

IN THE POWER OF THE SPIRIT: THE HOLY SPIRIT
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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.