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# The Holy Spirit in the world: a global conversation

**Drawing on extensive research on the Christian understanding of the Spirit in both Asian and Western contexts, Kirsteen Kim explains how different cosmologies have shaped Christian pneumatology. The contrast between belief in one universal Spirit and many spirits is then related to the experiences of modernity and post-modernity, contemporary interest in 'spirituality' and the theological reflection and mission practice of both charismatic and liberation theology.**

## Introduction: Toward a mission pneumatology

In 1992, Jürgen Moltmann lamented the fact that in the contemporary 'flood' of writing about the Holy Spirit (in the West) no new paradigm in pneumatology had emerged beyond the Catholic doctrine of grace or the Protestant pattern of Word and Spirit.<sup>1</sup> I believe that, since Moltmann wrote, and partly due to his own contribution, there has in fact been a considerable learning process in pneumatology taking place which may be said to amount to a new paradigm. What has developed, and what Moltmann himself began to articulate in *God in Creation* and *The Spirit of Life*,<sup>2</sup> is a theology of the Spirit's work in the world beyond the boundaries of Christian confession. Another way of describing this approach is 'mission pneumatology'.

The catalyst for this development, and for Moltmann's own work, has been conversations between theologians from different contexts. These are not only conversations between theologians of different confessions – Protestant, Catholic, Orthodox, or Pentecostal-charismatic. They also include the reflections of Christians from different geographical locations and cultures, particularly in Asia and Africa, on their profound and broad experience of the presence and activity of the Spirit of God. The way in which the Holy Spirit is understood and described is affected not only by confessional standpoints but also by local experience and by the meaning of 'spirit' in any particular cultural-linguistic context.<sup>3</sup> Renewed interest in the theology of the Holy Spirit in the West has gone along with a revival of interest in spirituality and 'spiritual' experiences in wider society and is informed by popular, literary and philosophical understanding of 'spirit'. In other regions or cultural zones in the world we might expect correspondingly different interpretations according to their 'spiritual' experience and the meaning of 'spirit'.

1 Moltmann 1992: 1.

2 Moltmann 1985 and Moltmann 1992.

3 Raiser 1991.

Using such an approach of global conversation, I have tried to develop a theology of the Spirit in the world, or mission pneumatology. My work suggests that in different contexts the link between the Holy Spirit and Christian mission is conceived in several different ways:

- in the Western tradition, the Spirit is thought of as ‘the Spirit of mission’<sup>4</sup>
- Eastern Orthodox theologians may be more inclined to conceive of ‘the mission of the Spirit’<sup>5</sup>
- in the Indian context, mission can be thought of as ‘mission in the Spirit’<sup>6</sup>
- for Korean Christian theologians, mission may be understood as the power of the Spirit among or over the spirits.<sup>7</sup>

Each of these four approaches is an attempt to express how the Holy Spirit is at work in the world, and each is informed by local understanding of the world, or cosmology.<sup>8</sup>

Since they are less well documented, in this paper I focus here on theologies from India and from Korea, and on the contrasts between them. This enables us to draw out the questions which they – and especially the Korean context – pose for the older paradigms of the West and East. The three Indian theologians who were the focus of my study were Stanley Samartha, Vandana and Samuel Rayan. In the Korean context I concentrated on the work of four theologians: Ryu Tong-Shik, Suh Nam-Dong, Chung Hyun Kyung and Cho Yonggi. In each context there was considerable variation in pneumatological understanding, reflecting the wide range of theological perspectives in each country but it was also possible to distinguish some shared characteristics of Indian-ness and Korean-ness and to compare these with one another.<sup>9</sup>

## The Spirit in Indian and Korean Christian theologies

Christians have to agree that the Holy Spirit’s work is not confined within the visible boundaries of the church or within the individual Christian because if it was then ‘mission itself would be impossible since it is the Spirit that brings people to Christ’.<sup>10</sup> At the very least, the Holy Spirit is preparing the way for the reception of the Christian gospel. But the freedom of the Spirit attested to in the Bible (e.g. John 3:8) and the Spirit’s work in the whole of creation (Gen. 1:2) would also support a view that the Spirit’s activity cannot be limited to *preparatio evangelica* but is directed toward bringing about salvation in a wider sense.

In the Indian context, for example, theologians of inculturation, liberation and dialogue see the Spirit of God as also involved in varied ways with other communities of India, and not just for conviction of sin and conversion to

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4 Bosch 1991: 113-15 and Pope John Paul II 1990 (paras 21-30, online at [www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0219/\\_INDEX.HTM](http://www.vatican.va/edocs/ENG0219/_INDEX.HTM)).

5 Staniloae 1981; Keshishian 1992: 39-54; Bria 1986: 96-97.

6 Rayan 1999: sections 11, 16 (at <http://www.sedos.org/english/rayan2.htm>); Kim 2003b: 188-94.

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7 Chung 1991; Cho 1999a: 35-38; Cho 1989: 129; Cho 1999b: 45-49, 72-73.

8 Kim 2008.

9 For details of each theologian in context see Kim 2008.

10 Oleska 1990: 331.

Christianity. It is not obvious to them that the minority Christian community alone represents the hope for India's future. They argue that Christian mission involves co-operating in the Spirit with movements of nation-building, justice and peace.

In Korea, revival movements contributed to a sense that they were living in the third age of the Spirit (following on from the first age of the law and the second age of the church). This led Korean church leaders and theologians to expect the Spirit's power in dealing with social and personal problems and in reviving their land devastated by war. They share with Indian theologians a vision of the Spirit's work that is not limited by doctrines or institutions and reaches beyond the established Christian community into the whole cosmos.

In both India and Korea, the religious background understanding of 'spirit' influences the expectations of what the Holy Spirit can do and how the Spirit will act. Pneumatology has arguably become the 'cornerstone' of Indian Christian theology because of a shared perception, due to the dominant Hindu culture, of a cosmic Spirit universally present and the background of fascination with spiritualities of all kinds.<sup>11</sup> The pervasive consciousness of one universal Spirit has led, on the one hand, to pneumatologically-based initiatives in inter-faith relations and, on the other, to a willingness to support movements of transformation beyond the Christian community. Korean theologians, however, are working with a prevailing tradition of belief in the many spirits of a shamanistic world-view and an expectation of the intervention of 'the Great Spirit'. This leads to an emphasis on the Holy Spirit's power and a heightened awareness of spiritual struggle in mission.

These varied pre-understandings of 'spirit' greatly enrich pneumatological reflection. They raise further questions about the background meaning of *rûach* in the Old Testament, *pneuma* in the New Testament, and other terms in the Bible referring to spiritual beings. These important biblical questions are being approached indirectly when we explore the range of interpretations in different contexts and engage in global conversation around the understanding of spirit, the Spirit, spirits and spiritualities. Negatively, if we do not do this, our approach to the biblical text will be limited by our own experience and world-view. Positively, it is possible that Christian brothers and sisters coming from different cultural contexts have captured the meaning of the ancient text more fully.

### **One Spirit or many?: contrasting cosmologies**

The outstanding difference between Indian Christian theologians and those from Korea in their religio-cultural perception of 'spirit' is the contrast in cosmologies. This contrast is between the belief in the one universal Spirit, within which the universe has its being (or appears to have being) and the awareness of a world of many spirits, among which the Holy Spirit is believed to be pre-eminent.

We could describe the dominant Indian perspective as a 'one-Spirit' theology. In this the Holy Spirit is perceived to comprise what can be experienced of the spiritual world. The dominant Korean perspective is a 'many-spirits' theology in which the spiritual world includes diverse spiritual entities. It should also be noted at this point that the strongly unitarian tendencies of Hindu philosophy emerged

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<sup>11</sup> Boyd 1975: 241-42.

in a society that is racially and culturally very diverse and where religion has been an important binding force. In contrast, the plurality of Korean theology of the Spirit emerges from a setting that appears relatively racially homogeneous and mono-cultural, but in which religion is a differentiating factor. The Japanese theologian Kosuke Koyama also observes that Korea is distinguished among Asian nations for its sense of history and eschatology which tends to override general Asian 'cosmological universalism'.<sup>12</sup>

This distinction between cosmologies of the one and of the many may be recognized as distinguishing different regions of the world, different paradigms of thought in history, and even the views of different groups within the same society. It is a major difference between theologies of a more catholic kind and those of a more pentecostal-charismatic nature. Within Korea, theologies of a paternal or Confucian orientation have less time for the spirit-world than those of a shamanistic or maternal orientation.

Between the one-Spirit and many-spirits traditions there is a difference of terminology. In contexts in which many spirits are recognized, there is a need to attach the adjective 'holy' or some other qualifier to the word 'Spirit' when referring to the third person of the Trinity. Where only one Spirit is in view, or the Spirit is more distanced from other spiritual entities, the qualifier is unnecessary and 'the Spirit' or 'Spirit' alone is enough to signify what is meant. This difference can be illustrated by the titles of two books on spiritual discernment: the first by Tim Gorringer, a British Anglican with Indian experience, is *Discerning Spirit*<sup>13</sup> and the second by Amos Yong, a North American Pentecostal pastor with a Malaysian-Chinese Buddhist background, is *Discerning the Spirit(s)*.<sup>14</sup>

A similar distinction between world-views has been suggested by Aloysius Pieris, a Jesuit theologian from Sri Lanka. He uses the terms 'cosmic' and 'meta-cosmic'. Primal, folk, or popular religions – or local spiritualities – deal with the somewhat chaotic world of many spirits at a cosmic level. In contrast, the world religions introduce a universal dimension and a higher level at which there is perceived to be an overarching unity. Thus a meta-cosmic world-view can incorporate a cosmic one. This seems to have happened in conversions of tribal people to Roman Catholicism in Latin America and other parts of the world in recent centuries where aspects of indigenous religiosity have been absorbed into Catholic practice. Pieris also believes this explains why religious conversions almost always take place from a cosmic to a meta-cosmic religion, and not the other way round.<sup>15</sup> However, his point about conversion is not so convincing in the context of New Age and other emerging spiritualities in the West as it is in the Asian context. It may, therefore, be better to see cosmic and meta-cosmic as alternatives rather than as a hierarchy of belief systems. Pieris' model further helps to distinguish between 'one-Spirit' theologies and 'many-spirits' theologies.

## Modernity and post-modernity

The observation that there are broadly two different cosmologies at work here should not be understood as an attempt to reduce complex cultures and systems of thought

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<sup>12</sup> Koyama 1988: 141.

<sup>13</sup> Gorringer 1990.

<sup>14</sup> Yong 2000.

<sup>15</sup> Pieris 1988: 71-74.

to an essential core. Nor is it an attempt to synthesize different world-views into one. Each way of thinking has its own integrity and there are many varieties of spirituality that could be included under each head. Nevertheless, the difference observed between the predominant pneumatologies of India and Korea calls for some further reflection on the part of those developing a theology of the Holy Spirit in the contemporary Western context. This is especially so because the most obvious difference between modernity and what is called post-modernity is that for modernity the highest value is unity, whereas for post-modernity difference is most important.<sup>16</sup> Movements toward undifferentiated unity are therefore regarded with suspicion in a post-modern age where diversity and plurality are most appreciated. If it is to be heard in the current climate, mission theology for post-modernity must therefore recognize complexity and variety and allow room for other theologies and modes of expression. In post-modernity, unity can only be discovered or inferred from within a particular context; it cannot be asserted *a priori*. It may be therefore that where 'one-Spirit' pneumatology was characteristic of modernity, 'many-spirits' pneumatology may be more suited to post-modernity. This may be considered to be the theological import of the global rise of pentecostal-charismatic spirituality.

## Lessons for the West

Despite globalization, the contemporary West is dissimilar in many respects to the societies of India and Korea. However, when it comes to dealing with plurality there may be much the West can learn. Western secularization has not entirely extended to human consciousness and the possibility of the rediscovery of theological thought, which Peter Berger foresaw in 1971,<sup>17</sup> has now become a reality. The rise of post-modernity has seen a resurgence of interest in what Berger called the 'supernatural' and what now tends to be referred to as 'spirituality'.<sup>18</sup> Often, this does not conform to the old institutional patterns but is expressed in conversion to Eastern religions, 'New Age' eclecticism, or in other alternative movements. Within Christianity there are also alternative spiritual movements,<sup>19</sup> as well as new church movements that are pentecostal-charismatic in type.

Moltmann has tried to relate his mission pneumatology to New Age spirituality and to Pentecostal-charismatic forms of Christianity. However, he does this, on the one hand, without sufficient attention to the difference between the Creator Spirit of Christian tradition and the Earth Mother of many New Age religions<sup>20</sup> and, on the other, lacking appreciation of the many-spirits worldview of Pentecostal spirituality.<sup>21</sup> Understanding the differing approaches of Indian and Korean theologians, especially their contrasting awareness of one Spirit and many spirits, raises important questions for Western theologians of the Spirit in the world or Christian mission.

## The Spirit and the spirits

### Modern Western theologies

Awareness of a spirit-world has been the norm in most societies in history. This continues to be so<sup>22</sup> but, particularly since the Enlightenment, Western Europeans

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**16** Cf. Welker 2002: 438.

**17** Berger 1971.

**18** Heelas and Woodhead 2005.

**19** Tacey 2004.

**20** Cf. Deane-Drummond 1997: 276.

**21** See Stibbe 1994: 13; Kuzmic 1994: 22; Macchia 1994: 27; Chan 1994: 36, 40.

**22** Arnold 1992: 198-205.

have appeared to inhabit a simplified, sanitized world. Here, in the historic Protestant churches at least, in so far as human beings have related to God at all, it has been without interference from or mediation of other spiritual beings. In modern theology, particularly Protestant theology, angels and demons alike are condemned to the realms of superstition. What remains is 'God and man'. Rudolf Bultmann's project of demythologization involved a rejection of belief in 'the New Testament world of demons and spirits' as incompatible with the world of 'the electric light and the wireless' and 'modern medical and surgical discoveries'.<sup>23</sup> Although Paul Tillich emphasized a universal Spiritual Presence, for him the ambiguity of religion justified recognition of the demonic as well as the divine.<sup>24</sup> But even he admitted that he found it difficult to accommodate 'spirits' (plural) in his theology. This was because they implied the existence of a 'spirit' realm that he associated with 'ghosts' and rejected because it stood apart from life as he understood it.<sup>25</sup> The great twentieth-century Catholic theologians of the Spirit, Rahner and Congar, consider only the Spirit of God and the human spirit. Among modern Western theologians Karl Barth is unusual in referring to 'the spirits of the world'<sup>26</sup> but in his theology only evil spirits are contemplated.

### Asian theologies

In the context of India, advaitic Hinduism allows little room for a spirit-world, since spiritual life is more an internal matter of the heart than engagement with external forces. However, especially in view of the rapid growth of Pentecostal-charismatic movements in India, Indian theologians have (under the influence of this philosophy) too easily dismissed the popular religion of many gods and spirits. In contrast, for many Korean theologians the context is exactly such a complex world-view of many spirits. At the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Canberra in 1991, a young Korean theologian, Chung Hyun Kyung dared to make the world of spirits explicit in her presentation<sup>27</sup> but the way in which she did so shocked many of those present and led to controversy. Nevertheless, many of the papers produced around the event also referred to other spirits and used spirit-world language.

The other opening plenary presentation at the 1991 WCC was by Parthenios, Patriarch of Alexandria and All Africa. This made only passing reference to 'the spirit of evil' from whom the Holy Spirit delivers us, but other Orthodox contributions seemed to assume multiple spirits as background to the debate. Orthodox reflections at Crete in 1989 warned that 'spirits other than the Holy Spirit may act in the world'.<sup>28</sup> This warning was repeated in their statement of concerns after Canberra.<sup>29</sup> Orthodox reflections on the Canberra theme also stated that, in Orthodox worship, the work of God in saving and redeeming from political and other forces is articulated as 'a victory over the demonic principalities, forces and powers'.<sup>30</sup>

African contributors, Justin Ukpogon (Catholic),<sup>31</sup> Joseph Osei-Bonsu (Protestant)<sup>32</sup> and John Pobee (Anglican)<sup>33</sup> immediately related the topic of the

**23** Quoted in Dunn 1998: 67-8.

**24** Tillich 1963: 102-6.

**25** Tillich 1963: 23.

**26** For example, Barth 1962: 128, 129, 134-5.

**27** Chung 1991.

**28** Castro 1990; Orthodox reflections 1990: 92.

**29** Orthodox participants 1991: 281.

**30** Castro 1990: 92, 95.

**31** Ukpogon 1990, also in *Ecumenical Review* 41/3 (Jul 1989), pp 416-425.

**32** Osei-Bonsu 1989.

**33** Pobee 1990.

Holy Spirit and creation with the spirits of African Traditional Religion. There were many others, however, for whom such considerations were entirely foreign. For example, the European Catholic theologian Philip Rosato discussed the whole range of 'the mission of the Spirit within and beyond the Church' without finding it necessary to use the language of spirits or powers at all.<sup>34</sup>

### Spirits in Late Modernity

It would not be desirable to go back to the Middle Ages in Europe by attempting to reinstate a hierarchy of angels, spirits and demons. Modernity delivered people from the fear of capricious activity and the need for fetishes and mantras that such a world-view can generate. Chung Hyun Kyung, for one, has written about how her Western education freed her from childhood fears of the ghosts and spirits her grandmother told her about.<sup>35</sup> Being released from this daily anxiety about unpredictable forces, Europeans developed modern science. This assumes the world is ordered and sees a bigger picture that has allowed them to control the environment in new and unimagined ways. Modernity has demythologized the 'spirits' by revealing vested social and political interests behind religious doctrines and finding social and psychological explanations for believing in the 'spirits'.

John V. Taylor's experience of 'divination as practised by mediums in Africa' led him to believe that, through the Holy Spirit, the voices of the spirits actually articulate 'the subconscious awareness of the community'.<sup>36</sup> In the Indian case, demons may speak what is otherwise unmentionable<sup>37</sup> and in the Korean case Shamanism may function as the 'waste disposal' of the religious world.<sup>38</sup> However, consigning the spirit world to fairyland and providing a logical explanation does not necessarily solve the human problem. It has been the discovery of post-modernity that rationality is not the only or necessarily the best tool for dealing with 'the absurdities of existence'.<sup>39</sup> Religion and spirituality have a continuing role to play in helping human beings deal with the apparently inexplicable, the daily struggle, and the powerful – often unseen – forces they encounter. But what is lost along with the spirit-world is a sense of the involvement of the Holy Spirit in the everyday world that 'demons and spirits' inhabit, and the possibility of engagement with popular religion.

'One-spirit' religions tend to suppress local or primal spirituality. This is the case not only in Korea (where the later religions despised Shamanism) and in India (where advaitic Hinduism relegated popular practices to a lower level of spirituality) but also in the modern West. Popular religion erodes any monopoly of the spiritual by introducing the struggle and competition of everyday life, as reflected in the gospel writings, into the theology of the Holy Spirit. It may well be that the suppression of popular religion and spirituality by elitist philosophies has contributed to a sense of the remoteness of the Spirit or a diminishing of the Spirit's personhood. The 'Holy Spirit' without the many spirits can convey a sense of abstraction, distance, and splendid isolation. This in turn increases the alienation of academic theology from church life and popular belief and inadvertently spurs

**34** Rosato 1990, also in *Ecumenical Review* 41/3 (Jul 1989), pp 388-97.

**35** Chung 1988.

**36** Taylor 1972: 67-68, 107-108, 166 and Taylor 1963: 148-50.

**37** Selvanayagam 2000.

**38** Kim 2003a: 82-100, 189-91.

**39** Suurmond 1994: 79 (see pp 75-97).

the growth of new movements. At the very least, as one of the first scholars of Pentecostalism, Walter Hollenweger, reflected after the Canberra Assembly, ‘The fact that [the issue of spirits] has produced so much dissension and discussion shows that it aggravates a weak spot in Western theology’, which tends just ‘to label such beliefs “psychological” or “superstitious”’.<sup>40</sup>

Positive interest in what is termed in Catholic circles ‘popular religiosity’, or in the ecumenical movement ‘indigenous spirituality’, is a recent development. However, several groups have been giving serious theological attention to the many-spirits perspective. The fact that the language of the spirit-world is found in the Bible makes it part of the shared heritage of all Christians. For the sake of better understanding of the biblical material, in recent years some New Testament scholars have shown the significance of the belief in the supernatural in the worldviews of both Jews and Gentiles. Since Wheeler Robinson in 1928, some have argued that it was the ‘spirit-world’ that ‘formed the matrix of the idea of the Holy Spirit’ and that the fact that awareness of this is absent in the modern West is something that makes interpretation of New Testament pneumatology particularly difficult.<sup>41</sup> James Dunn, who has done particular work on the language of demons, spirits and exorcism in the New Testament, comments that ‘the New Testament world of demons and spirits’, which Bultmann rejected, ‘is also the biblical world of the Holy Spirit’. He fears that ‘in abandoning the dimension of the demonic we may find that we have abandoned also the dimension of the Spirit’, since this is the milieu from which theology of the Holy Spirit arose.<sup>42</sup>

## Spiritual Warfare

### Pentecostal-charismatic theology and experience

By the nature of their engagement with spiritual power, Pentecostal-charismatic theologians have paid particular attention to passages of the Bible that concern ‘authorities’, ‘cosmic powers’, ‘spiritual forces’, and ‘the heavenly places’ (e.g. Eph. 6:12). Yet Pentecostal-charismatic awareness of a spirit-world has been played down in all of the major studies of the movement:

- Arnold Bittlinger’s early report contained only one reference to it;<sup>43</sup>
- Hollenweger’s definitive work included only an eight-page chapter on ‘demonology’ in a book of nearly six hundred pages;<sup>44</sup>
- David Martin discusses the spirit-world under the heading ‘Africanization’ and in connection with Shamanism, but not as inherent in Pentecostalism itself;<sup>45</sup>
- Allan Anderson does not list any references to spirits or demons though he does refer several times to ‘exorcism’ and ‘deliverance’.<sup>46</sup>

Nevertheless, it can be said that Pentecostal-charismatic spirituality has a distinct advantage over traditional missiologies in parts of the world where people are familiar with phenomena from the spirit-world. This is because ‘the charismatic emphasis on the power of the name of Jesus Christ and His Spirit’ could be used to relate to witchcraft, sorcery and other forms of the occult.<sup>47</sup> The offer of healing by

<sup>40</sup> Hollenweger 1997: 383.

<sup>41</sup> Robinson 1928: 2.

<sup>42</sup> Dunn 1998: 67-68.

<sup>43</sup> Hocken 1981.

<sup>44</sup> Hollenweger 1972: 377-84.

<sup>45</sup> Martin 2002: 138-43, 161-62.

<sup>46</sup> Anderson 2004: 197, 201, 211, 228, 230, 231, 233-34.

<sup>47</sup> Hocken 1981.



Pentecostal-charismatic forms of Christianity has been one of its major attractions to the poor, and especially in parts of the world least affected by modernization, secularization and scientific rationalism. In such contexts, its message of 'signs and wonders' meets popular hopes and expectations.<sup>48</sup> In the case of the giant Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, for example, the literal application of New Testament descriptions of Jesus' ministry of exorcism is part of the theology of Pentecostal-charismatic healing practices: demons or evil spirits are seen as the cause of disease to be driven out by prayer 'in the name of Jesus'. In sub-Saharan Africa, 'Spirit-type' churches meet the need to deal with the fear of evil generated by the spirit-world, which Western theology has generally failed to address.<sup>49</sup>

In the 1970s and 1980s some returned American evangelical missionaries, Paul Hiebert, Alan Tippett and Charles Kraft, all of whom had backgrounds in anthropology, reflected together on their encounters overseas with the spirit-world in primal religious settings. They laid the groundwork for John Wimber's 'power evangelism' in which Christian witness consisted in demonstrating the power of the Holy Spirit over other spirits and thereby 'conquering ground'.<sup>50</sup> Through the networks of charismatic evangelicalism, this method was applied from Ecuador to Nigeria and to Korea.<sup>51</sup>

'Spiritual warfare' has provoked a great deal of discussion and criticism<sup>52</sup> and the more politically correct 'spiritual conflict' is now preferred in moderate circles.<sup>53</sup> Nevertheless, as Harvey Cox concludes after observing Pentecostalism in North America, it seems that 'modern liberal theologians have too easily discarded the idea of transpersonal forces of evil'.<sup>54</sup> As Cox, Philip Jenkins,<sup>55</sup> and others have highlighted, Pentecostal-charismatic movements are the fastest growing form of Christian expression today. This is clearly an argument for developing a Christian theology of Spirit and spirits that is more representative of the biblical message and Christian tradition than 'spiritual warfare'.

### **Liberation theology**

Like many evangelicals and Pentecostal-charismatics, liberation theologians have used the biblical language of 'the powers' or 'evil spirits', but in a rather different sense.<sup>56</sup> North American theologian Walter Wink studied the biblical language of the powers in depth and then applied the biblical terminology of spirits, demons and angels to political powers and systems. Wink sought to 'name' and 'unmask' the powers in societal structures; that is, to address the spiritual dimension of institutions by 'engaging' their 'fallen' spirits through non-violent resistance, in order to bring about their redemption.<sup>57</sup> The common language of the powers united liberal and Pentecostal-charismatic theologies when 'third-wave' theology found support in the biblical studies of Wink<sup>58</sup> and Wink welcomed the insights of Wagner and others into 'spiritual warfare'.<sup>59</sup>

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**48** Anderson 2004: 210-14; cf. Yong 2000: 187.

**49** Allan Anderson 1991: 8-25. See also Daneel 1993.

**50** Wimber and Springer 1985; Lord 2005: 16-21.

**51** Douglas 1990: 105-107.

**52** See, for example, Percy 1996 and Moreau 2003.

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**53** World Evangelical Alliance 2000: 20.

**54** Cox 1996: 286.

**55** Jenkins 2002: 7-8.

**56** McAlpine 1991.

**57** Wink 1984, 1986, 1992:3-10.

**58** Wink 1992: ii.

**59** Wink 1992: 313-14.

Pentecostal-charismatic theologians have also tried to show that, like liberation theology, they are holistic in taking historical realities seriously and meeting bodily needs.<sup>60</sup> The difference between them was not about the reality of the 'spirits', or their power over human life, but about whether they were to be understood as 'supernatural'.<sup>61</sup>

### The dangers of dualism and totalitarianism

The danger with an adversarial approach to other spirits that are generally assumed to be evil – an approach that both Pentecostal-charismatic and liberation theologians share – is a tendency to oppose two equal and opposite worlds and to draw firm lines between good and bad. This can encourage an aggressive approach in mission which degenerates into cosmic or spiritual 'warfare'. Both the 'third-wave' and liberation theology have been criticized for encouraging violent methods of bringing about social change.<sup>62</sup> Wink tries to refute accusations of such dualism by a sweeping assertion of eclectic holism.<sup>63</sup> This seems to indicate that he is instead tending the other way, towards what Taylor described as 'monistic totality'.<sup>64</sup> The Senior Pastor of Yoido Full Gospel Church, Yonggi Cho also rejects dualism by positing a greater totality. In his doctrine of 'the Fourth Dimension', the spiritual world of the Holy Spirit encompasses all others, and so there is no question of a dualism of equal and opposite forces.<sup>65</sup>

### The Spirit in a Plural age

Pentecostal theologian Amos Yong's investigations in the religious sphere using a many-spirits paradigm suggests a way forward beyond dualism and totalising approaches. Yong draws attention to the 'unity in diversity' theme in the account of the first Pentecost when the Holy Spirit is seen to be the ground of personal encounter and of personal identity in community that enables eschatological reconciliation.<sup>66</sup> He thereby points to the work of Jean-Jacques Suurmond and Michael Welker, two Reformed theologians who have taken Pentecostal-charismatic perceptions seriously in their reflections on the Holy Spirit.

In his critical study, Suurmond, who also has a great deal of experience in North America, identifies the 'essential contribution' of Pentecostalism to the world as its spirituality of celebration, which has its origins in third-world or black spirituality.<sup>67</sup> This he characterizes as 'play', which is neither disordered nor ordered, but brings Word and Spirit together.<sup>68</sup> This baptism with Word and Spirit is the 'beginning and principle' (quoting James Dunn) of all Christian life and therefore has the – sadly unrealized – potential to unite diverse traditions.<sup>69</sup> The concrete expressions of this baptism are the gifts of the Spirit. Suurmond argues – reflecting on the Pentecost event – that these become the ground of human encounter, because every gift of grace frees us to see the other as truly other.<sup>70</sup> As Suurmond describes, it, in the play of Word and Spirit, identity (Word) interacts with the other

**60** For example, Sepulveda 1993; Daneel 1993; Land 1993; Petersen 1996; Wenk 2000.

**61** Arnold 1992: 169-82, 198-205; Wink 1992: 350 n 44 and 368 n 19.

**62** For example, Moreau 2003: 312; Matthey 2004: 117.

**63** Wink 1998: 13-36.

**64** Taylor 1963: 62-63, 72-73, 83-92, 201.

**65** Cho 1999b: 45-49, 72-73.

**66** Yong 2003: 300.

**67** Suurmond 1994: 19.

**68** Suurmond 1994: 87-88.

**69** Suurmond 1994: 150, 160.

**70** Suurmond 1994: 180-84.

(Spirit), making authentic relations of unity in difference possible.<sup>71</sup> Since the gifts of the Spirit cannot be narrowly interpreted as ‘supernatural’, these new modes of relationship extend into the wider society.<sup>72</sup> As God’s Wisdom, the Word and the Spirit are creatively present throughout the world.<sup>73</sup> Suurmond urges that the church should discern this, and proclaim and celebrate that Christ, the Wisdom of God, has reconciled all things in Jesus Christ.<sup>74</sup>

Welker also reflects on the pluralism in the Pentecostal account that is not subsumed into homogeneous unity by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Rather, by the power of the Spirit, it is differentiated into intersecting but distinct ‘force-fields’ of giftedness.<sup>75</sup> As Welker sees it, ‘The one Spirit ... makes use of diverse gifts of grace, diverse deeds and services (cf. 1 Cor. 12:4-6) and of their interplay in order to reveal and attest to God’s presence’.<sup>76</sup> Thus, ‘in the force field of the Spirit, concrete individuality and world-overarching universality are held together’.<sup>77</sup> For him the Spirit is ‘Christ’s domain of resonance’.<sup>78</sup> This is not an ideal but a reality that is near and is world-overcoming by the power of the communion.<sup>79</sup> The Spirit is a ‘public person’, whose ‘primary individual-human center of action’ is Jesus Christ<sup>80</sup> but whose influence and effectiveness is worldwide and diverse.

Suurmond’s celebration of giftedness and Welker’s recognition of force-fields of the Spirit contribute to Yong’s Pentecostal vision of a Christian theology. This affirms particular experiences and identities and sees these as giving ‘particular testimony to the nature of humankind and humanity’s relationship to God ... in anticipation of the full reconciliation to be accomplished in the kingdom’.<sup>81</sup>

Speaking to the contemporary West, Michael Welker is suspicious that ‘people have emphasized over and over again that God’s Spirit works union, unanimity, and unity among human beings’. He is concerned that ‘less clarity and energy have been devoted to saying that “the unity of the Spirit” not only tolerates differences and differentiation, but that it maintains and cultivates differences’. This work occurs in what Welker sees as a ‘powerful and invigorating’ form of pluralism.<sup>82</sup> He complains that the Western world has been shaped by a very different spirit. This has frequently been confused with the Spirit of God and has also spread all over the world. It has attempted to define and regulate what is human, what is certain, what is meaningful across societies and cultures.<sup>83</sup> In contrast, Welker seeks a ‘realistic theology’ that no longer attempts to fit God into a total metaphysical system, a theology that recognizes that the world cannot be explained solely in terms of bilateral relations, and thus escapes moralism and self-righteousness.<sup>84</sup> His ‘realistic biblical theology’ begins by giving up the illusion that a single system can explain God and by recognizing that God’s revelation is mediated in diverse human attestations, each of which is partial. His theology therefore consists in ‘testing them for interconnections and differences’ to allow ‘the reality of God to come forward in ever-new ways’.<sup>85</sup> This means being open to a plurality of

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**71** Suurmond 1994: 189-92.

**72** Suurmond 1994: 198-202.

**73** Suurmond 1994: 37-41.

**74** Suurmond 1994: 202-203.

**75** Welker 1994: 228, 240-41.

**76** Welker 1994: 241.

**77** Welker 1994: 248.

**78** Welker 1994: 314.

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**79** Welker 1994: 307-308.

**80** Welker 1994: 312.

**81** Yong 2003: 308.

**82** Welker 1994: 22-23.

**83** Welker 1994: 279.

**84** Welker 1994: 40-41.

**85** Welker 1994: 46-47.

experiences and constructions of experience, not necessarily compatible with each other, to express God's vitality and freedom. It also means that, resisting the temptation to harmonize and systematize them, we should allow them to 'mutually illuminate, strengthen, and clarify each other'.<sup>86</sup> Welker's vision of the interacting force-fields of the Holy Spirit and the spirits of the age in effect introduces a 'many-spirits' cosmology into the Western context to which, until recently, it seemed so alien.

### **Mission in the Spirit among the spirits**

In conclusion, it may be useful in post-modernity to think that, in the course of mission, we encounter many diverse spirits and powers in the world. We may regard these as supernatural entities or natural forces, or simply use this language as a metaphor for socio-economic powers. A model that allows for both good and evil (or neutral or fallen) spirits at work in the world could perhaps help mission to steer a course between an *a priori* rejection of other traditions and a naïve embrace of movements that do not share the Christian vision. It would allow for both conflict and cooperation between Christians and other groups, within a plural perception of reality.

Christians can have confidence that, however powerful and threatening they may be, all 'thrones', 'dominions', 'rulers', and 'powers' are only creatures of God and, at the end, will be reconciled in Christ (Col. 1:15-20). We do not have to maintain the attitude that 'whoever is not with me is against me' (Matt. 12:30). It may be that 'whoever is not against us is for us' (Mk. 9:40). At the very least, we may need to give the unknown others the benefit of the doubt, and perhaps cooperate with them for specific purposes. In showing hospitality to strangers, we may be entertaining angels without knowing it (Heb. 1:14; 13:2).

Recognising that there are good as well as bad forces at work, a mission theology of the Holy Spirit should allow us to appreciate creativity and love wherever they are found and to affirm whatever is true, honourable, just, pure, pleasing, and commendable (Phil. 4:8). Such an approach could avoid the implicit co-optation of others into Christian faith and also make clear that, while being committed to their own mission, Christians acknowledge other missions and support those whose temporal aims coincide with theirs.

Mission will be both chastened and invigorated by awareness that there are many spirits abroad. In any truly missionary encounter, these spirits will be recognized and their natures discerned by the Spirit of Christ. They will be seen and appreciated for what they are, without being rejected on the one hand or subsumed into Christianity on the other. Living together in the Spirit of Jesus Christ, among many spirits, we discern the Spirit of mission in order to participate in the mission of the Spirit.

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<sup>86</sup> Welker 1994: 47, x.

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