

## SPIRIT CHRISTOLOGY: A PENTECOSTAL CONTRIBUTION TO THE TRINITARIAN DISCOURSE

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### Abstract

*In reply to Jesus' question to his disciples, "Who do you say I am?", the early church used the biblical symbol of God as Spirit to explain how God is present and active in Jesus and the contents of Jesus' divinity. By the second century, the Apologists responded to christological controversies such as adoptionism, monarchianism, docetism and modalism, as well as the introduction of the gospel to a Greek-speaking audience that required the utilisation of hellenistic philosophical terms. As part of their contextual hermeneutical endeavour, they introduced Logos Christology, with its focus on Jesus as the word (Logos) of God incarnate, who also speaks the word of God, emphasising his divinity to the neglect or diminishment of his humanity. It is argued that Western Christology can benefit from the supplement of Spirit Christology, which is evaluated at the hand of certain criteria useful in evaluating a valid Christology. Because of the influence of its growth and its emphasis on the Spirit, especially in the global South, Pentecostalism is ideally situated to introduce Spirit Christology as a productive systematic christological addition to the christological discourse. The essence of pentecostal hermeneutic, defined as the hermeneutic in which the Holy Spirit is involved in the interpretation of Scripture, lies in its pneumatocentric emphasis. It emphasises the fundamental need for an existential relationship with Christ that represents the experience of the presence of God through the Spirit that is christologically and pneumatologically inscribed. It views the three persons of the Trinity within the context of the economy of salvation to explain their inter-trinitarian relationships. It requires that the filioque view be rejected because it presupposes that the Father-Son relationship is a primary relationship of origin and subordinates the Spirit to the Son, which cannot be accepted. Lastly Pentecostalism's general view of God falling outside the human frame of reference is illustrated by their practice of speaking in tongues. Spirit Christology supplements the use of intellectual reason with the exercise of discursive and intuitive reason to form a conception of the hidden super-essential Godhead of the Bible.<sup>1</sup>*

**Keywords:** Logos Christology; Spirit Christology; *homoousios*, Chalcedonian Christology; Two natures

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## **Introduction**

Logos Christology, which served the Western church and theology for the past two millennia, can benefit by being complemented by Spirit Christology, a productive systematic christological model. Pentecostalism is in the ideal position, with its emphasis on the Spirit and its influence due to its phenomenal growth in the global South (Mofokeng & Madise 2019:2), to present its unique contribution of spirituality in the form of Spirit Christology to the church.<sup>2</sup>

To understand Spirit Christology and Logos Christology, the christological controversies that characterised the first four centuries of the church's existence should be kept in mind. The earliest church utilised Spirit Christology to explain the uniqueness of Jesus in terms of the Spirit anointing him, an emphasis that Eastern Orthodoxy maintained through the centuries. During the second century, the young church developed a Logos Christianity in response to the need to contextualise patristic theology to reach a Greek-speaking audience in terms of Greco-Roman philosophical categories and theologies (Nürnberg 2018:6; Kärkkäinen 2017:38) and the many different christological controversies, leading also to the development of classical theism (Kärkkäinen 2017:4). At Nicaea and Chalcedon in the fourth and fifth centuries, Logos Christology was officially defined as a church doctrine.

Some criteria, to which any christology should adhere in order to be valid, are developed before Spirit Christology is introduced and evaluated. The reintroduction in the nineteenth century of Spirit Christology to the modern church is discussed in terms of two trends: a supplanting of Chalcedonian Christology with an alternative Spirit Christology (that does not serve the needs of Pentecostalism) and a reworking and enriching of Logos Christology with a vital Spirit Christology that asserts that the anointing with the Spirit was conditional for Jesus to realise his messianic work. In Jesus' life, the Spirit played an essential role. Spirit Christology illustrates the interdependence between Christology and pneumatology. In the final section, a pentecostal perspective on Spirit Christology is presented in terms of some contributions it can make to the christological discourse in the contemporary church.

## **Word Christology**

Maimela (1986:261) asserts that to be Christian theology worth the name, African Christianity must be based christologically, that is, on what has happened to and with Jesus Christ, through whom God's redemptive activity has been revealed to the world. Kalu (2008:81) adds that African Christianity cannot be understood except in terms of the core of its lived faith, which is its theo-christological theology. This emphasises the importance of christology in all theological endeavours. Word or Logos christology can be defined in terms of its focus on Jesus as the word (Logos) of God incarnate that also speaks (or reveals) the word of God (Gaybba 1994:6). The emphasis is on the divinity of Christ, and the danger is that it might neglect or diminish his humanity, especially his human personhood (Schoonenberg 1977:361). A focus on the incarnation as its point of departure in discerning Christ's identity runs the risk of assuming that Christ's divine

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<sup>2</sup> It is acknowledged that Christology cannot be diverted to Word and Spirit Christology because the subject is much more complicated. However, for the sake of the length of the article, it is necessary to focus on these two christological models without limiting the wider discussion that includes high and low Christology, ontological, functional, and soteriological Christology, etc.

and human natures were parallel realities, abstract from each other but joined together by divine initiative (Macchia 2018:13). To understand Word Christology and its origins and influence, it is necessary to refer to the long and arduous journey in the early church to finally reach consensus amidst christological controversies that reflected Jesus' question to the disciples, "Who do people say I am?" (Mark 8:27).

The pre-Chalcedonian debate about the two natures of Christ lingered in the early church for a long time, starting in the late first and early second centuries with the Ebionites, a Jewish group, who held to the validity of Mosaic Law for Christians and argued that God adopted Jesus at his baptism. The implication is that Jesus did not exist before his incarnation, and he was not the product of a virginal conception (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.26.1–2, 5.1.3; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical history* 3.27.2). Cerinthus from Asia Minor held a similar view, denying the virgin birth, teaching that Jesus was a wise human and that he was empowered with the spirit of Christ that he received during his baptism by John the Baptist (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 1.26.1; Hippolytus of Rome, *Refutation of all heresies* 7.21; Eusebius, *Ecclesiastical history* 3.28–35; 7.25.3). It seems that his theology linked to some aspects of a Gnostic cosmology in which the world was made by a lesser being, while Jesus introduced and revealed a supreme god that was previously unknown, even to Jews.

The early church was also challenged by Docetism, another emphasis in the christological controversies that did not accept Christ's full humanity. See, for example, the warning in 1 John 4:1–3 against those who teach that Jesus had not come in the flesh. In the same period, Ignatius of Antioch also addressed the error, warning the Ephesians to close their ears against those who do not speak truthfully about Jesus (*Ign. Eph.* 6.2) and affirming that Jesus was "both flesh and spirit, born and unborn, God in man, true life in death, both from Mary and from God, first subject to suffering then beyond it" (*Ign. Eph.* 7.2).

Gnosticism was related to Platonic philosophy and influenced Jewish and Christian thinking, especially since the second century CE. Some Gnostic texts claimed to have been written by apostles; the best-known is the Gospel of Thomas. It consisted of a Gnostic cosmogony shrouded in biblical language and denied the goodness of the created order, emphasising spiritual salvation apart from embodied existence. Christ as saviour brought knowledge (*gnosis*) to a select few that he chose, limiting salvation to them. Valentinus and Marcion contrasted the evil, violent and vindictive God of the Old Testament with the loving god of the New Testament who sent Jesus to demonstrate his love and peace. Marcion dismissed the Old Testament from his Bible and kept only parts of the New Testament that he considered free from the influence of Jewish theology. Irenaeus (130–202 CE) and Tertullian (an African theologian; 155–240 CE) defended biblical Christology against Marcion's errors. Irenaeus (*Against Heresies* 3.1.1) argued that the revelation in the Old and New Testament is foundational in understanding the work of God as trustworthy because the authors received their knowledge through the Holy Spirit. "All Scripture, which has been given to us by God, shall be found to be perfectly consistent ... and through the many diversified utterances (of Scripture) there shall be heard one harmonious melody in us, praising in hymns the God who created all things" (Irenaeus, *Against Heresies* 3.5.1). The Gnostics distinguished between Christ as a heavenly being and Jesus as an earthly man, in contrast to Tertullian (*Against*

Marcion 4.1), who emphasised that Jesus Christ is the fulfilment of the prophecies about the Messiah in the Old Testament.

At the turn of the second and third centuries, the twin errors of modalism and adoptionism threatened the church. Both accepted the oneness of God or monarchianism, which refers to “sole sovereignty” and explicitly denies God as three persons coexisting consubstantially as one in being to defend God’s supremacy. Adoptionism taught that God adopted Jesus as God’s Son at his baptism. Modalism taught that the Father, Son, and Spirit referred to ways, modes of acting or names and not distinct persons (Kärkkäinen 2018:119). In trying to maintain God’s oneness and Christ’s divinity, monarchianism denied that the Father, Son and Spirit were unique persons (see Tertullian, *Against Praxeas*, 1 for a defence against these views).<sup>3</sup> Tertullian (*Against Praxeas*, 2), in response, confirmed that the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are three persons (*personae*), “not in condition, but in degree, not in substance, but in form, not in power, but in aspect; yet of one substance, and one condition, and of one power”.

The lingering christological controversies burst into the open in the fourth century CE in the controversy between Arius and Athanasius, an African theologian (Quayesi-Amakye 2016:292). Arius (256–336 CE) was a presbyter in Alexandria who taught that the Son was created by God. He did not pre-exist as the co-equal eternal Son of God and was not ontologically equal to the Father. The Council of Nicaea (325 CE), called by emperor Constantine (272–337 CE) to address Arianism, declared belief in “one Lord, Jesus Christ, the Son of God, begotten of the Father, the only-begotten, that is, of the essence of the Father, God from God, Light from Light, true God from true God, begotten, not made, of the same being as the Father” (<https://www.fourthcentury.com/urkunde-24/> Accessed 20 June 2020).<sup>4</sup> It employed the term *homoousios* (“same substance”) to describe the relationship of essence between Son and Father, a term not found in Scripture. At the end of the christological discussions in the early church, the Holy Spirit had become the *theos agraptos*, the God about whom no one writes, the “forgotten God” in Gregory of Nazianzus’ terms or the “Cinderella of theology” in Kärkkäinen’s (2018:7) words.

This was not the end of the controversies, and Apollinaris of Laodicea at the end of the fourth century taught that Christ became united with a body only, without having a human soul because the soul was replaced with the divine Word, or *logos*. The Council of Constantinople (381 CE), the second ecumenical council, denounced Apollinaris and reaffirmed Nicaea’s formulations (<https://www.britannica.com/event/First-Council-of-Constantinople-381> Accessed 20 June 2020). Constantinople emphasises that a middle way between the full divinity and the full humanity of Christ should be excluded, as this would imply that Christ was either a half-god or a super-man [Nürnberg 2017:4]). In the early fifth century, Nestorius of Constantinople (386–450 CE) taught that Mary was not *theotokos* (“God-bearer”) because the Creator could not be born, suffer or die. Jesus was actually two distinct persons, and his humanity and divinity operated independently,

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<sup>3</sup> There are two subcategories of monarchianism. Dynamic monarchianism tried to preserve God’s sole sovereignty by promoting the idea that God was dynamically present in Jesus, making Jesus higher than any other human. Modalistic monarchianism defended God’s supremacy by seeing the three persons of the Trinity as mere modes or names of the same God (Kärkkäinen 2017:46-47).

<sup>4</sup> The Council of Nicaea confusingly had not yet produced the creed which is known by its name. It produced an important “statement”, on which the latter creed is based (Kärkkäinen 2018:48).

at one time the one and at other times the other one working (for a defence, see Cyril of Alexandria, *Fourth Letter of Cyril to Nestorius*). The Council of Ephesus (431 CE) denounced Nestorianism as heretical.

Eutychus of Constantinople in the early fifth century combined the two natures of Christ into one single nature (monophysitism), with both natures existing before the incarnation and with one nature since the birth of Christ. His human nature was a mere appearance, and this made him different from other humans. In reaction, the Council of Chalcedon (451 CE) affirmed the two natures of Christ (Greek *-henophysitism* or *miaphysitism*), “the same perfect in divinity and perfect in humanity, the same truly God and truly man ... consubstantial with the Father as regards his divinity, and the same consubstantial with us as regards his humanity; like us in all respects except for sin” ([http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0451-0451,\\_Concilium\\_Chalcedonense,\\_Documenta\\_Omnia,\\_EN.pdf](http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0451-0451,_Concilium_Chalcedonense,_Documenta_Omnia,_EN.pdf) Accessed 20 June 2020).<sup>5</sup> It also affirmed Mary as “the virgin God-bearer (*theotokos*)” (“In the one person of Christ, a divine and a human nature subsist, each in its full integrity, not to be confused with each other, nor separated from each other” [Nürnberg 2018:8]).

Today, in most Western churches, Logos Christianity stands at the centre, with Spirit Christology playing only a minor role as a result of what has happened since the second century.<sup>6</sup> In the early church, Spirit Christology was still prominent, with the *Shepherd* of Hermas (Sim V, 5:2; Sim IX, 1:1) identifying the Spirit with the Son of God, an idea found also in the Essene community, in Theophilus of Antioch and Irenaeus (Grillmeier 1975:54-56), in psilanthropic Ebionite Christology (Del Colle 1993:97) and the Syrian church celebrating the eucharist with the words, “The body of Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit, for the healing of soul and body” (Schoonenberg 1977:354). Spirit Christology served as a retrospective tool by which early Christians could comprehend the meaning of the horrific death of Jesus of Nazareth, as well as of the prior politico-religious condemnation of him after his brief public manifestation, by means of the facilitation by the collaborative and coextensive mandate of the Spirit (Rosato 2006:169-170). In the opinion of Hook (1968:48), Spirit Christology served as a natural explanation in Palestinian circles to throw light on what seemed mysterious about Jesus, but (as stated above) the young church’s exposure to the Gentile world created the need for a category of thought which would effectively explain Jesus to Greek-speaking people. The Logos doctrine in the prologue of the Fourth Gospel (John 1:1-3) provided for this need. Due to the influence of the Apologists that consisted of second-century Christian thinkers who wanted to offer a reasonable defence for the Christian faith vis-à-vis contemporary culture and philosophy (Kärkkäinen 2017:41), the Logos (incarnation) Christology, a Christology from above, became predominant and eventually the only Christology of traditional churches (Macchia 2018:13). Arianism, Nestorianism and Monophysitism arose within Logos Christology and was rejected.

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<sup>5</sup> The Council accepted the formula of Cyrillus of Alexandria: the unity of the two natures according to *hypostasis* (Van der Kamp 2019:110).

<sup>6</sup> The sixteenth-century Reformers did not restore the pneumatological emphasis that the Roman Catholic Church had lost. The only exception is John Calvin in his hermeneutical discussion of the role of the Spirit in the interpretation of the Bible, especially in preaching. See article to be published in HTS Theological Studies in 2021, “Comparison between the respective views of John Calvin and classical pentecostals on the role of the Holy Spirit in reading the Bible”.

For Logos Christology, the hypostatic union of the Logos and the human reality of Jesus was so important that Jesus' relation to the Father, let alone to the Holy Spirit, was not considered adequately. The emphasis was on the incarnation, which was in Jesus' conception in the womb. Spirit Christology was moved to the margins by diminishing interest in Jesus' baptism by elevating the incarnation, ignoring Luke and Matthew's explicit ascription of his conception to the Spirit.<sup>7</sup> The "anointing with the Spirit" was moved from his baptism to his conception in the womb, in contrast to what the Synoptic Gospels clearly state. Now it was not the Spirit, but the Logos who became the anointing one. The Lukan "one who is anointed with the Spirit" was now interpreted as the Johannine Logos incarnate, and the incarnation was interpreted as the personal or hypostatic unity between Logos and humanity. This union led to what Scholasticism calls the "substantial sanctification" of Jesus. The working of the Spirit was accidental, with sanctification (also of believers) conceived as indistinctly the work of the Trinity and only appropriated to the Spirit (Schoonenberg 1977:355).

In conclusion, in Logos Christology, the anointing was extended to the conception of Jesus as a human being and ascribed to the Logos, not the Spirit. In the process, the Spirit's influence on Jesus became merely accidental in comparison to that of the Logos. The influence of the Spirit was not considered to be a condition for Jesus' ministry. In this way, Logos Christology denied the testimony of the New Testament about the function and essence of the Spirit.

### Criteria for Christology

What requirements are to be met before the Christian church can consider a Christology as orthodox, showing similarity with the Christ traditions found in the New Testament? Habets (2003:200-202) suggests six criteria for such a Christology that in terms of the discussion here need to apply for a Spirit Christology to qualify alongside a Logos Christology. The first criterion is the most important, that it must be faithful to the biblical testimony and specifically the language used about Jesus (Maimela 1991:12). Pentecostalism shares with Protestantism the principle that the Bible is normative for the teaching and practice of Christians, although the various traditions interpret the normativity in different terms.<sup>8</sup> This criterion is the motivation for introducing Spirit Christology as a complement of Logos Christianity, because the pneumatological perspectives found in Paul, Luke and John are neglected by traditional christological reflections (Hook 1968:59; Schoonenberg 1977:352).<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> In Luke's Gospel, Christology itself begins with pneumatology. Jesus is conceived by the Spirit, implying a fundamental pneumatological basis (Stephenson 2020:81).

<sup>8</sup> It should also be acknowledged that, within each tradition, there is also a wide diversity of opinion on the interpretation of many biblical passages. The various traditions identified within the Bible by theologians, such as the two creation narratives found in Gen 1-3, the priestly and Deuteronomist traditions underlying Lev-2 Ki and the different Gospel traditions that leave room for Q do not find much room in traditional pentecostal theology with its more conservative hermeneutic. In their discussion of Spirit Christology, pentecostal contributions do not refer to these historical developments that led to the writing of the Bible.

<sup>9</sup> Not all agree that Logos Christology and Spirit Christology should complement each other. Bryant (2014:516) argues that such supposed complementing consists of "cherry-picking between two distinct and seemingly antithetical christological models to form their own theological postulates". He thinks that Spirit Christology should function as a model on its own merits by demonstrating how the essential aspects of Logos Christianity and Spirit Christology coalesce. The implication is that a Spirit christological model is not subordinated to Logos Christology.

The second criterion, is the question that a christological suggestion needs to be able to answer, whether it adequately presents both Christ's humanity and divinity. Adoptionism as well as docetism should be avoided in both theological formulation and practical application because of its confusion regarding the humanity-divinity issue. Logos Christology allows for Christ's divinity and humanity to co-exist in one person; it needs to be established whether Spirit Christology would pass the test.

The third criterion inquires whether the orientation of a christological method diminishes either of Christ's two natures. While Logos Christology views Jesus as "enfleshed God" (*theos sarkotheis*), Spirit Christology with its emphasis on Jesus' infilling with the Spirit may result in Jesus being represented as merely an inspired man in whom God is present (*anthropos theophoros*), something short of divinity.

A fourth criterion asks about the christological model's tenability to conceive of the unity of divine and human in Jesus, resulting in coherency with other doctrines confessed by the church. As the center of Christian faith, the Jesus of Christology should be coherent and intelligible to the church.

the fifth criterion asks for christological agreement with the ecumenical confessions as defined by the major councils that made decisions about Christology and whose decisions achieved universal acceptance by the church. Nicaea and Chalcedon accepted that Jesus is truly divine and truly human at the same time and that Jesus is consubstantial with God and humanity.

The sixth criterion requires that contemporary Christology should be able to respond to contemporary issues. It must be able to empower Christians to live authentic lives of faith because it is relevant and intelligible. Merely repeating the ancient symbols of the councils may imply that one ignores the different thought-world(s) that contemporary people inhabit.

## **Spirit Christology**

Since the nineteenth century, several theologians reacted against Logos Christology, but only a few suggested that Spirit Christology should be restored.<sup>10</sup> The purpose of Spirit Christology is to make Jesus more digestible to secular culture and more appropriate to the spiritual and pastoral needs of the faith community within the context of contextual hermeneutics (Rosato 1977:433). Spirit Christology refers to the explanation of how God is present and active in Jesus and the contents of Jesus' divinity by emphasising God in terms of Spirit rather than Logos (Haight 1992:257).

During the past two centuries, various proposals were made in terms of a Spirit Christology in reaction to the dominance of Logos Christology in classical Western Christianity. At the moment, these proposals are being revisited by various theologians with divergent emphases. Haight (1999:447) is of the opinion that it is the result of the challenges that classical patristic language started to pose to the church of the modern period that finds itself in a different thought-world (Haight 1999:447).

There are two distinct categories of proposals for a Spirit Christology. On the one hand, some want to replace and supplant Logos Christianity by new models, while, on

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<sup>10</sup> From the Catholic side: Del Colle (1994); Kasper (2011); Coffey (1999); from Pentecostal side: Studebaker (2012); Jenkins (2018). Unfortunately, there is little engagement in contemporary discourse about Spirit Christology from the global South.

the other hand, there are those who propose to complement Logos Christology with a Spirit Christology by reworking elements of scholastic theology (Schoonenberg 1977:356). The first set of proposals tends towards a post-trinitarian theology while the second supports traditional trinitarian orthodoxy, and, in both cases, the interest is motivated by the assumption that early Christianity utilised a Spirit Christology to refer to the work of the Spirit in Christ and the daily life of the church. It is suggested that a pentecostal Spirit Christology finds itself in the second tradition.

### ***Supplanting Logos Christology***

The model that proposes the replacement of Logos Christianity with a Spirit Christology is represented by authors from different traditions and various perspectives, although they share the same fundamental idea of the rejection of Chalcedonian Christology (authors include Irving [see Strachan 1973]; Sykes and Clayton 1972; Dunn 1975; 1977; 1980 and Lampe 1977). It is accepted that the early church exhibited a robust Spirit Christology, reflected in Eastern Orthodoxy, that traditionally had identified the “Spirit” with the divine element in the incarnation (Del Colle 1994:8-33). Several contemporary Roman Catholic and Protestant theologians prefer the same perspective and some of them, in an attempt to reconsider christological perspectives, go back to the interests of a pre-Chalcedonian period in order to define a non-Chalcedonian alternative to Logos Christology.

The rejection of Logos Christianity is illustrated by Haight’s (1992:257) definition of Spirit Christology as an explanation of how God is “present and active in Jesus”. With regard to Jesus’ divinity, he views God in terms of the biblical symbol of Spirit rather than Logos. Who Jesus is and what he did should be interpreted primarily in terms of a pneumatological orientation (Del Colle 1993:96). Hunter (1983a:127) describes Spirit Christology in terms of several characteristics: It consists of an orientation from below, implying that in ontological categories no distinction can be made between the Spirit and the risen Christ, and in the process, it rejects classical trinitarianism as the direct result of the influence of philosophy, particularly of Platonism and Neoplatonism, on theology (Brümmer 2005:18; see Nürnberger 2009:102). It rejects Chalcedon with its incarnational Christology, with several proponents also rejecting any real (or ideal) preexistence of Jesus because it implies that the risen Lord and the Spirit are seen as an ontological unity. For that reason, Lampe (1972:124) suggests that Jesus is not “adjectively” or “substantively” God; to his mind, Jesus is only “adverbially” God. God dwelt and worked in and through the human spirit of Jesus in such a way that in him, uniquely, the relationship for which all human beings were originally intended by their Creator was finally and fully realised (Lampe 1977:11). Lampe even eliminates the pre-existent Son as taught in the tradition. He refers to it as “mythical concepts” (Harris 2017:67). The Logos serves as a functional notion of God’s activity in the same way as Spirit, the angel of YHWH, and wisdom did in the Old Testament. The Spirit is identified with the Logos as the divine element in the person of Christ (Habets 2003:206). Traditional trinitarian language is ascribed to what is perceived as ecumenical councils’ capitulation to Greek philosophy, and the proposed terms in terms of “person” (*prosopon*, *hypostasis*, *persona*) and “essence” (*ousia*, *physis*, *substantia*) are rejected.

Berkhof (1965:24-25; see Kärkkäinen 2018:19) also equates an exact identity between Christ and the Spirit, thinking of the Spirit in strictly christocentric terms and



viewing the Pauline use of “in Christ” and “in the Spirit” as synonymous. The Spirit in modalistic terms, in his view, is the function of the risen Christ and not an autonomous substance. It is primarily the “vitality” of God, “God’s inspiring breath by which he grants life in creation and re-creation” (Berkhof 1965:14) and a predicate to both the substance “God” as well as the substance “Christ” (Berkhof 1965:28).

The problem with this perspective is that it denies orthodox trinitarianism in total. The Spirit becomes nothing more than a description of the activity and presence of God. If the Spirit is solely the saving presence of God in Jesus and the church, the incarnation consists of a mere human being inspired or anointed by the Spirit rather than a human nature joined with a pre-existing divine person (Son/Logos), implying adoptionism. Spirit Christology emphasises the relational unity between Jesus and God without any ontological corollary; for Jesus to be divine is to negate his humanity. And when the Spirit becomes the divine outreach that has taken on the form of Jesus, a form of modalism is implied. When the risen Christ and the Spirit are functionally identified with each other, the result is that any hypostatisation to either the Spirit or the Spirit and the Son is denied. The implication is that the Son is now experienced as Spirit, and the Spirit is defined as the active presence of God in the world (Dunn 1975:325-326). Such a Spirit Christology fails the essential criteria of Christology posed above.

### ***Reworking and enriching Logos Christology***

Proposals to complement Logos Christology with a Spirit Christology by reworking elements of scholastic theology started with patristic scholars like Denis Petau (1583-1652), Louis de Thomassin d’Eynac (1619-1695) and the Tübingen schools of the nineteenth century. Matthias Joseph Scheeben (1835-1888) and Heribert Mühlen (1927-2006) further stimulated interest in pneumatology. Several prominent theologians are currently working to recover the ancient paradigm of Spirit Christology, like H. Mühlen, D.M. Coffey, J. Moltmann, T.A. Smail, W. Kasper, P.J. Rosato, G.D. Badcock, N.S. Clark, K. McDonnell, J.J. O’Donnell, G.W. Hawthorne, M. Welker and R. Del Colle.<sup>11</sup> They preserve trinitarian distinctions and accept the classical understanding of the incarnation, guard against any modalism that negates the personhood of the second or third persons of the Godhead, and redescribe the relationship between the exalted Christ and the Spirit working in the present world. Their pneumatic Christology attempts a wholly theocentric and pneumatological Christology and a genuinely christocentric and theocentric pneumatology (Hunter 1983b:270) that sees the work of Christ as giving the fullness of the Spirit and abundant blessings from God to the church (Olwa 2016:179).<sup>12</sup>

For Spirit Christology, Jesus was “a man so totally possessed by the Spirit that the outcome of his life and ministry was a revelation of God” (Hodgson 1971:184). Logos is defined as the revelation of God in terms of Hebrews 1:2 that God has spoken in the last days through God’s Son. The inadequacy of traditional Logos Christology requires a reinterpretation of Jesus as a person in which God self is met. The Logos becomes the personalisation of Jesus’ humanity. The Spirit, on the other hand, sanctifies Jesus through the *charismata* (Badcock 1997:146). The assumption is the essentiality of the

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<sup>11</sup> For a comprehensive discussion of Spirit Christology from the patristic period to the rise of Pentecostalism, see Bryant (2014).

<sup>12</sup> See remark of Anderson (2016:320) that African Pentecostalism is essentially christocentric because of their pneumatic emphasis; the word of the Spirit is to reveal Christ.

Spirit in the life of Christ, creating in Jesus the graces essential for realising his messianic work and derived from the function of the Spirit. Christology thus becomes a function of an overarching pneumatology, emphasising the interdependence between Christology and pneumatology and leading Congar (1986:101) to refer to a “Pneumatized Christ”. Jesus came as bearer and mediator of the Spirit, revealing who God is. Logos Christology is a consequence of Spirit Christology, reversing the tradition (Kasper 1976:230-274).

Jesus is the Christ (“anointed one”, messiah) because of the anointing with the Spirit; the Spirit mediates the incarnation continually, divinising Jesus’ humanity because the Father anoints him with the Spirit (Coffey 1984:469). In this sense, the incarnation is the distinctive work of the Spirit rather than the result of the Logos determining the human life of Jesus directly (Habets 2003:214). God communicates directly with and through Jesus because he is filled by the Spirit. The Spirit is an empowering presence to Christ’s humanity that enables the human nature of Christ to be liberated from the effects of sin, and this results in the freedom to be obedient to the Father’s will (Harris 2017:11). The Spirit sanctifies and empowers him to reveal God obediently and comprehensively. Because the Spirit filled Jesus at conception, his humanity lost its natural propensity to sin. Jesus as Spirit-filled man stood in continuity with the prophets of the Old Testament; what distinguished him from the prophets was “the infinite excellency of his person above theirs” as the everlasting Son (Owen 1968:31).

That Jesus is divine is clear from his relationship with the Father in or by the Spirit. The *locus* of Jesus’ divinity was not in the possession of a divine nature but in his relationship as Son to the Father, as mediated by the Spirit (Schwöbel 1995:140-141). It was the Spirit that bore witness that Jesus was the Son of God and Messiah, that his miracles were divine in origin and that his death was for the propitiation of sin. Spirit Christology attempts to reclaim the complete humanity of Jesus without depreciating his divinity, fulfilling an important criterion for a valid Christology.

Logos Christology and Spirit Christology can then also be viewed as complementary, as Colin Brown (1996:67-86) suggests. While the focus of Logos Christology is on Jesus as the word of the incarnate God, Spirit Christology emphasises his anointing as the Messiah with the Spirit.

In terms of the criteria developed to evaluate a valid Christology, Spirit Christology in the sense of a reworking and enrichment of Logos Christology fulfils all the requirements. It is faithful to the biblical testimony; it adequately presents both Christ’s humanity and divinity without diminishing either of Christ’s two natures; it is coherent with other doctrines confessed by the church and specifically the new interest in pneumatological perspectives in the contemporary church; and it responds to contemporary issues, especially in Africa (see next point).

### **Contribution of pentecostal spirituality to Christology<sup>13</sup>**

The Bible provides a strong warrant for a Spirit Christology; there is also a theological warrant, found in the neglect of the Spirit in systematic theology (Habets 2003:202-203).

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<sup>13</sup> Theology traditionally played a subordinate role in pentecostal thought and it is still the case today in many instances. The anti-intellectualist tradition among pentecostals is based on their emphasis that believers should live in a developing relationship with God marked by continuity of encounters with the Spirit, and that reflection on doctrine only follows experience. For that reason, there is no room for repetition of credo’s in

In Africa, with its emphasis in African traditional religions on spirit-possession and the openness that the concept created for pentecostal theology, the hunger for Spirit-talk requires that Christology be supplemented and enriched with such a pneumatological perspective (Murimi 2016:113). The prevailing Logos model of dogmatic Christology is not adequate to the needs of African Christians, as it does not meet the last criterion for a valid Christology mentioned above (Rosato 2006:170). Imported Western “orthodoxy”, with its thin spiritual experiences and power, lacks the vitality of a pneumatology needed by Africans (Kärkkäinen 2018:151).<sup>14</sup> What is needed is the incorporation of a comprehensive Spirit Christology into contemporary theology, and it is submitted that Pentecostalism is uniquely situated to emphasise such a perspective. The identity of Jesus should be revisited from the perspective and in terms of the presence and operation of the Spirit in him (Maimela 1982:61), and Jesus’ power over the world of spirits and his connectedness to the Holy Spirit should be emphasised to meet Africa’s pneumatic expectations with its emphasis on the spirit (Goergen 2001:6). Pentecostals are inclined to the work of the Holy Spirit in almost everything they do (Kgatle & Mofokeng 2019:2).

Pentecostal theology is more than evangelical theology with some extra emphasis on particular pentecostal themes, as early pentecostal scholars suggested and applied in their systematic theologies (e.g., in Jeffreys 1930; Brewster 1976; Williams 1953; Duffield and Van Cleave 1983; Menzies and Horton 1993; Horton 1994). What these systematic theologies lacked was a major overarching axiom, theme and methodology in service of their ethos because pentecostal theology and hermeneutic represent a paradigm shift with a different point of departure and destination.

The condition for being pentecostal is to have experienced the power of God through the Spirit (Kgatle & Mofokeng 2019:2). Pentecostals’ unashamed emphasis in their theology on the significance of the Spirit that emerges out of their experience of God’s presence and activity in their world serves as point of departure in pentecostal participation in christological discourse. The Spirit of God is a symbol of the presence and agency of God in the world that inhabits Christians, but also the natural world as a present and active force (Yong 2010:175). Del Colle (1993:92-93) argues that “Spirit Christology is the most productive systematic christological model” that explicates the unique contribution of pentecostal spirituality to the church. It refers to the ministry and mission of the person Jesus from the perspective of the close interrelationship between Jesus as Son and Jesus as Spirit. In other words, the emphasis is on Jesus as the one who stands in a unique relationship to God and who is filled with the Spirit.

Life transformation for the believer and an experience of Christ’s presence as a result of Christ’s death and exaltation as *kyrios* (Lord) is marked by an experiential effusion of the Spirit as a gift and empowerment leading to an anointed life, a term emphasised by Pentecostals. In pentecostal imagination, an existential relationship with Christ is fundamental, and it is experience of the presence of God through the Spirit that is christologically and pneumatologically inscribed. Spirit baptism follows on

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their liturgies or catechetics as in many Reformed traditions. This motivates a separate discussion of spirituality as the practice of their encounters with God that is contrasted with their theological endeavours.

<sup>14</sup> Kärkkäinen’s remark should be qualified, as he is probably talking only of pentecostal Africans, although it can be argued that African traditional religion with its widespread emphasis on spirit-possession contributed to an African worldview that includes ample room for the spirit.

encountering the Spirit-baptiser, Jesus Christ. And any contemplation of the person of Jesus considering this experience always falls within the gambit of the confession of Jesus as “truly human” and “truly divine” (Del Colle 1993:93).

The biggest challenge that Spirit Christology poses is to the understanding of trinitarian conceptions. Spirit Christology explicitly moves from the economic to the immanent Trinity because it functions on two levels: a christological level and trinitarian level. For Pentecostals, trinitarian distinctions are not a matter of speculation but of lived experience and Christian witness (Del Colle 1993:106). Instead of following adoptionism’s replacement with Spirit Christology, Pentecostals argue that Jesus’ ministry and mission, as well as his relation to the Father, were facilitated by the Spirit that the Father poured out on him. In this way, pneumatology enhances trinitarian relations (Habets 2003:229).

For pentecostal Spirit Christology, the Trinity, which consists of three persons, can best be explained in terms of the economy of salvation. The economic Trinity refers to the activity and roles of the three persons regarding creation and redemption (Pannenberg 1991:79). In contrast, the ontological Trinity refers to the Trinity in itself, without regard to God’s works of creation and redemption. In the Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are one being, while the personal properties of the three persons are distinguished. “It is the Father who sends the Son into the world for our redemption. It is the Son who acquires our redemption for us. It is the Spirit who applies that redemption to us” (Sproul 2014). In other words, the economic Trinity is expressed in functional terms.

One implication of a consistent Spirit Christology is that the *filioque* view is rejected because it presupposes that the Father-Son is a primary relationship of origin.<sup>15</sup> The implication of *filioque* is clear: the Spirit is secondary, subordinating the Spirit to the Son (Kärkkäinen 2018:123). This contrasts with the early church’s view of the Spirit as the mediator of Jesus’ community with the Father and of the believer’s participation in Christ (Grenz 2005:61). Spirit and Christ presuppose and mutually condition each other in Moltmann’s (1981:178) view. Jesus’ history did not begin with Jesus himself but with the *ruach/pneuma*, the creative breath of God, so Jesus came forth as the anointed one (*masiah/christos*) who proclaimed the gospel with power, as demonstrated by the signs of the new creation in his miracles of healing and deliverance (Moltmann 1993:73).

In Logos Christology, the Father and Son play the active roles in terms of the economic Trinity, while the Spirit functions merely as a gift shared by the Father and the Son, denying a comprehensive identity for the Spirit. Habets (2003:230-231) and Wienandy (1995:8, 15) suggest that the Trinity can be fully understood only when all three persons in a logical and ontological way cooperate in one simultaneous, nonsequential and eternal act “in which each person of the Trinity subsistently defines and is subsistently defined by the other persons” (Miles 2006:20). The Son loves the Father in the same Spirit by which he is begotten (Wienandy 1995:8, 17). In other words, the three persons of the Trinity help constitute each other within their relationships. There is a mutual co-inherence or *perichoresis* of action within the Trinity that constitutes the three persons because of the action of all three as the mutual interpenetration, participation and unification of differing and still distinguishable entities (Welker 2010:91-92; note Brümmer’s 2005:110 scepticism that *perichoresis*

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<sup>15</sup> Not all proponents of Logos Christology necessarily subscribe to *filioque*.

refers to three divine agents; he rather views it as “three interconnected forms of action performed by one and the same divine Agent”). It implies that the three persons become who they are because of the interactions among them, fashioning one another into themselves (Wienandy 1995:8, 78-79).

In contrast to the passive function assigned to the Spirit in Logos Christology, in Spirit Christology it is the Spirit’s active role within the Trinity that makes the *perichoresis* intelligible. The three persons are who they are because of their mutual relationship with each other. The Father becomes Father because the Spirit makes God the Father of the Son and makes the Son the Son of the Father.

Spirit Christology maintains the Father as the *monarchia* and the *fons divinitatis*, from which both the Son and the Spirit came forth (Habets 2003:233). As the word of God, the Father breathes forth the Son, and the breath of God is the Spirit. Word and Spirit both go out from the Father in a mutual relationship with each other, illustrated by an inner coherency in the anointing and utterance of the word (Logos). The pneumatological relation of Jesus to God, as Son in the Spirit, intensifies Jesus’ filial relationship. In this way, Spirit Christology contributes to the understanding of the identity and mission of Jesus as well as the other members of the triune God.

The life of the church can be enriched by a Spirit-Christology. It consists of a doxological posture within which the self-revelation of God can be used to partake in the theological endeavour. When Pentecostals experience their faith in worship, they encounter Jesus as the one anointed by the Father but also as the Spirit baptiser who anoints believers with God’s power and presence. Their encounters with God through the Spirit, which are fundamental and conditional to their spirituality, lead to a christological confession that is characterised by soteriological and pneumatological motifs (Del Colle 1994:109). Revelation for Pentecostals is neither contentless experience as defined by liberalism nor timeless propositions as defined by conservative fundamentalism but the dynamic self-disclosure of God in the history of salvation in a process of disclosure that culminates in the revelation of Jesus. It impacts and instructs current believers in the truth (Pinnock 1996:226).

A last contribution that pentecostal spirituality can make to the christological discussion and that connects to the doxological emphasis in the previous paragraph is its general view of God as incomprehensible, indescribable, ineffable and infinite (Nel 2017).<sup>16</sup> As continuationists, they expect to experience encounters with God in line with the experiences and events described in the Bible, and they define truth in terms of their personal experiences with God, based on what the Bible leads them to expect (Nel 2017:2). The past inspiration of the Spirit inspired and secured the Bible, while the present inspiration of the Spirit empowers current readers (Pinnock 1996:230). Truth is not primarily based on what the Bible teaches but on what the Spirit reveals to them, although revelation is always subjected to what the Bible teaches. Believers know God because they have encountered God in their daily existential reality. Their knowledge forms the basis of their theological understanding of God.<sup>17</sup> Their knowledge of God in

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<sup>16</sup> This view of God connects to Eastern theology’s apophaticism, which operates more by using negative, elusive and suggestive terms for describing God’s person than positive, exact and defined terms as Western Scholasticism’s cataphatic method does (Kärkkäinen 2017:48).

<sup>17</sup> The remark should be read in terms of a previous footnote that explained the dualism between experience and theology that underlies much of pentecostal theology.

dynamic, personal terms describes God as the unknowable God that exists outside the human frame of reference. For Pentecostals, it is more imperative to love God than to speculate in abstract terms about God (Yong 2002:23). This is illustrated by the pentecostal practice of speaking in tongues, which serves as a prayer and worship “metalanguage”. The worshipper is equipped to enter God’s presence and worship intuitively and affectively because the rational and intellectual is bypassed for the moment. Glossolalia is “a way of crying to God from the depths and expressing the too-deep-for-words sighings of the heart” (Pinnock 1996:172-173).<sup>18</sup> When one encounters God in speaking and singing in tongues, the entire human being is implicated in an embodied form. While language can never adequately express the One that theology endeavours to picture, worship in tongues serves as a means to sing the praises of God much more adequately than is possible within the limitations of human languages (Tollefsen 2014:59). The exercise of discursive and intuitive reason “in demonstration of the power which the Spirit stirred up” complements the use of intellectual reason to try and form a conception of the hidden super-essential Godhead in terms of what was revealed to us in the Bible (in the words of Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite 1920:41).

## Conclusion

Spirit Christology, motivated by contextual hermeneutical concerns, presents Jesus Christ in a digestible manner to contemporary secular culture, (Mburu 2019:10) and also more appropriate to the needs of faith communities.<sup>19</sup> A strong warrant for such a Christology is found in the New Testament, as well as the current neglect of the Spirit in systematic theology. Especially in Africa, with its emphasis on spirit-possession, a Christology enriched with such a pneumatological perspective is needed because the Logos model does not serve the pneumatic needs of African Christians, and Pentecostalism is uniquely situated to provide a Spirit Christology whose Jesus is explained in terms of the presence and operation of the Spirit in him.

It was argued that Western Christology can benefit from the supplement of Spirit Christology. Before introducing such a Christology from a pentecostal perspective, some criteria were described that can be used to evaluate a valid Christology. Spirit Christology meets the set requirements: it is faithful to the biblical testimony, presents Christ’s humanity and divinity adequately, does not diminish either of Christ’s two natures, is able to conceive of the unity of divine and human in Jesus in coherency with other doctrines confessed by the church, agrees with the ecumenical confessions, and is able to respond to contemporary issues.

While Logos Christology focuses on Jesus as the incarnate word of God, emphasising his divinity at the cost of the neglect of his humanity, Spirit Christology emphasises that God is present and active in Jesus through the Spirit and explains the contents of his divinity. A new interest in Spirit Christology can be ascribed to the challenges that the

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<sup>18</sup> It is granted that pentecostals are inclined to think in dualistic terms of the rational and intellectual vs. experience without leaving room for the fact that experience always includes elements of the rational while the rational does not exist apart from the emotional and experiential. This dualism is used in pentecostal theology, but this qualification should be kept in mind.

<sup>19</sup> Quayesi-Amakye (2016:293), following Martey (1993:84-86), makes the significant remark that to contextualize Christology to Africans, it must meet Africans at the sociopolitical level of poverty, racism, sexism, classism, colonialism, neocolonialism, political dictatorship and every concept that dehumanizes the African personality. It must also meet Africans at their religio-cultural level.

church of the modern period experiences with classical patristic language due to a different thought-world. The new interest consists of two distinct proposals for a Spirit Christology, a replacement and supplanting of Logos Christianity by new models, and a proposition to complement Logos Christology with a Spirit Christology by reworking and enriching elements of scholastic theology. Spirit Christology in the last sense fulfils all the requirements of a valid Christological model. The proposed pentecostal Spirit Christology finds itself in the second tradition.

A pentecostal Spirit Christology contributes to the current discourse by defining Jesus' identity as the product of the Spirit's presence in him. Pentecostal theology and hermeneutic represent a paradigm shift with a different point of departure and destination: the experience of the power of God through the Spirit. The Spirit's significance is found in Pentecostals' experience of God's presence and activity in their world, in line with Christ's earthly ministry through the Spirit. In pentecostal imagination, an existential relationship with Christ is fundamental, beginning in Spirit baptism and determining pentecostal Bible reading practices, with current existential experiences with Christ through the Spirit serving as the lens through which the Bible is read.

The challenge of Spirit Christology to trinitarian conceptions is intercepted through Pentecostals' lived experience, in which trinitarian distinctions do not become a matter of mere speculation. Pneumatology enhances trinitarian relations. When they experience their faith in worship, they encounter Jesus as the one who was anointed by the Father as the Spirit baptiser that anoints believers with God's power and presence. Their encounters with God through the Spirit, which are fundamental and conditional to their spirituality, lead to a christological confession that is characterised by soteriological and pneumatological motifs. The emphasis is on the economy of salvation and the immanent Trinity, expressing in functional terms the distinctions between Father, Son and Spirit. The three persons of the Trinity constitute each other within their communion and relationships, implying a *perichoresis* of action within the Trinity. As the word of God, the Father breathes forth the Son, and the breath of God is the Spirit. An implication is the rejection of *filioque* that represents subordination of the Spirit to the Son instead of the Spirit as the mediator of Jesus' community with the Father and of the believer's participation in Christ.

Lastly, Pentecostals view God as incomprehensible and indescribable, a truth they experience in encounters with God through the Spirit. Their encounters with God empower them to speak of the unknowable God, who falls outside their frame of reference in dynamic, personal terms. Their practice of speaking in tongues represents a "metalanguage" useful in worshipping the unknowable and indescribable God in intuitive and affective terms which go beyond rational categories. *Glossolalia* serves as a means to sing the praises of God when God is encountered through the Spirit with discursive and intuitive reason, thus allowing the formation of a conception of the hidden super-essential Trinity in terms of what was revealed to us in the Bible.

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