness and proclaiming Christ to others even in their sufferings, because the Spirit rests upon them.<sup>40</sup>

The presence of the Spirit, previously known in the Jewish writings and in the Gospels, is reconsidered and intensified in the embodied lives of Christ's followers everywhere and under any circumstances. The expansion allows the disciples to begin to see the creativity and the scope of work of the Spirit beyond their own narrow perspective. The Holy Spirit, as the aftermath of the resurrected Christ, unites believers and helps to create a common narrative that tells the world who they are and invites others to join.

### *A Call to Loving Togetherness*

Paul, in his instructions to various churches, illuminates and expands the idea of a common narrative under the guidance of the Spirit, particularly in Romans 8 which is considered the high point of his pneumatology.<sup>41</sup> Paul reveals how Christ remains not only Himself in the

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<sup>39</sup> See 1 Pet 1:2-16. Assuming that the author is Peter, although not all agree with that. The question of who the audience is also contested. However, 1:14, 18; 2:9-10; 2:25; 3:6 and 4:3-4 support the idea that Peter addresses Gentile Christians.

<sup>40</sup> 1 Pet 4:14. See S. Khobnya, "So That They May Be Won Over Without a Word: Reading 1 Peter Through a Missional Lens," *European Journal of Theology* 29 (2020): 7-16.

<sup>41</sup> The Spirit-related terminology appears about 170 times in the Pauline corpus with thirty-seven on them in Romans (twenty-one in Romans 8 only) and thirteen in 1 Cor 12, which makes Rom 8 integral to Paul's pneumatology. See James Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Grand

permanent sphere of the Spirit but also becomes the source of “a new spiritual disposition” for his followers.<sup>42</sup> If you are in Christ, Paul writes, His Spirit dwells in you. To be in Christ is to be in the sphere of the Spirit and to have minds set on God through the Spirit until the age of glory.<sup>43</sup>

For Paul, the Spirit facilitates not only the connection of believers to God through Christ but also places them, or adopts them, in the loving togetherness with each other as brothers and sisters, and co-heirs with Christ.<sup>44</sup> This strong realisation of the multidimensional togetherness in the Spirit ideally leads believers to search and sense the presence of the Spirit in their relationships to God in Christ, to other people and even the whole creation.<sup>45</sup> It is fair to say that the empowering work of the Spirit is highly relational; and interrelatedness proves essential for understanding pneumatic experience.<sup>46</sup>

Paul contributes to the discussion on the Spirit through his emphasis on loving interrelatedness between members. All dimensions of the work of the Spirit, including the distribution of spiritual gifts are for the benefit of the whole community, manifest themselves in the community, for the sake of the community, and as a part of full realisation of God’s love for the world poured into their hearts by the Spirit of Christ.<sup>47</sup> Practically, when churches or/and

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Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 423; Samuel D. Ferguson, *The Spirit and Relational Anthropology in Paul* (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020), 151.

<sup>42</sup>Barry D. Smith’ language in “‘Spirit of Holiness’ as Eschatological Principle of Obedience,” in *Christian Beginnings and the Dead Sea Scrolls* (ed. John J. Collins and Craig A. Evans; Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 76.

<sup>43</sup> Rom 8:5-11, 17-23.

<sup>44</sup> Rom 8:12-17.

<sup>45</sup> Rom 8:18-23.

<sup>46</sup> Volker Rabens, “Power From In Between’ The Relational Experience of the Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts in Paul’s Churches,” in *The Spirit*, 140.

<sup>47</sup> Rom 5:5; 1 Cor 12.

theological communities seek greater fellowship between each other they are seeking the experience of the Holy Spirit.<sup>48</sup> Through intentional and caring relationships with others on the basis of “faith working through love” believers can enjoy a fuller experience of the Spirit and visualise the kingdom of God in the world in the present, perhaps as OT prophets envisioned this.<sup>49</sup>

Paul’s teaching on true togetherness formed by the Spirit could be elucidated by the beautiful apocalyptic imagery from Revelation. John draws a picture of the holy city that reveals “a restored and transformed human community”<sup>50</sup> and the invitation of the Spirit to the nations to drink from the water of life and be healed.<sup>51</sup> While Revelation remains a complex writing to analyse,<sup>52</sup> more interpreters recognise that it calls Christian communities to be an alternative reality to the world’s impurity, violence and idolatry.<sup>53</sup> They are “to model peace, justice” and the true human togetherness that “embraces world’s diverse peoples.” Such an obedient witness “offers a foretaste of the future when the holy city comes down from heaven and the transforming presence of God fills the whole earth.”<sup>54</sup> Significantly, the Spirit in Revelation

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<sup>48</sup> Moltmann, Jürgen, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*. Translated by Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1982; repr., 1993), 239-240.

<sup>49</sup> Gal 5:5-6.

<sup>50</sup> D. Flemming, “On Earth as it is in Heaven,” in *Holiness and Ecclesiology in the New Testament* (ed. K. Brower and A. Johnson; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2007), 356.

<sup>51</sup> Rev 22:17.

<sup>52</sup> See various approaches summarised in I. Paul, *Revelation: An Introduction and Commentary* (TNTC; Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2018), 48-49.

<sup>53</sup> Flemming, “On Earth”; Ben Witherington, III, *Revelation* (Cambridge: CUP, 2003); Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: CUP, 1993); David Arthur DeSilva, *Seeing Things John's Way: The Rhetoric of the Book of Revelation* (Louisville: John Knox Press, 2009). Some examples include Rev 22:15; 21:3.

<sup>54</sup> Flemming, “On Earth,” 358.

invites churches to liminal space to reflect on their present position in the world from the perspective of God's future and his throne.

### *Conclusions*

This paper barely scratched the surface in relation to the question of the Spirit and human togetherness posited at the beginning. However, a number of implications are in place when the analysis is carried across the NT stories, and when the language of fulfilment is taken seriously.

The Spirit enables the continuity of the story of God in Christ and celebrates the consequences of Christ's life, death, and resurrection as the restoration of human identity and the possibility of togetherness with God for all those in Christ. The Spirit also represents a foundation for human togetherness. God's design, promised through the Spirit, does not merely focus on the vertical togetherness and coming together, either as individuals or individual communities, as people of God restored in Christ. The ultimate purpose of the Spirit is to unite and empower God's people to unite the nations. God invites followers to love one another and drives them to introduce loving togetherness known to them through Christ to the end of the world far beyond their status quo.

God's people are called to find their place in the world for the divine dwelling as a sign of the new world coming. The characteristic of this new world, where the Spirit of Christ is active, reflects the idea of inclusive fellowship that embraces differences, crosses boundaries, empowers the powerless and helps the helpless. This characteristic also bears the notion of being open-minded to the new possibilities of God's work in the world and recognising that the Spirit works beyond our imagination and beyond only our experience. The Spirit calls to creativity in modifying the tactics of Christian presence in the world through developing interrelations. He

literally teaches and enables us to build up togetherness in obedience to Christ with boldness and without hindrance. Moreover, his power is transcendent the most in our togetherness.