

[Asian Voices Amplified, pp. 9-26]

## **Appointed Messiah and Lord: Towards a Pentecostal Spirit Christology**

Frank Macchia

### **Abstract**

I propose a Pentecostal Spirit Christology that finds its point of departure in Christ's bearing of the Spirit, all the way to the victory of the Cross and the Resurrection, where Christ is appointed Son of God (as well as Messiah and Lord) in a new way – namely, in power, or in glorified flesh for the purpose of imparting new life to all flesh. This fulfilment then involves not only resurrection but also Pentecost, where from his risen fullness Christ imparts the Spirit on all flesh. His full deity and humanity are thus revealed in his becoming for us all the wellspring of the Spirit, for humanity was made to be the vehicle of the Spirit, and only God can pour forth the Spirit on all flesh. Christ becomes Messiah (who bears the Spirit) and Lord (who pours forth the Spirit). The entire quest for the meaning of the historical Jesus and of our dogmatic claims surrounding him point us to the events of Christ's resurrection and outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost.

**Key Words:** baptism of Jesus, Christological dogma, historical Jesus, Messiah, Pentecost, Spirit baptism

One thing I have learned from my Pentecostal heritage was that Pentecost is the event of the church calendar that requires far more attention than Evangelicals have granted it. With a focus on this event, Pentecostals preached about Jesus as the *living Christ* who encounters us as the Saviour, Spirit Baptiser, Healer, and Coming King. Of course, the living Christ acts in continuity with his life devotion to the kingdom of God that culminated in his ultimate victory over sin and death. And the victory of the Cross and of the Resurrection were indeed pivotal to their gospel. But *the narrative arc* of Christ's messianic mission directed Pentecostals all the way to the throne where Christ reigns as Lord and from where he imparts the Spirit on behalf of the Father, uniting himself to us as his body and working among us and through us on the cutting edge of the church's mission. I find this narrative arc in Luke-Acts, and I will always be grateful to the Pentecostals for pointing me there. My purpose here is to develop the broad outline of a Spirit Christology that uses Christ's resurrection, exaltation, and outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost as its key focus.

Let us thus begin with Pentecost, with the key text of Acts 2:32-36:

This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says,

“The Lord said to my Lord,  
‘Sit at my right hand,  
until I make your enemies your footstool.’”

Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.”<sup>1</sup>

The above text, taken from Luke’s summary of Peter’s Pentecost sermon, starts with the Resurrection, which is simply described with the words, “this Jesus God raised up” (Ἰησοῦν ἀνέστησεν ὁ Θεός). Earlier, Peter spoke of the Crucifixion in a way that anticipates the Resurrection, locating the fulfilment of the following words in Jesus:

For you will not abandon my soul to Hades,  
or let your Holy One see corruption.  
You have made known to me the paths of life;  
you will make me full of gladness with your presence (Acts 2:27-28).

Peter reminded us that these words were not fulfilled by David, for he died and saw corruption. Indeed, he fully partook of Adam’s curse: “you are dust, to the dust you will return” (Gen 3:19). But not Christ! He bore this curse but did not fall to it. He overturned the curse of Adam; he did not decay. He was raised!

But the narrative arc of Christology does not end there. The Resurrection is itself fulfilled for Luke in Christ’s exaltation to the throne to reign. It is there at the throne in his risen and exalted state that he is made Messiah and Lord. Luke’s summary of Peter’s Pentecost sermon highlights the fact that David did not fulfil the messianic promise precisely because he was not exalted to the throne. This may be said only of the Messiah, Jesus Christ:

“The Lord said to my Lord,  
‘Sit at my right hand,  
until I make your enemies your footstool’”

Therefore let all Israel be assured of this: God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Messiah” (Acts 2:34-36).

Key to his exaltation as *Lord and Messiah* was his impartation of the Spirit on behalf of the heavenly Father, which John the Baptist earlier foretold he would do (Luke 3:16). Christ received the Spirit as *Messiah* to pour forth the Spirit as the *Lord*. Christ’s pouring forth of the Spirit is not incidental to his resurrection and exaltation. Luke presents this Spirit-outpouring as the climactic moment of his exaltation. Christ tells the disciples at the conclusion of Luke’s Gospel that they are to go to Jerusalem (24:59), the location traditionally associated with the inauguration of God’s Kingdom, to receive the Spirit, which Christ identifies as the “promise of the Father.” The promise of the messianic reign is indeed also the promise of the Spirit that he bore and pours forth. Fittingly, Luke’s Acts begins with Jesus referring to their coming Spirit baptism (1:5). Peter’s Pentecost sermon features Christ’s pouring out the Spirit as the

---

<sup>1</sup> Unless otherwise noted, I will quote from the ESV translation.

inaugural event of his exaltation and reign. Most of Peter's sermon is taken up with a description of that Spirit impartation. Luke's narrative arc when it comes to Christology comes to rest in Christ as Lord and Messiah, precisely as the one who bore the Spirit so as to pour forth the Spirit from his own victory and in witness to him. *His Lordship is won in the Spirit precisely as a reign into which others are incorporated through the outpouring of the Spirit.*

Intriguing is Luke's implication that Christ is *made* Lord and Messiah at his resurrection and exaltation. Helpful in unpacking the meaning behind this point is a complementary text from Acts from Paul's sermon in chapter 13:

And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm,

"You are my Son,  
today I have begotten you."

And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way,

"I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David."

Therefore he says also in another psalm,

"You will not let your Holy One see corruption" (Acts 13:32-35).

Christ's victory over death includes the victory over the condemnation and dominance of sin as well, as verses 38-39 imply: "Let it be known to you therefore, brothers, that through this man forgiveness of sins is proclaimed to you, and by him everyone who believes is freed from everything from which you could not be freed by the law of Moses." As Paul wrote in Romans 8:3, "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh."

The above text from Paul's sermon in Acts 13:32-33 is similar to the Acts 2:32-34 text quoted from Peter's Pentecost sermon. First, both texts highlight the Crucifixion, but as that which leads to the victory of resurrection and exaltation. Deliverance from sin and death means overcoming the curse of corruption and decay: "to dust you shall return" (Gen 3:19) and the deliverance of one's soul from "abandonment to Hades" (2:31). The Resurrection is God's faithfulness to be with us even in Hades as a door of hope to the reception of the blessing of life. Jesus *is* the Spirit Baptiser! Second, in Acts 13 as well as Acts 2, Christ or Son of God is installed as Messiah at the Resurrection and exaltation. Third, as similarly noted in Acts 2, the "blessings of David" implied by the promise of the coming Messiah are not fulfilled by David. Only Christ is raised as Lord and Messiah or as the Lord who imparts the Spirit from his own fullness as the anointed Messiah.

The Acts 13 text does not explicitly involve the Spirit, though the witness to the risen Christ mentioned in this text assumes the Acts 2 kerygma of the Christ who is exalted under the anointing of the Spirit to pour forth the Spirit. It is within this narrative of the blessings of life in the Spirit, constantly sustaining and being received with renewed force among the churches, that our Acts 13 text finds its place. The Acts 13 text uniquely brings to the forefront Christ's elevation as Son of God. In this text, Psalm 2:7 is quoted, "You are my Son; today I have begotten you." One should recall here Romans 1:4 where Paul describes his gospel as

involving Christ who “was appointed to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead, Jesus Christ our Lord.”<sup>2</sup> Though the term “Son of God” could mean many things in the ancient world, the New Testament reveals a close connection between this term and the Messiah, involving in places also Christ’s essential role in the divine self-giving for the salvation of the world. Romans 1:3-4 along with Acts 13:33 were part of an early Jewish Christian apologetic for Christ’s messianic identity that focused on Psalm 2:7 as a description of Christ’s installation as Messiah and Son of God at the Resurrection.

I want to elaborate on this narrative arc of the risen and exalted Christ as bearer and impartor of the Spirit that links Acts 2:32-35; 13:32-33; and Romans 1:3-4. The idea that Christ is installed as Son of God or Messiah *in power* at his resurrection through the Spirit of holiness fits Luke-Acts well and provides the basis for a Pentecostal Christology. Though Luke describes the Resurrection as key to Christ’s installation as Son of God, he also assumes that Christ was the holy Son of God in power even at his Incarnation. Note Luke 1:31-35:

“And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall call his name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. And the Lord God will give to him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of his kingdom there will be no end.”

And Mary said to the angel, “How will this be, since I am a virgin?”

And the angel answered her, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore the child to be born will be called holy – the Son of God.”

Luke 1:31-35 quoted above has the Resurrection and exaltation as the event of Christ’s messianic appointment in Romans 1:3-4 and both Acts 2:32-35 and 13:32-35 at its horizon. First, though John the Baptist is *filled* with the Spirit in his mother’s womb in Luke 1:15, only the Son of God and Messiah is *conceived* by the Spirit in the virgin’s womb in 1:31-35. The very flesh of the Son of God was uniquely set apart from John in the womb. The prophets like John are only filled by the Spirit. Only the flesh of the Son of God is *conceived* by the Spirit in power under the sign of a miraculous virgin conception. The miraculous conception of the flesh of the Son of God in *holiness* by the power of the Spirit (Luke 1:35) signals the miraculous deliverance from the corruption and alienation of flesh through the Resurrection depicted in Acts 2:27. The Son of God conceived in the virgin’s womb under the power of the Spirit implies eschatological transcendence, for in Luke 1:31-35 he will rise to reign and of his Kingdom there will be no end (v. 33).

Second, one should not overlook the emphasis of Luke 1 on the fact that the flesh of Christ is conceived by the power of the Spirit in *holiness*: “the child to be born will be called holy” (v. 35). The connection to Romans 1:4 in which Christ is appointed the Son of God in power at the Resurrection “according to the Spirit of holiness” is obvious. His triumph over the reign of sin and death in resurrection as the Son of God in the power according to the Spirit of holiness

---

<sup>2</sup> I follow the ESV here except for the term “declared,” which I have changed to “appointed.”

depicted in Romans 1:3-4 (and 8:3) is implicitly anticipated in Luke 1 at Christ's conception as the holy Son of God in the power of the Spirit in the virgin's womb. Christ's sinless life is anchored in this conception in holiness. His triumph is anchored there in the power of the Spirit of holiness.

Third, all three texts from Romans 1 and Acts 2 and 13 contrast David and Christ. In Romans 1:3-4, Christ's *birth* in the Davidic line "according to the flesh" (κατὰ σάρκα) is contrasted with Christ's *resurrection* in power "according to the Spirit of holiness" (κατὰ πνεῦμα ἁγιωσύνης). Also, in both Acts 2 and 13, the promise or blessings to which David bore witness was not fulfilled in him but rather in Christ as Messiah. The meaning is clear. The lineage of David according to the flesh was not the source of power when it came to God's victory over sin and death. That power came from the Son of God in the power of the Spirit. Conceived of the Spirit in the virgin's womb, the Son of God belongs both to this world and to the next, both to the lineage of flesh and to the miraculous power of God, especially of the Spirit, that will raise the dead and make all things new. Christ belongs to the resurrection and exaltation of flesh to glory. He will be the one to inaugurate it; in fact, it is being inaugurated in him already.

Fourth, the exaltation of Christ to the throne is also key to the final and decisive appointment of Christ to his messianic reign in Acts. The prophecy of David given in Acts 2:28 has Christ seeking to be "full of gladness" in his Father's presence. David is said to have known that God would place one of his descendants on the throne (v. 30) which ends up being in the heavenlies at the Father's right hand (vv. 33-34). This exaltation to sovereign authority is the implied horizon of Luke 1:35 where the Son of God conceived by the Spirit of the "Most High" will reign from the throne over the "house of Jacob." The additional allusion to Isaiah 9:7 and Daniel 7:14 is found in the phrase, "of his kingdom there will be no end" (Acts 2:33). The reign of the Messiah will be eternal, part of the eschatological transcendence implied by the virgin conception. As in Acts, the everlasting reign of the Son of Man in Daniel 7:14 includes all nations and tongues. This flesh of the Son of God conceived by the Spirit is destined for fulfilment in Acts 2 to reach all peoples and nations so as to elevate them all to glory.

Fifth, Luke 1:35 implies that the Son conceived in Mary's womb was always the Son into eternity past. Luke 1:33 claims that the Son conceived by the Spirit of the Most High will manifest in his flesh the sovereignty of the Most High by reigning over a divine Kingdom that will have no end. In light of Acts 2, we could ask how one can conquer sin and death, occupy the throne of God to reign over all, and from this throne pour forth the Spirit upon all flesh on behalf of the Father if he is not united to the Father in deity? As St. Augustine wrote in commentary on Acts 2:33, "How great a God is he who gives God!"<sup>3</sup> Christ is indeed appointed in his flesh at the throne as "Lord and Messiah" (2:36) for it is there that the Messiah who bore the Spirit pours him forth as the Lord.

Luke tells us that after the Son of God's conception as the holy Son of God under the power of the Spirit, he continued to give himself to the life of the Spirit.

---

<sup>3</sup> St. Augustine, "*De Trinitate* 15.26," New Advent, accessed January 15, 2026, <https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/130115.htm>, no. 46.

Christ “grew and became strong in the Spirit” according to Luke 1:80.<sup>4</sup> By the end of Luke 2 (2:52), Jesus is said to grow in wisdom as well. Such childhood dedication to the path of the Spirit in holiness leads up to his pivotal experience at his baptism at the Jordan in Luke 3:21-22: “Now when all the people were baptised, and when Jesus also had been baptised and was praying, the heavens were opened, and the Holy Spirit descended on him in bodily form, like a dove; and a voice came from heaven, ‘You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased.’” The one whose flesh was conceived as the holy Son of God under the power of the hovering Spirit is now filled by that same Spirit at the Jordan River. John the Baptist had just announced that the coming Messiah will baptise others in the Spirit (Luke 3:16). What seems clear from this promise is that the Messiah receives the Spirit to impart the Spirit to others. The one who is conceived as the holy Son of God in the Spirit only wills to be the Son by that same Spirit as the Lord and elder brother to many others.

Anchored in Israel’s crossing the Jordan into the Promised Land, Jesus descends into the water in solidarity with them, indeed, in solidarity with all who require repentance to place their hope in God. Israel was delivered from oppression and bondage in the Exodus as adopted to sonship. “Out of Egypt I called my son” (Hos 11:1), for, according to Romans 9:4, to them “belong the adoption,” as well as eschatological glory (e.g., Isa 60:1-2). But the more God called out to them, the further away from God they went (Hos 11:2), like the younger son in the parable of the prodigal son. Unlike the vindictive and self-righteous elder son in that parable, however, Jesus is the *faithful* elder Son who offers a path to reconciliation that is merciful to sinners. He goes out into the far country at the Cross to bring the lost back to the household of the Father. The Israel of the Exodus was never meant to have their sonship solely in themselves. They were meant to gain sonship in the promise and coming of their Messiah: “You are my Son; today I have begotten you” (Ps 2:7). Fulfilled in the Messiah, Israel’s sonship will later be fulfilled by faith in him and in devotion to the messianic mission to the nations. The Son of the Father calls humanity to adoption as his brothers and sisters in the Spirit so that they may pray “Abba” to the heavenly Father in and with him in times of confession and need (Rom 8:15). Thus, Christ in the water of the Jordan turns in solidarity with sinners towards a new promise, the Holy Spirit and the kingdom of God to come, and he is the one who will open this hope for them. He is already doing so.

Though Christ’s Jordan event is anchored in the history of Israel, it is an apocalyptic event that looks to the future. Typical of an apocalyptic event, the heavens open and God speaks. Unlike Matthew, Luke has the Father speak directly to the Son: “You are my beloved Son; with you I am well pleased” (3:22). One hears an echo of the direct address of Psalm 2:7: “You are my Son.” Though this Psalm 2:7 text is quoted in Acts 13:33 and lies behind Romans 1:3-4 in reference to the Resurrection, it applies to Christ’s Jordan experience as well, in anticipation of the Resurrection. The Spirit descends on Christ in the form of a dove, harking back perhaps to the dove in the story of Noah on the

---

<sup>4</sup> I part here from the lower case for “spirit” used in the ESV. The context of Luke 1 highlights the role of the Holy Spirit in Christ’s life (e.g., 1:31-35).

edge of a new world. The Father expresses love and delight in the Son as the Spirit is poured forth upon him (e.g., Isa 42:1), implying that the circle of love that involves the Father and the Son also involves the Spirit as its “ecstatic delight.” The Spirit’s descent on Christ not only empowers him for his mission but deepens his awareness of his sonship and of the holiness of his cause. He is after all the holy Son conceived under the power of the hovering Spirit for precisely this moment. The eschatological reach of this event is also shown in the symbolism of Christ’s baptism that occasioned the event of the Spirit’s descent. As the fourth-century church father Ephrem the Syrian noted, Christ went down into the water in solidarity with sinners and rose up from the water in the power and victory of the Spirit, just as he will descend into Sheol at the Cross in solidarity with sinners so as to rise and be exalted in the power of the Spirit.<sup>5</sup> Christ’s baptism at the Jordan anticipates Easter. Christ is declared the Son in Luke 9:28-36 at the transfiguration event as well, where he glows with light, another foretaste of his coming resurrection and exaltation (v. 29).

Directly after the momentous event at the Jordan, Christ is led by the Spirit towards his time of trial. He goes to the desert to be tried of the devil. At every point Christ stays true to the holiness that belonged to him as the Son of God and Messiah. Though Christ had heard the Father declare him the beloved Son with whom he is pleased at the Jordan, Satan immediately calls that declaration into question: “If you are the Son of God ...” (Luke 4:3), as though it were open to doubt. Satan attempts to lure Christ into proving his sonship by doing things that would in themselves result in betraying it. Christ fasted in the desert to focus on preparation for his mission and to illustrate the all-surpassing value of the will of his Father over the material sustenance of life. “Man shall not live by bread alone” is his response. Indeed, any effort to live by bread alone is a living death. Death by bread alone!

Next comes the offer of the material kingdoms of the world, if only Christ would worship Satan. Not even such an expanded offer of material wealth and power can cause Christ to abandon his devotion to the Father and his reign. His answer is fitting: “You shall worship the Lord your God, and him only shall you serve” (Luke 4:8). So far, Christ is faithful to his prayer he will offer that the kingdom of God come to earth, the will of the Father being done on earth as it is in heaven (Matt 6:10). Christ will be the one who fulfils this.

Finally, Satan tries to get Christ to will something other than the Father and then to impose that will on him. “If you are the Son of God,” Satan asks again, this time as part of a challenge to put the Father’s loyalty to the test by throwing himself down from the pinnacle of the temple to see if the Father will spare him. There will come a time when Christ indeed will lay his life down to fulfil the Father’s cause of love in the world, but attempting to force the Father’s hand through a senseless test would be an act of unfaithfulness. “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test” is Christ’s response (Luke 4:12). Every one of these tests, if accepted, would not prove Christ’s sonship, only betray it. The path of

---

<sup>5</sup> See Kilian McDonnell’s discussion of Ephrem in Kilian McDonnell, *The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan: Trinitarian and Cosmic Order of Salvation* (Liturgical, 1996), 168-69.

devotion to the Father and yielding to the Spirit of holiness would cease. Christ would fundamentally lose his way. Such is, of course, unthinkable.

After his victory in the desert, Christ gives his messianic inaugural address in which he quotes mainly from Isaiah 61:1-2:

The Spirit of the Lord is upon me,  
 because he has anointed me  
 to proclaim good news to the poor.  
 He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives  
 and recovering of sight to the blind,  
 to set at liberty those who are oppressed,  
 to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.

The start of the address cuts right to the heart of his sonship: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me," as the Spirit rested upon him in the womb and at the Jordan. The Spirit deepened the Son's awareness of his sonship and empowered him to give himself completely towards the accomplishment of God's cause of a just and merciful love in the world. He proclaims good news to the poor. The category of the poor is holistic, involving those who are for any number of reasons relegated to positions outside the boundaries of the justice and mercy of the kingdom of God. They are the outcasts and the marginalised when it comes to the religious establishment. The healing of the blind and the liberty to the oppressed undoubtedly have the same holistic thrust, pointing to Jesus's healing and liberating ministry. Christ mercifully broke through legal and political barriers to bring the liberating and reconciling grace of God to all those who had been excluded, isolated, and laden with burdens of guilt and suffering. As we noted above, he went to the far country of them all, even of the self-righteous who excluded them, to win them back to the Father.

Towards this end, the one who was baptised in the Spirit also took on the baptism in fire, the baptism of his death: "I have a baptism to be baptised with, and how great is my distress until it is accomplished!" (Luke 12:50). He descends into death, but Hades could not hold him: "God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it" (Acts 2:24). His body did not return to dust; neither was his soul abandoned to Hades (v. 31). He is not eternally abandoned; he does not sink into the pit of Hades never to return; the fire of his death does not consume him. His trial only serves to confirm and deepen his holy sonship, which belonged to him from his conception. The Son conquered sin and death in his flesh for all flesh to extend that holiness and its favour with God to us, a point that Peter needed to grasp in relation to Cornelius and his household: "God, who knows the heart, showed that he accepted them by giving the Holy Spirit to them, just as he did to us. He did not discriminate between us and them, for he purified their hearts by faith" (Acts 10:8-9). Christ's impartation of the Spirit of holiness extended his victory to all flesh in all its diversity, empowering all flesh to bear witness to him to the ends of the earth. He was raised and exalted to the throne to reign and to become the Spirit Baptiser, willing only to be the Son in filial relation to others. His faithful journey as the Son of God and Messiah to that place of exaltation is called the path of life rather than death. His destiny was his installation as Son in the presence of the Father at his right hand: "You have made known to me the paths of life; you

will make me full of gladness with your presence” (Acts 2:27). “The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand’” (v. 34).

There is in all of this a Spirit Christology that allows us to proceed not only from above to below, or from the uniting of the eternal Son with human flesh, but also from below to above, or to his ascent as Lord and Messiah to the place of his appointment as such *in power*, or in his flesh for the sake of all flesh. This is an atonement in the Spirit that is profoundly inclusive of others, that reconciles us with God in the victory that Christ won in the Spirit and was actualised in his flesh for the sake of all flesh. This victory incorporates us in a divine communion that also unites us to one another in an ever more expansive and diversified communion of saints. In short, I am profoundly grateful for the direction of thought suggested to me by my Pentecostal heritage. Though I have been influenced by other streams, including the Reformed tradition, my Pentecostal heritage holds for me pride of place.

### **Bibliography**

- St. Augustine. “*De Trinitate* 15.26.” New Advent. Accessed January 15, 2026.  
<https://www.newadvent.org/fathers/130115.htm>.
- McDonnell, Kilian. *The Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan: Trinitarian and Cosmic Order of Salvation*. Liturgical, 1996.



# Presence, Power, and Pentecost: A Spirit-Christological Response to Frank D. Macchia

Pravinkumar Israel

Christians across traditions increasingly recognise that any fresh engagement with Christology must place the Holy Spirit at the centre.<sup>1</sup> Frank D. Macchia's chapter, "Appointed Messiah and Lord: Towards a Pentecostal Spirit Christology," offers a compelling Pentecostal reading of Luke-Acts. Macchia argues that Jesus's resurrection, exaltation, and Spirit-outpouring form a single redemptive arc. Building on his proposal, this response appraises Macchia's contribution to Spirit Christology from an Asian Pentecostal perspective to clarify the contours of Spirit Christology and its implications for Christian theology and explore how a pneumatological focus reshapes contemporary inter-religious engagement in a religiously pluralistic context in Asia.

## Spirit Christology in Context

Spirit Christology represents a theological approach to understanding the person and work of Jesus Christ that emphasises the role and agency of the Holy Spirit throughout Jesus's life, ministry, death, resurrection, and ongoing mission. Spirit Christology asks how Jesus's identity and saving work are disclosed *in and through* the Holy Spirit rather than *apart from* the Spirit's agency. Whereas classical Logos Christology stresses eternal generation and metaphysical union of the Son with the Father and the Spirit, Spirit Christology explains how God is present and active in Jesus by using the biblical symbol of God as Spirit, providing an essential pneumatological dimension to Christological reflection that complements traditional Logos Christology.

### *Historical Development of Spirit Christology*

While the Early Church used Spirit Christology to explain how Jesus was uniquely anointed by the Holy Spirit in his life and messianic ministry, the Eastern Church continued to maintain this understanding through the centuries.

---

<sup>1</sup> Renewed interest in pneumatology across the denominational lines has called for fresh engagement. To name just a few of the Spirit theologians: Yves Congar, Karl Rahner, Heribert Mühlen, and Ralph Del Colle (Roman Catholic theologians), Clark H. Pinnock and Jürgen Moltmann (Reformed and Lutheran theologians); and Vladimir Lossky, Nikos Nissiotis, Boris Bobrinsky, Paul Evdokimov, and John D. Zizioulas (Orthodox theologians).

Irenaeus of Lyons in the second century developed a robust understanding of the Holy Spirit's work, declaring that "the knowledge of the Son of God is through the Holy Spirit"<sup>2</sup> and that "The Lord, receiving this as a gift from His Father, does Himself also confer it upon those who are partakers of Himself, sending the Holy Spirit upon all the earth."<sup>3</sup>

Basil of Caesarea, in his defence of the divinity of the Holy Spirit, emphasised the Spirit's inseparable work with the Son: "Whether you wish to examine the Old Testament – the blessings of the patriarchs, the help given through the law, the types, the prophecies, the victories in battle, the miracles performed through righteous men – or everything that happened since the Lord's coming in the flesh, it all comes to pass through the Spirit."<sup>4</sup> Basil further affirmed that "the Lord was anointed with the Holy Spirit, who would henceforth be inseparably united to His very flesh."<sup>5</sup> As the church grew, it contextualised Christology to Greco-Roman philosophical categories and theologies as well as responded to the many different Christological controversies.

The twin errors of Modalism and Adoptionism began to impede the church, both with an emphasis of the oneness of God or Monarchianism as one in being to defend God's supremacy. Adoptionism taught that God adopted Jesus as God's Son at his baptism, while Modalism taught that the Father, Son, and Spirit referred to ways, modes of acting, or names and not distinct persons. In offering a suitable response to such tendencies, trinitarians such as Tertullian and Athanasius used categories of Logos Christology to maintain God's oneness and Christ's divinity. They began to use the Johannine conception of the Logos leading also to the development of Logos Christology, which became the official doctrine of the church following the Nicaean and Chalcedonian councils in the fourth and fifth centuries.<sup>6</sup>

Spirit Christology was marginalised in later theological development as the focus shifted predominantly to Logos Christology. The emphasis on the Incarnation in Jesus's conception in the womb meant that the "anointing with the Spirit" was moved from his baptism to his conception, and the Spirit's influence on Jesus became "merely accidental in comparison to that of the Logos."<sup>7</sup> The working of the Spirit was conceived as indistinctly the work of the Trinity and

---

<sup>2</sup> St. Irenaeus, *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 7.

[https://www.ccel.org/ccel/irenaeus/demonstr.preaching\\_the\\_demonstration\\_of\\_the\\_apostolic\\_preaching.html#fna\\_preaching\\_the\\_demonstration\\_of\\_the\\_apostolic\\_preaching-p7.4](https://www.ccel.org/ccel/irenaeus/demonstr.preaching_the_demonstration_of_the_apostolic_preaching.html#fna_preaching_the_demonstration_of_the_apostolic_preaching-p7.4).

<sup>3</sup> St. Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, Book 3, Chapter 17, Section 2.

[https://ccel.org/ccel/irenaeus/against\\_heresies\\_iii/anf01.ix.iv.xviii.html](https://ccel.org/ccel/irenaeus/against_heresies_iii/anf01.ix.iv.xviii.html).

<sup>4</sup> Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit* 16.39, in *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*, Second Series, vol. 8, ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace (Hendrickson, repr. 1994), 24-25.

<sup>5</sup> Basil of Caesarea, *On the Holy Spirit*, 24-25.

<sup>6</sup> Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *The Doctrine of God: A Global Introduction*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (Baker Academic, 2017), 4, 38; Marius Nel, "Spirit Christology: A Pentecostal Contribution to the Trinitarian Discourse," *Scriptura* 119, no. 1 (2020), 1-19, <https://doi.org/10.7833/119-1-1808>.

<sup>7</sup> Nel, "Spirit Christology," 6.

only appropriated to the Spirit. This marginalisation led to a neglect of the Spirit's essential role in Jesus's identity and mission.

### *Spirit Christology Highlights*

Spirit Christology asks how Jesus's identity and saving work are disclosed in and through the Holy Spirit rather than apart from the Spirit's agency. The renewed interest in Spirit Christology among theologians of all sections of Christian traditions – Pentecostal, Roman Catholic, and Reformed – rightly responds to longstanding complaints of the neglect of the Spirit in the Western theological tradition.

The late twentieth century witnessed a resurgence of Spirit Christology through theologians such as Geoffrey Lampe,<sup>8</sup> Karl Rahner,<sup>9</sup> Jürgen Moltmann,<sup>10</sup> Clark Pinnock,<sup>11</sup> Roger Haight,<sup>12</sup> Ralph Del Colle,<sup>13</sup> and Amos Yong.<sup>14</sup> These scholars sought to recover the pneumatological dimension that had been eclipsed by the dominance of Logos Christology in Western theology.

Spirit Christology essentially highlights the following motifs in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ:

- the Spirit's creative role from conception to resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth;
- Jesus's anointing and empowerment for mission; and
- the Spirit's role in the growing messianic self-awareness leading to Jesus's death and resurrection.

The present approach is not to supplant the Chalcedonian Christology with an alternative Spirit Christology but rather to provide a reworking and enriching of Logos Christology with a vital Spirit Christology that asserts that the anointing with the Spirit was essential for Jesus to realise his messianic work.

In this context, Macchia's chapter, "Appointed Messiah and Lord: Towards a Pentecostal Spirit Christology," offers a compelling Pentecostal reading of Luke-Acts in which Jesus's resurrection, exaltation, and Spirit-outpouring form a single redemptive arc and serve as the climactic event that incorporates "all flesh" into the divine life. This response seeks to (1) appraise Macchia's contribution, and (2) explore how a pneumatological focus reshapes contemporary inter-religious engagement.

---

<sup>8</sup> Geoffrey William Hugo Lampe, *God as Spirit* (Clarendon Press, 1977).

<sup>9</sup> Karl Rahner, *Foundations of Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Idea of Christianity* (Seabury Press, 1978); Karl Rahner, *Theological Investigations* (Helicon Press, 1971).

<sup>10</sup> Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (Fortress Press, 2001).

<sup>11</sup> Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (InterVarsity Press, 2022).

<sup>12</sup> Roger Haight, "The Case for Spirit Christology," *Theological Studies* 53, no. 2 (1992): 257-87.

<sup>13</sup> Ralph Del Colle, *Christ and the Spirit: Spirit-Christology in Trinitarian Perspective* (Oxford University Press, 1994).

<sup>14</sup> Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religion* (Wipf and Stock, 2014).

### Reading Macchia's Chapter through the Pneumatological Lens

Following on from Wolfhart Pannenberg's proposal of a "Christology from below,"<sup>15</sup> Macchia goes beyond the Resurrection to Pentecost as the key starting point for the Spirit Christology. He argues that Luke's narrative arc of the messianic fulfilment does not end at the Resurrection but with the risen and exalted Christ, where he is declared to be the *Messiah* and *Lord*. From this exalted position, Christ imparts the Spirit on behalf of the Father (Acts 2:32-36).

Key strengths of the chapter include:

1. Pentecost as Christological summit: By reserving the titles Lord and Messiah for the exalted, Spirit bearing, and Spirit pouring Jesus, Macchia rehabilitates Acts 2 as the climactic event of the Messiah's salvation history.
2. Biblical coherence: The chapter is solidly based on Luke-Acts and Pauline texts that portray Jesus's life beginning with his conception; proceeding to his ministry as the Spirit anointed; and culminating in his death, resurrection, and exaltation all as Spirit-driven.
3. A holistic soteriology: Deliverance of all creation from its bondage to decay (Gk., *phthora*) and forgiveness of sins coalesces in the Spirit's life-giving power.
4. The unique Spirit: The Christological criteria for the Spirit's work that sets apart the work of the Holy Spirit as the Spirit of Christ which stands apart from the spirits of the world.
5. Missional dynamism: The same Spirit who empowered Jesus to cross boundaries empowers the church for witness. The outpoured Spirit signals a border-crossing reign that embraces Gentile households (Acts 10) and resonates with Asian visions of a plural human family under God.
6. Openness to plurality: A pneumatological horizon legitimates respectful engagement with "the Spirit's seeds" in other faiths.

The following few critical observations provide leads to further potential for the Pentecostal Spirit Christology:

1. While Macchia resists Adoptionism by affirming pre-existent sonship, his language of Jesus being "*made* Lord and Messiah" needs tighter integration with the Nicene *homoousias* to avoid misunderstanding.
2. Macchia foregrounds prophetic empowerment but says less about the Spirit's sanctifying work; a fuller account would connect Pentecost to ethical transformation.
3. The interfaith engagement potential is implicit yet underdeveloped: if the exalted Christ now works *by the Spirit*, how does this inform and shape Christian encounters with non-Christian believers of the Spirit?

---

<sup>15</sup> Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Jesus: God and Man* (Westminster Press, 1968), 108, 140-49.

## Current Debates and Developments

Pentecostal scholars like Amos Yong<sup>16</sup> and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen<sup>17</sup> have proposed a “pneumatological theology of religions” in which the Spirit’s universal activity opens space for mutual learning. While critics warn that bracketing Christological particularity risks relativism, recent retrievals of classical voices such as Edward Irving, John Owen, Jonathan Edwards, etc. show that Spirit Christology can enrich orthodoxy without discarding Chalcedon.

It has been claimed by those who promote a theology of the third article that this, in some way, could be a more fruitful theological basis for reflection and engagement with the pluralistic world. Amos Yong, for example, writes, “Spirit Christology is a fully biblical but marginalised theological perspective that can speak to, and needs to be reappropriated for, our time.”<sup>18</sup> Similarly, Roman Catholic theologian Philip Rosato writes that Spirit Christology “might well allow Christian theologians to present Jesus Christ in a way more understandable to contemporary secular culture and also more appropriate to the current spiritual and pastoral needs in the Christian community.”<sup>19</sup>

### *Spirit Christology and Interfaith Engagement*

The Vatican’s *Dialogue and Proclamation* sees dialogue as “collaboration with the Spirit of the Risen Lord who is universally present and active.”<sup>20</sup> Similarly, Asian ecumenical documents speak of cultivating a “culture of dialogue that is open and inclusive through the Spirit.”<sup>21</sup>

Roman Catholic theologian Peter Phan suggests four key stages that can be mapped progressively, while integrating Spirit-led discernment.<sup>22</sup> Phan suggests

<sup>16</sup> Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*; Amos Yong, “The Holy Spirit and the World Religions: On the Christian Discernment of Spirit(s) ‘After’ Buddhism,” *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 24 (2004): 191-207.

<sup>17</sup> Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen and Amos Yong, *Toward a Pneumatological Theology: Pentecostal and Ecumenical Perspectives on Ecclesiology, Soteriology, and Theology of Mission* (University Press of America, 2002).

<sup>18</sup> Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Baker Academic, 2005), 86.

<sup>19</sup> Philip Rosato, “Spirit Christology: Ambiguity and Promise,” *Theological Studies* 38 (1977): 423-49.

<sup>20</sup> Pontifical Council for Inter-Religious Dialogue, “Reflection and Orientations on Interreligious Dialogue and the Proclamation of the Gospel of Jesus Christ,” Vatican, accessed January 15, 2026, [https://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/interelg/documents/rc\\_pc\\_interelg\\_doc\\_19051991\\_dialogue-and-proclamatio\\_en.html](https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/interelg/documents/rc_pc_interelg_doc_19051991_dialogue-and-proclamatio_en.html).

<sup>21</sup> William LaRousse, “Asian Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of *Nostra Aetate*, Bishops’ Institute for Religious Affairs (BIRA VI) Dialogue with Religions in Asia and Interreligious Marriage,” FABC Office of Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs (OEIA) Redemptorist Center, Pattaya, Thailand, November 17-19, 2015, <https://fabc.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/FABC-Papers-153.pdf>.

<sup>22</sup> Peter C. Phan, *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue* (Orbis Books, 2008). The four stages, namely, the Preparation Stage, Dialogue of Life Stage, Dialogue of Action Stage, and Dialogue of Experience Stage, where the participants build relationships through shared life and invoke the Holy Spirit’s

that the divine Spirit serves as the foundation for a theology of religions, discernible in various religio-cultural traditions, providing a basis for interfaith connection “from below,” through shared human and spiritual experiences.

Indian theologians Stanley J. Samartha<sup>23</sup> and M. M. Thomas<sup>24</sup> link the Spirit’s universal outreach to concrete dialogue with neighbours of other faiths and ideologies. Samartha, although he has not attempted a fuller view of the work of the Spirit in other religions, appeals for a more expanded understanding of the Spirit beyond the life of the individual believer and the Christian community.<sup>25</sup> He cites that liberation theologians have been willing to recognise the presence of the Spirit in secular movements and societies and questions why such reluctance exists to identify the presence of the Holy Spirit in non-Christian religious societies.<sup>26</sup> M. M. Thomas draws attention to “the need to consider afresh the question of the presence and work of the Spirit of God outside the church.”<sup>27</sup>

### *Challenges and Safeguards*

While the Pentecostal Spirit Christology encourages positive missional engagement, we need to raise certain cautions in terms of its implications for doctrinal integrity:

1. *Risk of Functional Unitarianism:* Over-emphasis on Spirit presence can empty proclamation of the specific scandal of the Incarnation and the Cross.
2. *Trinitarian Integrity:* Any appeal to the Spirit in other religions must remain tethered to the triune economy so that pneumatology does not eclipse Christology.
3. *Criteria for Discernment:* Yong highlights the need for communal, cross-bearing tests that differentiate the Spirit of Christ from conflicting “spirits.”<sup>28</sup>

---

presence, seeking genuine encounter in mutual respect and discernment and ultimately leading to refined engagement in Christology and interfaith witness.

<sup>23</sup> See Stanley J. Samartha, “The Holy Spirit and People of Various Faiths, Cultures, and Ideologies” and “Courage for Dialogue: An Interpretation of the Nairobi Debate,” in *Courage for Dialogue: Ecumenical Issues in Inter-Religious Relationships* (WCC, 1981), 75-88.

<sup>24</sup> M. M. Thomas, *The Church’s Mission and Post-Modern Humanism: A Collection of Essays and Talks, 1992-1996* (Jointly published by Christava Sahitya Samithi and Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1996).

<sup>25</sup> Samartha, “Holy Spirit,” 1981.

<sup>26</sup> Stanley J. Samartha, “The Holy Spirit and People of Other Faiths,” *The Ecumenical Review* 42, nos. 3-4 (July-October 1990): 250-63.

<sup>27</sup> M. M. Thomas, “The Holy Spirit and the Spirituality for Political Struggles,” *The Ecumenical Review* 42, nos. 3-4 (July-October 1990): 216-24.

<sup>28</sup> Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirits: A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions* (Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

### *Opportunities for Practice*

1. *Liturgical Formation*: Integrating Pentecost themes throughout the year cultivates awareness that mission and dialogue are Spirit-dependent.
2. *Interfaith Spiritualities*: Joint fasting, silence, and lament allow participants to sense the Spirit's gentle movements beyond doctrinal debate.
3. *Prophetic Solidarity*: Shared advocacy on climate justice, migration, and poverty becomes a site where the Spirit manifests relational communion across faith lines.

### **Conclusion**

Frank D. Macchia's chapter persuasively re-centres Pentecost within Christology, showing that Jesus's identity as Lord and Messiah is inseparable from his role as Spirit Baptiser. His approach to a Pentecostal Spirit Christology not only deepens biblical coherence but also furnishes a theological grammar for inter-religious engagement in a religiously plural world. When Christians meet neighbours of other faiths, they can do so with confidence that the same Spirit who raised Jesus animates all genuine quests for truth, while still confessing that the crucified and risen Christ is the definitive giver of that Spirit. Holding together Pentecostal vitality with classical dogma and dialogical openness remains the unfinished – but Spirit-empowered – task before the global church today.

### **Bibliography**

- Basil of Caesarea. *On the Holy Spirit 16.38*. In *Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers*. Second Series. Vol. 8, edited by Philip Schaff and Henry Wace. Hendrickson, Repr. 1994.
- Bobrinsky, Boris. "The Holy Spirit – in the Bible and the Church." *The Ecumenical Review* 41, no. 3 (1989): 357-62.
- Bobrinsky, Boris. "The Indwelling of the Spirit in Christ: 'Pneumatic Christology' in the Cappadocian Fathers." *St Vladimir's Theological Quarterly* 28, no. 1 (1984): 49-65.
- Evdokimov, Paul. *L'Esprit Saint Dans La Tradition Orthodoxe*. 1969. Reprint, Cerf, 1977.
- Haight, Roger. "The Case for Spirit Christology." *Theological Studies* 53, no. 2 (1992): 257-87.
- Irenaeus of Lyons. *Demonstration of the Apostolic Preaching* 7.  
[https://www.ccel.org/ccel/irenaeus/demonstr.preaching\\_the\\_demonstration\\_of\\_the\\_apostolic\\_preaching.html#fna\\_preaching\\_the\\_demonstration\\_of\\_the\\_apostolic\\_preaching-p7.4](https://www.ccel.org/ccel/irenaeus/demonstr.preaching_the_demonstration_of_the_apostolic_preaching.html#fna_preaching_the_demonstration_of_the_apostolic_preaching-p7.4).
- Irenaeus of Lyons. *Against Heresies*, Book 3, Chapter 17, Section 2.  
[https://ccel.org/ccel/irenaeus/against\\_heresies\\_iii/anf01.ix.iv.xviii.html](https://ccel.org/ccel/irenaeus/against_heresies_iii/anf01.ix.iv.xviii.html).
- Lampe, Geoffrey William Hugo. *God as Spirit*. Clarendon Press, 1977.
- Lossky, Vladimir. *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*. St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1976.

- Manohar, Christina. "Spirit Christology: An Indian Christian Perspective." PhD diss., University of Gloucestershire, 2007.
- Mühlen, Heribert. *A Charismatic Theology: Initiation in the Spirit*. Burns & Oates, 1978.
- Nel, Marius. "Spirit Christology: A Pentecostal Contribution to the Trinitarian Discourse." *Scriptura* 119, no. 1 (2020): 1-19. <https://doi.org/10.7833/119-1-1808>.
- Nēsīōtēs, Nikos A. *Theology as Doxology and Dialogue: The Essential Writings of Nikos Nissiotis*. Bloomsbury Academic, 2019.
- Pannenberg, Wolfhart. *Jesus: God and Man*. Westminster Press, 1968.
- Peppiatt, Lucy. "Spirit Christology and Mission." PhD diss., University of Otago, 2010.
- Phan, Peter C. *Being Religious Interreligiously: Asian Perspectives on Interfaith Dialogue*. Orbis Books, 2008.  
<http://archive.org/details/beingreligiousin0000phan>.
- Pinnock, Clark H. *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit*. InterVarsity Press, 2022.
- Rosato, Philip. "Spirit Christology: Ambiguity and Promise." *Theological Studies* 38 (1977) 423-49.
- Samartha, Stanley J. "The Holy Spirit and People of Various Faiths, Cultures, and Ideologies" and "Courage for Dialogue: An Interpretation of the Nairobi Debate." In *Courage for Dialogue: Ecumenical Issues in Inter-Religious Relationships*. WCC, 1981.
- Samartha, Stanley J. "The Holy Spirit and People of Other Faiths." *The Ecumenical Review* 42, nos. 3-4 (July-October 1990): 250-63.
- Thomas, M. M. *The Church's Mission and Post-Modern Humanism: A Collection of Essays and Talks, 1992-1996*. Christava Sahitya Samithi and Indian Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1996.
- Thomas, M. M. "The Holy Spirit and the Spirituality for Political Struggles." *The Ecumenical Review* 42, nos. 3-4 (July-October 1990): 216-24.
- Yong, Amos. "The Holy Spirit and the World Religions: On the Christian Discernment of Spirit(s) 'After' Buddhism." *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 24 (2004): 191-207.
- Yong, Amos. *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology*. Baker Academic, 2005.