

Baptism in the Spirit

A theological analysis of the phenomenon of Spirit baptism

Torgeir Værnesbranden

Supervisor

Professor Terje Hegertun

MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society,

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Abstract

In this thesis I have given a critical analysis of prof. Dr. Frank D. Macchia's seminal work *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* and presented my own explorations of the phenomenon often referred to as *Baptism in the Spirit*.

In my analysis of Macchia's book, I discuss whether or not "the doctrine" of *Spirit baptism* is a valid doctrine in itself or merely a metaphor, useful in order to describe *the phenomenon* of Spirit baptism. My answer to that question is that Macchia uses the experience of Spirit baptism, central to the Pentecostal churches and other charismatic churches, to accent the role of the Spirit in systematic theology, thus deepening the spiritual power of the Spirit baptismal experience beyond mere individual or even church contexts.

In my own philosophical exploration of the Spirit baptism experience, I present, and lean on, a conceptual model created by theology research fellow Jo Bertil R. Værnesbranden of MF School of Theology, Religion and Society. His two twin theses are *Language as metaphor for faith* and *Language as metaphor for Spirit*, and it is the latter I will apply here. In applying the model, I suggest that something does indeed expand and broaden one's horizon in and through Spirit baptism. The model engages with voices from people like French philosopher Jacques Derrida, Soviet psychologist Lev Vygotsky, Martin Luther and American theologian Robert W. Jenson, and in my application of it I use ideas from Orthodox theologian Olivier Clément, catholic scholar Kilian McDonnell, and through him, the writings of 5th century Syriac bishop Philoxenus of Mabbug. Much in the same way Frank D. Macchia seeks to use the experience of Spirit baptism as "a lens through which to look" at theology, I make an attempt at using the model of *language as metaphor for Spirit* in order to construe a systematic-theological framework with the features needed to integrate the phenomenon known as baptism in the Spirit.

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1 Introduction

In this master's thesis I will be writing on the theme of "baptism in the Spirit". The reason for this was initially a personal one, related to a powerful spiritual experience some 13 years ago. Over the years the topic has become one of theological interest to me as well. The phrase "baptism in the Spirit" is taken, chiefly, from the book of Acts and has as such been a phrase well known to me most of my adult life. But many years passed before I suddenly had an experience, or an encounter, often described with the words "baptism in the Spirit". Acts 1:4-5.8 (NIV) reads

... Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me [Jesus] speak about. For John baptized with water, but in a few days you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit... you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you ; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.

These, and other verses in Acts speak of the powerful acts of the Apostles in the power of the Spirit. The stories always intrigued me - and left me with a strong sense that my Christian walk was very different from that of the believers in Acts. It didn't, however, leave me feeling disillusioned or disappointed, but rather curious and inquiring. After being strongly discouraged against "experimenting" with it from people in my own church, I eventually realized there was little chance of me learning more about the phenomenon there. However, towards my late teens I made friends with people from Pentecostal churches, and they seemed to me highly adept at all things charismatic.

After a further few years, on a grey and rainy November morning on the premises of a run-down council estate in London, I joined a few local saints on their weekly "prayer walk". At the sudden prompting of an elderly Pentecostal "brother,"¹ I sat down on a nearby bench so that they could lay hands on me and pray for the Spirit to baptize me. In the very public, and, quite possibly, least atmospheric setting imaginable, they started praying. After a few seconds I started sensing a tingling feeling in my right leg. I shook my foot to make it go away, assuming it was just my leg having fallen asleep. However, this tingling sensation intensified, and within

¹ The "brother's" name was Roy, and he would affectionately call everyone in our church "brother" or "sister" when he talked to us.

seconds it felt as if jolts of electricity, of power, shot through my entire body. I said "uh", or something of that affect, as I felt this power overtake me completely. I got up on my feet after about a minute but could hardly stand upright. When I spoke, my English friends said grinningly I sounded either drunk or Irish (as opposed to the very distinct Norwegian accent I would normally have). We all laughed and hugged, the prayer walk commenced and by then the jolts had subsided to tingling. Eventually, after five to ten minutes "things were back to normal". Except, of course, they weren't really.

Or were they?

I didn't know quite what to make of it, other than that it felt *good* and I knew I had experienced something akin to the experiences my Pentecostal friends had been talking about, and that I could read about in the book of Acts. But *what*, exactly, was it I had experienced?

That question lingered with me and was part of my reason for starting theological studies – and it has lingered with me until this day, even when choosing the topic for my thesis.

The idea of some God granting an overwhelming and intense spiritual experience to anyone at all is ludicrous to most people, myself included. Was the experience real for me? When one thinks about it, and even more so if one adds the fact this happened to a young man on a bench outside a dilapidated house in a deprived area of London – it seems so unlikely, so made up, so easy to explain away by way of psychology or neurology.

In my theological studies, I had hoped to find answers within Pentecostal theology. To my surprise I realized that most of the theological work within Pentecostalism dealing with Spirit baptism was firmly within the field of Biblical theology, concerned mainly with exegeting the Lukan texts on the theme, or possibly on how to reconcile the seeming differences between Lukan and Pauline pneumatology. Fortunately, this changed when I during my master's studies encountered the works of professor Frank D. Macchia.

1.1 *Aim of the thesis*

Macchia's initial description of what prompted him to study theology, was very much like mine. Furthermore, a paraphrase of a question he framed in the opening chapter of *Baptized in the*

Spirit, became my personal question which also underlies this thesis: *What was this power that came upon me, with which I am to witness?*²

This question, however, isn't a very scientific one, or one easy to operationalize – but it will, and should, remain in the background of this thesis. The thesis has one primary research question and three secondary research questions. The primary research question is: What is Spirit baptism, systematic-theologically speaking? This question will be answered in two parts. In the first part I give a critical analysis of baptism in the Spirit, according to Frank D. Macchia's description. In the second part I explore the topic of Spirit baptism by way of phenomenological analysis, based on Jo Bertil R. Værnesbranden's conceptual model of language as metaphor for Spirit.³ The three secondary research questions driving the second part of this thesis forward are: 1) What is the ontological implication of Spirit baptism as it is phenomenologically described? 2) What is the eschatological (and pneumatological) implication of Spirit baptism as it is phenomenologically described? 3) Which features of a systematic-theological framework are able to – or necessary in order to – account for Spirit baptism as a phenomenon?

Thus, the flow of my thesis will set off with an introduction to the topic of Spirit baptism, granting it relevance from both Scripture and Tradition. I will show the prominent place of the phrase in the New Testament, and how it is closely related to the themes of Christian initiation, ecclesiology, the kingdom of God and eschatology. From the history of the Church I will point to influential fathers like Tertullian, John Chrysostom, Origen, Cyril of Jerusalem, and Hilary of Poitiers. Following this I will present professor Dr. Frank D. Macchia, arguing for the relevance of his voice in this thesis – both Macchia himself with regards to his status in global ecumenism generally, and Pentecostal theology specifically – and his book *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology*, which deals in no small degree with this particular topic. I then go on analyzing Macchia's theology on Spirit baptism critically, particularly the way in which he stretches his metaphor of Spirit baptism beyond the limits of recognition. In the second main section of the thesis, I embark upon my exploration the phenomenon of Spirit baptism, drawing eclectically on sources such as those listed above. The relevance of my sources will become clear as the thesis commences, but the last sections will clearly show that I have sinned

² Macchia (2006), 18. His question was: «What is this power with which we are clothed to witness for Christ?»

infinitely more than Frank Macchia in the area of “stretching metaphors”. To end with, I sum up my thesis by way of a highlighting insights gained, and of course also answering the initial questions driving this thesis forward.

In an attempt to reach the aim of this thesis, I will of course be engaging with Frank Macchia's description of Spirit baptism, which he expounds in his book *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (2006). Here, he couches the Pentecostal experience of baptism in the Spirit within a broader pneumatological framework than he claims has been the case up until his book. Bearing in mind the academic study of Pentecostal theology is still a field within theology that is being pioneered,³ I believe his claim is justified.

In my exploration, by way of phenomenological analysis, of the theme of Spirit baptism, I base my exploration on the conceptual model of *language as metaphor for Spirit*. This model is taken from the work of theology research fellow Jo Bertil Værnesbranden of MF School of Theology, Religion and Society where he is currently doing doctoral research entitled “*Language as a Metaphor for Faith*.”⁴ Værnesbranden’s model engages voices like those of Jacques Derrida, John D. Caputo, Martin Luther, and Robert W. Jenson, and in *my application* of the model I will draw on writings from people like Olivier Clément, Lev Vygotsky, Kilian McDonnell, and through McDonnell, the Syriac church father Philoxenus of Mabbug.

But before I start, two important notions need to be defined. The first is phenomenology. What is phenomenology, and, by extension, what is phenomenological method? The issue of how one can, in a methodologically robust manner, study personal experiences, is one Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen touches upon when he writes “the question of *method* in theology becomes acute... how [can one] collect and process testimonials, visions, prophecies, and similar material and make them ‘useful’ for an academic setting[?]”⁵

³ Up until the 80s, nearly all major systematic-theological works concerning Pentecostalism was done by people from *outside* the movement, and then the focus was mainly on Pentecostal spirituality. The theological work from *within* the movement, which was limited, was chiefly within the domain of Biblical theology.

⁴ Værnesbranden is currently working on a doctoral thesis. It is still, obviously, unpublished. However, Værnesbranden wrote his master’s thesis on the same topic in 2008. Regarding the current doctoral work, I will refer to material Værnesbranden has handed in at MF School of Theology, Religion and Society – namely, his project description from the spring of 2018, his PhD Seminar paper from the fall of 2019 and an essay on methodology also from the fall of 2019. All the material will obviously be listed in the bibliography.

⁵ Kärkkäinen 2010, 224.

To answer the question, let us define the concept of phenomenology, which is also, by extension, to define the phenomenological method, since phenomenology is a

...style of philosophizing, which emphasizes the attempt to get to the truth of matters, to describe *phenomena*, in the broadest sense as whatever appears in the manner in which it appears, that is as it manifests itself to consciousness, to the experiencer.⁶

Phenomenology is a way to describe phenomena as they manifest themselves to an experiencer. I will not claim, as an Husserlian phenomenologist perhaps would, that the phenomenological interpretation of my experience of Spirit baptism is a timeless truth, or as Heidegger's critique of Husserl goes – in the words of Moran – “too Cartesian and intellectualist in [the] account of human engagement with the world,... sterile epistemological formulations...”⁷ Rather, my phenomenological interpretation of my Spirit baptism may be regarded as an interpretation relative to the “world into which [I] find [myself] thrown, which reveals itself in the moods, the overall nature of which is summed up by Heidegger's notion of ‘Being-in-the-world’.”⁸ As such, it does not claim universal significance. But it nevertheless hopes to provide material of interest to, and benefit of, the ecumenical theological conversation.

The second notion to be defined, is theology, and, by extension, systematic theology.

As the late, great theologian Robert W. Jenson will be quoted much throughout the second part of this thesis, I will use his short but profound definition: “Theology is the church's enterprise of thought.”⁹ Based on that we can say that systematic theology is the church's *systematic* enterprise of thought. Hopefully the reader will, at least to some extent, recognize my attempts of “thought enterprise” in the following pages.

A last word on method. In this master's thesis, phenomenology will provide the method. But systematic theology will provide the topic and the tradition. This, I believe, does not go against the nature of the systematic theological enterprise.

⁶ Moran 2000, 4.

⁷ Ibid, 13.

⁸ Ibid, 13.

⁹ Jenson 1997, vii.

2 Spirit baptism

“Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers”? (Acts 19:2). To this question of the apostle Paul, Christians worldwide answer a wholehearted “yes”. Regardless of denominational background, the gift we received at baptism and/or conversion (depending on doctrinal beliefs) – the gift of the Holy Spirit itself – may be “fanned into flame” (2 Tim 1:6) later in life. Through an ever-deepening conversion to Christ Jesus we are all challenged to awaken this gift. Though by no means exhaustive, the following list taken from Kilian McDonnell¹⁰ and George T. Montague¹¹ gives us some examples of the manifold effects of the receiving the Spirit:

“Sanctification (1 Cor 6:11-19); a new and experiential relationship to God by which we cry ‘Abba, Father’ (Gal 4:6; Rom 8:15), and to Jesus whom we proclaim as Lord (1 Cor 12:3); a union with others in the bond of love, walking in the Spirit by the power of the Spirit (Gal 5:25); love, joy, peace and the other fruits of the Spirit (Gal 5:22); a new insight into the mysteries of God (Heb 6:4-5); the courageous boldness to witness even unto death (Acts 1:8 and the passim); the discernment of true doctrine (1 John 2:24-27); and gifts of praise, knowledge, prophecy, healing and other charisms of service for the upbuilding of the body of Christ, each according to the measure of Christ’s determination (1 Cor 12:7-11; Eph 4:7-16). As these gifts are sought (1 Cor 14:1) and discerned (1 Thes 5:19-21), they empower members to create that communion which the church is meant to be and to proclaim the church’s message of love, justice and peace to the world. The gift of the Spirit which is God’s infinite love (Rom 5:5) can never be totally appropriated, and for that reason it must be sought repeatedly through prayer (Acts 4:23-31); indeed, at times it needs to be stirred up or rekindled (2 Tim 1:6-7).”¹²

¹⁰ Kilian McDonnell is a Benedictine monk (O.S.B), president of the Institute for Ecumenical and Culture research, co-chair of the international classical Pentecostal/Roman Catholic dialogue, participant in the international Disciples of Christ/Roman Catholic and the national Lutheran/Roman Catholic Dialogues.

¹¹ George T. Montague is a Marianist Catholic Professor of theology at St. Mary’s University, San Antonio. He is author of *The Holy Spirit: Growth of a Biblical Tradition*. Past president of the Catholic Biblical Association of America, former editor of *Catholic Biblical Quarterly*, consultant of the National Service Committee for the Charismatic Renewal.

¹² Montague & McDonnell 1991b, 6.

Clearly, baptism in the Spirit is about much more than mere “high voltage” spiritual experiences. Still, Spirit baptism seems to me to be a theme of relative neglect in most Christian traditions. This neglect is puzzling, considering Pentecostal and charismatic movements are amongst the largest Christian movements in the world.¹³ But even more so, all four gospels introduce Jesus’ ministry with His Spirit baptism, or a Spirit baptism metaphor. Spirit baptism and its effects has a very prominent place in the book of Acts. As the above list from McDonnell and Montague demonstrate, the functional effects of the baptism are very wide and visible all through the New Testament. It is my clear opinion that more attention should be given to this theme, both Spirit baptism a phenomenon, and Spirit baptism term or topic within systematic theology. Professor Frank D. Macchia has contributed greatly to this cause, but before we get to the literary study of his work, it is helpful to reflect on the following two questions: How has Pentecostals viewed Spirit baptism, historically? And, what is the Pentecostal view of the doctrine in our time?

2.1 Pentecostalism’s doctrine of Spirit baptism

In the Pentecostal movement’s early years, Spirit baptism was understood as a second reception of the Spirit, separate from the first reception at the moment of conversion. It was as if it was a “rite of passage” to spiritual gifts and spiritual fulfilment. Although it might be said with Steven J. Land¹⁴ that the first years of a movement represents its DNA, not its “infancy,”¹⁵ that only goes for the Pentecostal *experience* of Spirit baptism. There wasn’t much regard for diligent systematic-theological work and reflection on baptism in the Spirit, and thus for the first Pentecostals it was chiefly a matter of “proof reading” the New Testament – the book of Acts in particular – to see if the experience had scriptural precedent. Kenneth Archer describes early Pentecostalism’s method of biblical interpretation as “premodern.”¹⁶ The theology of Spirit baptism was based on the same Lukan Biblical texts as they found in their proof reading. It follows, then, that Spirit baptism for early Pentecostals was understood as a second blessing, a

¹³ According to a Pew Research Center study, conducted by Center for the Study of Global Christianity at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary, showed that the number of charismatic and Pentecostal Christians in the world amounted to 584 million people in 2011. <https://www.pewforum.org/2011/12/19/global-christianity-exec/>

¹⁴ Steven J. Land is President and Professor of Pentecostal Theology at the Pentecostal Theological Seminary in Cleveland, TN, USA.

¹⁵ Land 2010, introduction (unnumbered pages). In the view of Kenneth Archer, early Pentecostalism was actively *against* the idea of working systematic-theologically on the doctrine of Spirit baptism. So, in that sense, there wasn’t even an “infant” period to talk about regarding the Pentecostal theology of Spirit baptism.

¹⁶ Archer 2009, 89.

reception of the Spirit separate from one's baptism, only confirmed with the "evidence" of speaking in tongues.¹⁷

In modern Pentecostalism, however, there has been a shift of focus. The Pentecostal experience of Spirit baptism as empowerment for witness, is considered as "a release of an already-indwelling Spirit in life."¹⁸ Implied in this is the fact that the doctrine "baptism in the Spirit" has disappeared from modern Pentecostal theology, as witnessed by the fact that the entire topic is only mentioned with a couple of lines in the influential work *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* by the distinguished Pentecostal scholar Steven J. Land. It evidently became hard to contend that a second reception of the Spirit, as an entry to a "higher level" of spiritual power and fullness, could be in harmony with the canonical voices in the NT; there was no way of justifying their early beliefs exegetically when taking the writings of Paul, John, Peter and Matthew into the equation, rather than mere Lukan monologue. The renowned theologian Frank D. Macchia, who will be presented more fully in the next section, laments this trend of neglecting the theological importance of Spirit baptism. Hence his efforts in *Baptized in the Spirit* to make it relevant again. He agrees with modern Pentecostalism's view that the Spirit remains with the believer from the moment of regeneration (whether that be regeneration the way baptists¹⁹ or sacramental theologies see it) and thus the typical phrases of "baptized in", "poured out", "filling up", "coming upon", "falling upon" and the like, are justified from a superficial reading of the New Testament wording. But they are not doctrinal statements with regards to the reception of the Spirit. The current Pentecostal focus comes across as less elitist and triumphalist than what was the case in the early days of Pentecostalism. This is obviously a good thing and rings truer with the spirit of, well, the Spirit. But professor Macchia seeks to go beyond this modern, brushed up understanding of Spirit baptism, in order to grant it more relevance at the ecumenical table.

2.2 Macchia's aim

Macchia's aim is to explore the Pentecostal experience of "Spirit baptism" through using "Spirit baptism" as an organizing principle in the outworking of his Pentecostal theology. He is a voice well worth listening to in academic Pentecostal circles. He is currently professor of Christian

¹⁷ Ibid, 103.

¹⁸ Macchia 2006, 77.

¹⁹ Not just capital B Baptists, but theologies that adhere to baptistic view of regeneration.

Theology at Vanguard University, CA, US, and Associate Director of the Centre for Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies, Bangor University, Wales, UK. He has served as past president of the Society of Pentecostal Studies as well as editor for its journal, *Pneuma*. For six years he has served on the Faith and Order Commission of the National Council of Churches (USA), and has been involved in the international Reformed/Pentecostal dialogue and the consultation on Christian Unity held at Princeton Theological Seminary. He did his D.Theol studies at the University of Basel under Jan Milic Lochman, has been involved with the Ecumenical Institute in Strasbourg, and also Martin Luther University in Wittenberg. The combination of these influences, make him ideally suited to formulate “a global Pentecostal theology”, as the subtitle of his *Baptized in the Spirit* reads. Furthermore, Macchia’s efforts to engage voices from the margins of social power and influence, from both past and contemporary contexts, gives him a distinct perspective on what could justifiably be labelled the most distinctive of early Pentecostalism’s doctrines – the doctrine of Spirit baptism.

Being an ecumenical theologian from a Pentecostal tradition, Macchia is concerned about Pentecostalism’s contribution to the ecumenical movement. Only when Pentecostalism speaks from the vantage point of its unique gifting as a movement of Christian affirmation, are the Pentecostal distinctives – especially the experience and the doctrine of Spirit baptism – valuable at the global and ecumenical table, according to Macchia.²⁰ In order to achieve this, Macchia proposes a *reworking* of the Pentecostal distinctives “in a way that cherishes our unique accents but expands them in response to the broader contours of the biblical witness and the diversity of voices at the ecumenical table”.²¹ Which, in my view, is a nice way of saying that the traditional Pentecostal doctrine of baptism in the Spirit is faulty, or lacking. Nevertheless, Macchia’s book *Baptized in the Spirit* attempts to do just this: “expand” the doctrine of Spirit baptism “in a way that cherishes” Pentecostalism’s “unique accents” in response to “the diversity of voices at the ecumenical table” and “the broader contours of the biblical witness”. In the remainder of this section I will present more thoroughly how Frank D. Macchia attempts to rework and broaden the doctrine of Spirit baptism in his seminal work *Baptized in the Spirit*, in a way that is true at the same time to Pentecostalism’s distinctive theological accents and to Pentecostal experience.

²⁰ Macchia 2006, 25.

²¹ *Ibid*, 25.

First, Macchia's use of the term "Spirit baptism" / "baptism in the Spirit" needs to be addressed. He is obviously justified in using the phrase, as it has a prominent place in the New Testament. The scriptures that use these exact phrases are from John the Baptist's statement, recorded in each of the four Gospels (Matt 3:11; Mark 1:8; Luk 3:16; John 1:33). Here the Baptist is saying that Jesus will "baptize with the Holy Spirit". In Acts 1:5 Luke has Jesus saying, "you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit" to his disciples, and 1 Cor 12:13 reads "we were all baptized by one Spirit". In *Baptized in the Spirit*, Macchia uses the phrase "Spirit baptism" in a wide variety of ways – contributing to the impression of actually moving away (not just "expanding" and "broadening") from the *doctrine of Spirit baptism* from Pentecostalism's early days. He refers to "the metaphor of Spirit baptism", "the central Pentecostal distinctive of Spirit baptism", and "Spirit baptism as an organizing principle". Furthermore, he uses the phrase in several different contexts: With regards to ecumenical dialogue, in the context of systematic theology, in dialogue with fellow Pentecostal scholars and in relation to Biblical texts. The reason for this, Macchia claims, is his desire to have the term function "in multiple ways to guide the Pentecostal movement towards a Trinitarian, Christoformistic, pneumatologically rich and diverse, and eschatologically robust version of Christian life and thought."²² Macchia defends this, saying it is because

Spirit baptism draws one into the field of God's presence and transforms one's life with the love of God. Everything we do and say, from Scripture reading to action in the world, takes place as a functional component of this baptism. This baptism implies that we do not relate to God as an object of reflection; rather, we are baptized into God as a powerful field of experience, which opens up wonders and joys as a daily experience.²³

Macchia's aim of reworking and broadening the doctrine of Spirit baptism is very clear here. But again, the sheer scope of Macchia's project presses the question of whether or not we might still be talking of "the doctrine of" Spirit baptism after Macchia has "reworked" and "broadened" the definition. A "Trinitarian", "Christoformistic", "Pneumatologically rich and diverse" and "eschatologically robust" version of Christian "life" and "thought" can hardly be said to exclude *anything*, and in saying the "doctrine of Spirit baptism" is everything, one simultaneously and indirectly says it is nothing. Perhaps Macchia's goal, as a leading scholar

²² Macchia 2006, 56.

²³ *Ibid*, 56.

within global Pentecostalism, is a pastoral one rather than systematic-theological. He himself says *Baptized in the Spirit* is not a work of systematic theology, but “rather a testing of the waters as to how this might relate to certain prominent theological loci”²⁴ - meaning he’s merely contributing to the conversation. But if that’s the case, it is not with just any voice, if I dare say. He wants to provide Pentecostals “with a way of contributing their unique emphasis”²⁵ on Spirit baptism to a “robust orthodox faith... that is rooted in... the Father as the Creator, centered in the Son as Spirit Baptizer and inaugurator of the kingdom of God, and richly directed toward the life of the eschatological Spirit in perfecting creation as the final dwelling place of God.”²⁶ He goes on to highlight that orthopathos and orthopraxis²⁷ is implicit in orthodoxy, as pointed out by Steven J. Land in his book *Pentecostal Spirituality*. To me this makes it clear that Macchia is primarily occupied with the spiritual lives of Pentecostals – or Pentecostal spirituality, if you will. He distances himself from language that gives the impression of seeking an encounter with the Spirit “beyond” Christ, which unfortunately has been present as an unhealthy element in Pentecostal spirituality. Macchia wants to show how the experience of Spirit baptism is an experience of “baptism into God”, where God is both the Gift and the Giver of eternal life. Spirit baptism to Macchia is the gift of the Spirit, by the Spirit, and thus “Spirit baptism supplies us with a lens through which to view God and the divine will for creation.”²⁸ He seeks to cherish and respect the Pentecostals’ yearning for renewal of the already indwelling Spirit, in a way that doesn’t come at the expense of broader pneumatological issues. These broader issues within pneumatology are needed to widen the understanding of Spirit baptism that it deserves, and it will also deepen the spiritual power of the experience. Baptism in the Spirit simply cannot, as an experience of charismatic power and enrichment, be separated from regeneration and Christian initiation. And that goes not just for the *moment* of regeneration, but also the *ongoing* regeneration in sanctification.

In sum, Spirit baptism is for Macchia a very real *phenomenon*, experienced by millions of Christians worldwide in the Pentecostal churches and charismatic movements within mainline churches. Theologically speaking he uses the term as just one metaphor amongst other possible

²⁴ Ibid, 17.

²⁵ Ibid, 112.

²⁶ Macchia 2006, 112.

²⁷ Orthopraxis (“right practice”) and orthopathos (“right affections”) constitutes, together with orthodoxy (“right praise/belief”) the three elements integrated in spirituality. Steven J. Land develops this in *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (2010).

²⁸ Macchia 2006, 117.

metaphors: “[the Spirit baptismal metaphor] is not the only one possible describing God’s redemptive act and the participation of creation in it, but it is one that accents the pneumatological substance and goal of that act.”²⁹ Macchia’s real aim, I believe, is to accent the *experience* of Spirit baptism and couch it within a theologically robust and pastorally sound spirituality. He does this by using Spirit baptism as a lens through which to approach theology, in order to accent the work of the Spirit in theology and life. In doing so, he not only turns to the Scriptures, but also to the authority early church.

2.3 The Church fathers on baptism and the Holy Spirit

Leaning on the writings of Killian McDonnell, O.S.B. and George T. Montague, S.M., Macchia finds ample evidence from the early post-biblical period that baptism in the Spirit was considered part of the liturgy connected to the initiation rites and thus part of the early church’s public life. I will expand on this in the following.

The material from Montague and McDonnell that Macchia draws on, demonstrate how church fathers like Justin Martyr, Origen, Didymus the Blind, and Cyril of Jerusalem used “baptism in the Holy Spirit” as a term synonymous with Christian initiation. Obviously, “Spirit baptism” then means something quite apart from early Pentecostalism’s belief of a “doctrine of Spirit baptism” as Spirit baptism subsequent from the reception of the Spirit at regeneration. For the Church fathers – as it is for a majority of Christians to this day - being baptized in the Spirit was another way of saying that the Spirit was given (and received) in water baptism. Furthermore, Montague and McDonnell show how several Church fathers – some of whom are even considered among the Doctors of the Church – “clearly regarded the reception of charisms as integral to Christian initiation”:³⁰ Tertullian (in his Catholic period), Hilary of Poitiers, Cyril of Jerusalem, John Chrysostom, John of Apamea, Philoxenus of Mabbug, Severus of Antioch, and Joseph Hazzaya. Interestingly, reception of charisms, particularly the gifts of tongues, was considered in early Pentecostalism to be the only valid “proof” of one’s Spirit baptism. Suffice to say, the phrase “baptism in the Holy Spirit”, and experiences associated with this Spirit baptism, was a part of the public life of the church, an integrated part of the early, post-biblical church’s liturgy in connection with the initiation rites. The Church fathers listed represent a geographically widespread area, and the three major languages in the first centuries of the

²⁹ Ibid, 127.

³⁰ Montague & McDonnell 1991b, 7.

Church: Greek, Latin and Syriac. The following quotes from Tertullian, Hilary and John Chrysostom respectively, demonstrate the above points clearly.

Speaking to the newly baptized just before they could receive their first holy communion, Tertullian says

“Therefore, you blessed ones, for whom the grace of God is waiting, when you come up from the most sacred bath of the new birth, when you spread your hands for the first time in your mother’s house [the church] with your brethren, ask your Father, ask your Lord, for the special gift of his inheritance, the distribution of charisms, which form an additional, underlying feature [of baptism]. ‘Ask’, He [the Lord] says, ‘and you shall receive.’ In fact, you have sought, and it has been added to you.”³¹

Even more startingly, Hilary, one of the Doctors of the Church, describes the experience of Spirit baptism itself:

“We who have been reborn through the sacrament of baptism experience intense joy when we feel within us the first stirring of the Holy Spirit.”³²

And lastly this quote from John Chrysostom, talking about the reception of charisms within the liturgy of initiation in the apostolic church:

“Whoever was baptized at once spoke in tongues, and not only in tongues, but many prophesied; some performed many other wonderful works.”³³

In conclusion, the experience often referred to as Spirit baptism had its place in the early, post-biblical church. If not as a doctrine in itself (in the way Pentecostalism understands their doctrine of Spirit baptism), the *experience* was expected to be *experienced* in relation to the initiation rites. If the early church would talk of “a doctrine” of Spirit baptism, it would be equated to the reception of the Spirit in conversion and the rites of initiation (water baptism, anointing, and the first Holy Communion). When Macchia draws on the history of the undivided

³¹ Montague & McDonnell 1991b, 8.

³² Ibid, 9.

³³ Ibid, 9.

church in his global Pentecostal theology, he's in my view unable to find justification for the early 1900s Pentecostal doctrine of "baptism in the Spirit", but there is ample evidence of the experience modern Pentecostals yearn for – and call for the worldwide church to be renewed by. Let us now turn more explicitly to the Scriptures.

2.4 Exegetical basis of Macchia's theology of Spirit baptism

In his "global Pentecostal theology" on Spirit baptism, Macchia takes into account canonical voices from both the New Testament and the Old Testament. Summarily speaking, one might say that Luke understands the Spirit baptism metaphor charismatically, whereas Paul speaks of Spirit baptismal metaphors as soteriological, incorporative and initiatory. And Macchia tries to integrate both, in addition to other canonical voices, under the header of the Spirit baptism metaphor.

2.4.1 Old Testament

From the Old Testament, Macchia considers the Spirit hovering over the waters in the creation story in Gen 1 relevant and connected to the Spirit's descent (in the form a dove) on Jesus at His baptism in the Jordan river. Macchia sees the same connection between the story of Noah, the dove and "new creation" in Gen 6-9. John the Baptist, as the last prophet of the Old Covenant, "forges [the connection] between Jesus as the Spirit Baptizer and the inauguration of the kingdom of God to establish God's lordship in history" in a way that is "rooted in the OT assumption that the divine presence will make this lordship a reality as a source of freedom and redemption for humanity."³⁴ Likewise, Jesus as, from the Old Testament perspective, the anointed Messiah is "being commissioned... to usher in the kingdom of God in power to make all things new." It seems clear, Macchia says as he connects the Old and the New Testament, "that Spirit baptism in Matthew 3 and parallel synoptic texts is granted broad eschatological implications that cannot be exhausted in any version of Christian initiation or of the essence of the church."³⁵ The New Testament notions of Christian initiation and the Church is insufficient: The broader, even cosmic Old Testament motifs need to be taken into account in securing an exegetical basis for Macchia's theology of Spirit baptism.

³⁴ Macchia 2006, 94.

³⁵ Ibid, 86.

2.4.2 New Testament

Macchia draws on Pentecostal New Testament scholars like Gordon Fee, Roger Stronstad and Robert Menzies in presenting Pentecostalism's traditional exegetical basis for its understanding of the doctrine of Spirit baptism. That involves a heavy emphasis on the Lukan accounts – according to Macchia, at the expense of Paul and the other New Testament authors. But in line with his goal of “reworking” and “broadening” the doctrine, he sets out to find an “all-encompassing framework [that] pneumatologically might be useful in couching the complementary relationship between Luke and Paul.”³⁶

Macchia laments the fact that talk of “Spirit baptism” is often limited to notions of rites of initiation, and following from that, competing ecclesiologies. What he wants to do instead, is to relate Spirit baptism *primarily* to the kingdom of God, and then, *secondarily*, to the church. He starts off by interpreting Luke's pneumatology as more expansive than mere charismatic empowerment.

“Stay in the city until you have been clothed with power from on high” (Luke 24:49), Jesus said to his disciples in the end of Luke's gospel. “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you” (Acts 1:8), Jesus says according to Luke in Acts. Elsewhere in Acts we read in Acts 2 that on the day of Pentecost,

All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken... ..” we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” (Acts 2:4-6.11b)

For Luke, Macchia says, the accent is on *functioning* in Christ in the power of the Spirit. Macchia agrees with Stronstad and Menzies, in the view that Luke's understanding of Spirit baptism is charismatic – as having to do with *empowerment for witness* (as Menzies' commentary on Luke-Acts is called). But at the same time, and on the basis of the Lukan texts quoted above, Macchia criticizes Stronstad and Menzies for focusing too narrowly on

³⁶ Macchia 2006, 58.

charismatic empowerment in Luke, at the expense of some of the nuances of Luke's pneumatology.

Before his ascension, Jesus spoke to the disciples "about the kingdom of God" (Acts 1:3). They're in Jerusalem, Macchia explains, "the significant city to the kingdom's fulfilment. It is in answer to their question about the fulfilment of the *kingdom* that Jesus directs them to the coming empowerment of the Spirit for witness."³⁷ Also, the Spirit's presence was about much more than charismatic gifts of the Spirit. In Acts 2:42-48, Macchia points out how the Spirit inspired devotion to the teaching of the apostles, broke down barriers between estranged people, inspired the common meal, and enriched the praise.³⁸ Furthermore, Macchia shows how Luke is "quick to note... the final apocalyptic horizon of [the Pentecost event]"³⁹ in Acts 2: The tongues of fire and the mighty sounds of a rushing wind is linked to the Day of the Lord consisting of "blood and fire and billows of smoke" (Acts 2:19-20). And for Paul, one's initiation into the body of Christ is only the penultimate fulfilment of Spirit baptism⁴⁰ (1 Cor 12:13). This means, the way Macchia sees it, that "Spirit baptism is signaled at Pentecost by an eschatological theophany of the presence of God to restore and to judge"⁴¹ and that the Spirit is "given at Pentecost but fulfilled in the final act of salvation at Christ's return".⁴² The scope of the Pentecostal pneumatology Macchia sketches out here could hardly be broader.

Paul's writing on "Spirit baptism" (understood in a broad sense) and Pentecost integrates on the one hand the cosmic transformation implied in apocalyptic hope, with Luke's focus of divine infilling on the other. Paul's description of Pentecost in Eph 4:7-10 reads

But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to his people." (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.

³⁷ Macchia 2006, 79.

³⁸ Ibid, 79.

³⁹ Ibid, 86.

⁴⁰ Ibid, 103.

⁴¹ Ibid, 86.

⁴² Ibid, 86.

Here, Macchia points out, Paul says that the *goal* of Jesus' bestowal of the Spirit and the gifts of the Spirit, is that Christ "will fill the whole universe" with his presence. This reading by Macchia⁴³ makes it clear for him that "Pentecost becomes a symbol, not only of the divine breath filling and charismatically empowering God's people, but also indwelling all of creation one day."⁴⁴ Here, Macchia sees the need to expand the concept of "Spirit baptism" to also include ecology, a perspective I sincerely hope Macchia – or someone equally gifted – will develop more fully some time.

Reading Paul's letters, Macchia finds there an accent on *being* in Christ, rather than Luke's *functioning* in Christ. When Paul speaks of Spirit baptism in the fluid metaphors connected to the concept, he suggests pneumatologically broader boundaries than mere "empowerment for witness". Paul connects Spirit baptism with confession, faith and sealing through water baptism. His primary concern is incorporation into Christ, and Paul attaches cosmic significance to the "baptism" of the Spirit (Rom 8). Whereas Stronstad and Menzies keep Luke's and Paul's understandings of Spirit baptism apart and base their Pentecostal view of Spirit baptism primarily on Luke, Macchia wants to integrate Paul's soteriological and Luke's charismatic understanding of Spirit baptism. "...We should speak of a theology of Spirit baptism that is soteriologically and charismatically defined, an event that has more than one dimension because it is eschatological in nature and not wholly defined by notions of Christian initiation."⁴⁵ These "more than one dimensions" perspectives on Spirit baptism, Macchia develops more fully when he sets off to expand the boundaries of the doctrine theologically.

2.5 *Expanding the theological boundaries of the phenomenon of Spirit baptism*

Macchia notes how many scholars from both outside and within Pentecostal circles debate whether Spirit baptism really is *the* central distinctive of the movement. In his attempts to reinvigorate Pentecostal theology in general, and pneumatology in particular, Macchia expands the Spirit baptism metaphor by Pentecostalism's eschatological vision⁴⁶ in order to arrive at a

⁴³ Ibid, 102.

⁴⁴ Macchia 2006, 103.

⁴⁵ Ibid, 16.

⁴⁶ Often referred to as *the latter rain of the Spirit* by Pentecostals, a phrase taken from the Old Testament book of Zechariah: "Ask the Lord for rain in the time of the latter rain. The Lord will make flashing clouds; He will give them showers of rain, grass in the field for everyone." (Zec 10:1). The *latter rain* is understood as a time of increase in heavenly blessings as the day of judgment draws closer. It could also be a good name for a punk rock band.

properly Pentecostal understanding of the kingdom of God in general, and eschatology specifically. One could say that the metaphor of Spirit baptism gets us at the pneumatological substance of eschatology, and consciously recognizing the first article of the Apostolic Creed can aid us in expanding the reach of Spirit baptism – “We believe in God the Father, Creator of heaven and earth.” Macchia says “eschatology can only involve all of creation in its implicit yearning for the kingdom to come if the Spirit is seen as involved in the reach of life toward renewal in all things.”⁴⁷ He attempts to redefine Spirit baptism in the light of eschatology and sanctification, with the intention of using the sanctification theme of participation in, and union with, God to augment the kingdom of God motif. As a metaphor Spirit baptism implies a participation in the life-transforming presence of God and this makes it well suited as a point of integration between eschatology and sanctification. And this integration could also function as a point of departure for a Pentecostal theology of the third article. This “Spirit baptism” of all creation also addresses an in my view underwhelming focus on ecology in Pentecostal circles. An eschatological interpretation of Spirit baptism not only revitalizes Spirit baptism by expanding it theologically, but it also revitalizes eschatology as a richly pneumatological and even ecological concept. To sum up with Macchia:

None of the theological understandings of Christian initiation to the life of the Spirit discussed... can exhaust the meaning of Spirit baptism. The connection between Spirit baptism and the inauguration of the kingdom of God attributed to John the Baptist (Matt 3:1-12) and to Jesus himself (Acts 1:2-8) grants this metaphor eschatological expansiveness and transcendence.⁴⁸

In other words, Spirit baptism is obviously connected to the kingdom of God in the New Testament. But is it then automatically clear what the theological nature of this connection is? To ask with Macchia: “What does it mean *theologically* to say that Jesus will usher in the kingdom of God as the Spirit Baptizer?”⁴⁹ And to add a question along the lines of Macchia’s aim with his work: What does it mean *to the experience of Spirit baptism* to say that Jesus will usher in the kingdom of God as the Spirit Baptizer? In this section I will try to expound on Macchia’s answers given above.

⁴⁷ Macchia 2006, 41.

⁴⁸ Ibid, 90.

⁴⁹ Ibid, 91 (italics added).

In elaborating on this, I will restate the question and then answer by breaking up a paragraph from Macchia to show how his view of the Spirit baptismal experience has three steps; the one expanding and broadening the scope of the other. What does it mean when we say that Jesus will usher in the kingdom of God as the Spirit Baptizer?

Macchia highlights how “[James D. G.] Dunn limits Spirit baptism to the notion of Christian initiation the life of the Spirit”⁵⁰ and for Dunn the scope of the event is thus limited to the *individual* level – one’s *initiation*. Macchia goes on to say, “Spirit baptism can be received by faith alone and yet be experienced in a way that is integral to the fulfilment of the metaphor’s meaning to the life of the church.”⁵¹ Here, he points out that the experience may be *beyond the individual level*, and rather, integral to the fulfilment of the metaphor’s meaning to the *life of the church*. Obviously, the categories of “*the life of the church*” are quite different to individualistic or even private categories of feelings or sensations.

But Macchia goes on to add that the experience of the event of Spirit baptism is even broader in its meaning. Much deeper than a merely individual level, and broader even than the church: “It is also in its more *expansive eschatological fulfilment* an experience of power among other things to be sought after and enjoyed by the people of God.”⁵² To Macchia, power may certainly be involved in the experience of Spirit baptism – but not the sort of power to boost one’s intensity in prayer and enthusiasm in studying the book of Leviticus. It is, rather, the kind of power that is from the *future*, a force that *transcends time and space* and involves yourself, the worldwide church and even *all of creation*. Your neighbor’s dog, the rain forest, the Greenland ice cap, the work of artists, the architecture of a city, the beauty of nature, the outcasts in society, the embarrassing guy from church with his bullhorn and pamphlets out on the street corner trying to make eye contact with you as you pass by. It is the power that takes us up into God, by the grace of God, to live in the Spirit by the power of the Spirit, following the call to ever new frontiers of establishing the kingdom of God’s love. As Macchia points out, Jürgen Moltmann notes that “through the gifts of the Spirit, the Spirit exercises eschatological freedom to expand, diversify, and proliferate the many expressions of divine grace in the world”.⁵³ There is a fundamental freedom on behalf of the Giver, meaning baptism in the Spirit is an event not

⁵⁰ Macchia 2006, 70.

⁵¹ Ibid, 70.

⁵² Ibid, 70.

⁵³ Ibid, 77.

dependent on human experience. And as if to stretch our minds even more, Macchia – drawing on Gregor of Nyssa - highlights the Trinitarian nature of the event.

The Son is the King and the Spirit is the kingdom in the fulfilment of the Father’s will. Through Christ as Spirit Baptizer, the Spirit brings creation into the kingdom of the King by indwelling all things with the divine presence so as to deliver creation from the reign of death unto the reign of life.⁵⁴

Baptizing in the Spirit is the same as establishing the kingdom of God, and where the kingdom is established, eschatological time has been united with linear time. Both past and present is seen in the light of Jesus’ coming in the eschaton, and being baptized into eschatological time, the past’s hold on us is altered. Not forgetting the balance between “now” and “not yet” with regards to the kingdom, Macchia says “the kingdom of God represents the sovereign rule of God inaugurated in Christ’s redemptive work but yet to be fulfilled in his return in power to make all things new.”⁵⁵ It is already “now” but also “not yet”.

This new life is dynamic, not static. This is because the kingdom, according to Matt 12:28 and Rom 14:17, has to do with the *life* of the Spirit of God, not with a certain place or moment in time. Thus, creation is opened up to new possibilities of hope and renewal. The establishment of God’s kingdom is not only, then, a divine task, but also something “we creatures” can participate in. Accordingly, it is not primarily about religion but about a life in God, filled with the fruits of the Spirit and dedicated to God’s righteousness on earth: ‘For the kingdom of God is not a matter of eating or drinking but of righteousness, peace and joy in the Holy Spirit’ (Rom 14:17)”.⁵⁶ Grace is granted us in Christian initiation *and* it confronts us with something *genuinely new* from beyond.

Here we are not dealing with two separate receptions of grace, but merely working out the *theological*⁵⁷ consequence of the fact that a *living relationship* with God is what is granted us in initiation, and not just grace as a material deposit that may or may not burst forth later in life. Our encounters with the Spirit, who indwells us, may very well be both unprecedented and unexpected since Christ’s new birth is itself unprecedented, and being a part of eschatological,

⁵⁴ Macchia 2006, 91.

⁵⁵ Ibid, 97.

⁵⁶ Ibid, 97.

⁵⁷ The logical outcome of a theological principle; theo-logical.

transcendent time, it is an event that *continues* to be such. Macchia draws a parallel to sacramental churches, who invoke the Holy Spirit in the celebration of Holy Communion. They invoke the Spirit, he says, “as a way of connecting an ongoing, fresh reception of the Spirit to baptism as the rite of initiation.”⁵⁸ Perhaps the “low” view of sacraments, liturgy and rites in Pentecostalism in fact weakens their pneumatology, contrary to the popular (and dare I say, triumphalist) belief in some charismatic circles that “less sacraments” equals “more Spirit”? I believe so.

Aware that this understanding of Spirit baptism is most likely not familiar to many Pentecostals, Macchia insists that this eschatological, cosmic understanding of it, is the context which the New Testament surrounds this phenomenon with. Macchia appeals to the authority of the great scholar Ernst Käsemann⁵⁹ in reiterating that

There is an inseparable connection between personal redemption/empowerment and cosmic renewal in the apocalyptic theological context of the Spirit’s work in the new Testament that makes *a restriction of our pneumatological categories to personal, existential, and even ecclesial contexts unthinkable* (Rom 8:18-25).⁶⁰

Despite the fact Pentecostals long have “connected Spirit baptism to the signs and wonders of the inauguration of the kingdom of God that foreshadow the new creation to come”,⁶¹ Macchia believes it’s something they’ve merely “intuited” by stressing the experience of Spirit baptism “as the presence of God to empower us for witness to Christ as the one who conquers sin, sickness and death.”⁶² Macchia wants to elaborate on the implication of what Pentecostals have “intuited”, and states

all of our soteriological and charismatic categories achieve their coherence in [the] wedding of the kingdom of God and Spirit baptism begun in the message of John the Baptist and fulfilled with different nuances elsewhere in the New Testament.⁶³

⁵⁸ Macchia 2006, 75.

⁵⁹ Who, admittedly, is not very likely to be considered a spiritual guide to any Pentecostal pastors – at all.

⁶⁰ Macchia 2006, 105. Italics added.

⁶¹ Ibid, 105.

⁶² Ibid, 105.

⁶³ Ibid, 105.

And since the kingdom of God “is pneumatological in substance”, it also has love, “the love enjoyed between the Father and Son and with creation, as its substance... [The] establishment of God’s reign is Spirit baptism ultimately fulfilled.”⁶⁴

In elaborating on love as the substance of the kingdom of God, Macchia concludes

the transformative power of the kingdom... has a Christoformistic goal and direction. The field of the Spirit and of the kingdom is the field of the risen and ascended Christ’s increasingly diverse presence.”⁶⁵

It is, however, not just the field of the risen Christ, but also of the crucified Christ. Thus, reaching out to others, having solidarity with suffering people everywhere and bearing the burdens of each other are all kenotic acts that are in fact establishing the kingdom. This is hardly what I had in mind after my own experience of “Spirit baptism”; being empowered to live the life of the crucified Christ. But surely, this is what Christian witness should look like. In relation to my initial question – “what is this power with which I was clothed?” – Macchia would perhaps answer that it was a power “determined and evaluated according to the specifics and implications of the redemptive story enacted in Christ.”⁶⁶ I will now proceed to exploring the phenomenon of Spirit baptism by way of phenomenological analysis.

⁶⁴ Ibid, 105.

⁶⁵ Macchia 2006, 106.

⁶⁶ Ibid, 128.

3 A phenomenological exploration of Spirit baptism

In this chapter I would like, with the critical analysis of Macchia as background, to explore systematic-theologically and phenomenologically Spirit baptism as phenomenon. Spirit baptism can be viewed from a variety of viewpoints. It can be explored exegetically, that is, one can conduct an expository exegesis of relevant passages from the Scriptures, possibly synthesized under the heading of Biblical theology. Or, it can be explored empirically, seeking to define and describe the experience based on an analysis of empirical data. Or, it can be explored systematically, that is, a theology of Spirit baptism can be developed on the basis of one or more theological and/or philosophical traditions. Traditionally, theology of Spirit baptism has been the hallmark of Pentecostal theology, whereas many of the other mainstream denominations, especially within the Protestant traditions, have had an underdeveloped pneumatology in general, and as part of that, also an underdeveloped – or non-topical – theology of Spirit baptism.

In this chapter we assume the third viewpoint, that of systematical-theological exploration. Still, we do not ignore the other viewpoints. We have – and will - read Scripture. And we take our point of departure from Spirit baptism as a phenomenon, and though phenomenological analysis cannot replace empirical analysis, still it is not wholly unrelated, seeing that phenomenology like empirical analysis ultimately seeks to account for the meaning of sense data.

Phenomenology, however, somewhat unlike empirical analysis, assumes a wider and more eclectic range (for the sake of meaning), in that we – in the particular instance of Spirit baptism - also seek to account for the observation that vocabulary about the experience is somewhat lacking or unclear. What is this phenomenon and how can we understand it? In the following chapter I will seek to give a systematic-theological framework for understanding Spirit baptism. In so doing I will, firstly, expand on the notion of Spirit baptism as a phenomenon. Secondly, I will indicate some ontological features related to pneumatology, relevant to our purpose. Thirdly, I will highlight some relevant aspects of eschatology, related to time and baptism, and fourthly, summarize the whole chapter and the entire thesis under the heading of Spirit baptism, trying to tie together the threads from the previous sections.

3.1 Phenomenon

Let us begin with a phenomenological description of Spirit baptism as a phenomenon. Bearing in mind that phenomenology is a way to describe phenomena as they manifest themselves to an experiencer,⁶⁷ I briefly describe Spirit baptism as it is typically described, a description I myself can ascribe to. Among vocabulary used of the experience is the following: 1) Filling – or a feeling of being filled to the point of spilling over (possibly into tongues), of having a real, unmediated, physical, spiritual experience. 2) Initiation, a new dimension (but not a new level – still feel as the same person), part of a whole – climax in what might have been a longer period (for example one year), but maybe just a few seconds – a repeated experience with same feeling, a feeling of change in the sense of preparation for what – it turned out – was to come. 3) Uncertainty, a feeling of «what was that?», unsure of how to interpret, a search for words and/or the commencement of using new vocabulary.

From this description, let us by way of phenomenological analysis highlight three issues or domains. The first is the question of inside/outside, or of an overlay. The experience is one of something being inside me, in me, transgressing the border between interior and exterior. It is also an experience of something being inside both in a physical and a mental sense. It is inside to the extent that there is no inside to which the experience does not pertain, then and there. As such the experience pertains to the whole person without residue. That is, the experience has an ontological character or dimension in that it pertains to who and what we are in the light of a who or a what outside of us. The event, in short, pertains to our view of reality and of what really is, deep down.

Ontologically determined experiences with a character of overlay has in theological terms been called justification, sanctification, or even deification (*theosis*).⁶⁸ One's character is changed, either momentarily (justification) or over time (sanctification), or one is placed in the proximity of – to the point of becoming one with (theosis) – another divine person. On the basis of this we can formulate the first of three questions: What is the ontological implication of Spirit baptism as it is phenomenologically described?

⁶⁷ See introduction above.

⁶⁸ The Luther-reception of the so-called Mannermaa-school in Helsinki has shown how the Orthodox doctrine of theosis and the Lutheran doctrine of justification significantly overlap. Braaten and Jenson write about this in *Union in Christ* (1998).

The second issue or domain is the question of time. The experience of spirit baptism is described in terms of initiation, repetition and temporality. Initiation marks the beginning of something new, of a new time or phase, establishes a before and an after. It makes a mark in time. Repetition means that the same, or a similar, experience can or will occur at later points. In that sense the first occurrence of the experience is not unique in nature, but at the same time marks the inauguration of a new *kind* of experience. Temporality means that the experience is not everlasting but lasts for a little while (typically a few seconds or up to a few minutes). It might possibly occur again from time to time.

The ephemeral character of these experiences points to a fundamental freedom on the behalf of the other part, and a fundamental passivity on behalf of the receiver. It is the matter of an in-breaking of which we do not have control. The character of onset/offset, of a temporal⁶⁹ breaking-in in time, and a fundamental freedom beyond our control, all point to the second question to be raised: What is the eschatological (and pneumatological) implication of Spirit baptism as it is phenomenologically described?

The questions raised by the uncertainty of the phenomenon takes the shape of a reply, somewhere between the general, indefinite and hypothetical «What was that?»⁷⁰ and the more specific, definite and direct «Who are you?». The uncertainty pertains to the nature of the other in the experience,⁷¹ the meaning of the experience for oneself and one`s life story,⁷² and a search for words and/or explanations.⁷³

Uncertainty might invite several kinds of responses. One might simply ignore the experience or let it fade without much afterthought. Or one could label it a mystery, or something of a kind of which is there is nothing more to say. Or, one could try to integrate it with the help of one`s theological tradition. It is this last response which will be pursued here. The third question,

⁶⁹ The temporal has a character of con-temporality, of two beings being simultaneously present in time.

⁷⁰ Was it real or imaginary? Genuine or placebo?

⁷¹ Was this the almighty creator God, or did I simply drink too much coffee?

⁷² Why did *I* experience it? Was I chosen somehow? Do I now have a specific mission, or is something dramatic going to happen? Or am I simply fooling myself?

⁷³ Is this experience «beyond words»? Or do I now have to start speaking in other words, «in tongues»? In what mode or register does this experience operate? Is there an alternative set of spiritual laws that now apply? Can it all be integrated?

then, is: Which features of a systematic-theological framework are able to – or necessary in order to – account for Spirit baptism as a phenomenon?

3.2 Spirit

In three short sections I will expand on each of the three questions stated above. We now proceed to answer the first of three questions: What is the ontological implication of spirit baptism as it is phenomenologically described? That is, what is the ontology at stake in talk of the Spirit related to transgression of inside/outside, of overlay, and of justification, sanctification and theosis? Clearly, the place to start in such a consideration is with the ontological “status” of the Spirit herself/himself/itself.

The problem, however, is that ever since Plato, dualistic metaphysical models of reality have tended to come aligned with a tertiary essence which for the most part has remained unarticulated.⁷⁴ That is, in the philosophical and theological tradition of the West,⁷⁵ we have had a determined predominant ontological status to assign to the Father (transcendent, a-historic and invisible) and the Son (immanent, historic and visible), but the Spirit has not had an ontological domain in which to rest its head.

One could, of course, say that the Spirit is both (immanent and transcendent, visible and invisible), but that begs the question of what exactly the Spirit is, ontologically speaking. It also runs the risk of completely subordinating the Spirit to the Father and the Son, and how, in such a scheme, is the Spirit a person in contradistinction to the Father and the Son? Let us for now leave the question open. Only at the end of this section will we be ready to sketch a tentative answer.

This whole fact in turn has led to a multitude of models being used for the Spirit, starting with the Biblical models of (among others) dove, flame (and, by extension, tongues) and advocate. We do, however, assign these models little ontological relevance, beyond its – not to be discounted - poetic imaginary potential. There is much to be gleaned for a sermon in these

⁷⁴ See Jacques Derrida, *Khora*, for a treatment of the issue. Robert W. Jenson also touches on this in his *Systematic Theology*, where he calls Aristotle and Plato “[our culture’s] two great providers of metaphysical options.” (Jenson 1997, 138) and laments “a [particularly Western] tendency of the Spirit simply to disappear from theology’s description of God’s triune action, often just when he might be expected to have the leading role.” (Jenson 1997, 153)

⁷⁵ Again, see the quote by Robert W. Jenson in the footnote above.

images. Still, people have sought other images, especially in order to develop a trinitarian theology.

In this context, and in our attempt to contribute to pneumatology, the first step in asking of the ontological status of the Spirit is to make the tautological observation that the Spirit is spirit. What is spirit, then? What is the ‘matter’ of spirit, or how is spirit/spirits/Spirit and the distinction between them to be thought? How are we to distinguish spirit from spirits, and spirit/spirits from Spirit? In order to answer questions such as these we need to inquire about the nature of Spirit/spirit/spirits. To venture beyond Spirit in order to say what the Spirit *is* sounds like a daunting endeavor, and indeed it is, but let us still try with use of a model. The model is one developed by Jo Bertil R. Værnesbranden.⁷⁶ As a model, it is something which will first have to be shown, and only afterwards can we measure the explanatory potential of it.

In accordance with Værnesbranden’s model, I will in the following use *language* as model for Spirit, that is, I will use language as *metaphor* for Spirit.⁷⁷ That is, in turn, to say metaphorically that the Spirit is (a) language. This might sound out of bounds, and in some sense it is an intentional border crossing but let us still linger with the thought for a little while.

Thinking along the lines of Værnesbranden’s model, the explanatory gain of saying that the Spirit is a language would be, first of all, that building on the philosophical and anthropological strain that asserts that language is what constitutes personhood, we could say that the Spirit as language is the Language / Personhood *per se* who grants language / personhood so that

⁷⁶ Jo Bertil R. Værnesbranden is a theology research fellow at MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society in Oslo. His doctoral project is entitled *Language As Metaphor for Faith*. His two main theses are that 1) *Faith is a language*, and, 2) *Spirit is a language*, and thus *Language as metaphor for Spirit* runs parallel to *Language as metaphor for faith* throughout his work (Værnesbranden 2019a). He also developed similar ideas in his master’s thesis, entitled *The Weakness of God* (Værnesbranden 2008). In reading it, I was introduced to the ideas from thinkers like John D. Caputo, Jacques Derrida, Martin Heidegger and Robert W. Jenson, and more specifically, to the idea of language as metaphor for faith / Spirit.

⁷⁷ There has, of course, been theologians who have written about faith, Spirit, language, metaphor and the like. But in those instances the connection between them has been used merely rhetorically. Værnesbranden explains in his project description (Værnesbranden 2018, 2) that he develops the existing rhetorical use further, building on the implicit theoretical perspectives in the rhetorical use. One of the theologians in this regard is Robert W. Jenson, who wrote about “...[t]he astonishing switch that Luther has pulled on the Greek’s ontology and epistemology. In their doctrine, the specific character of personal beings, ‘souls,’ is that their being is determined by what they, as perfect eyes, *see*. Luther switched that; for him the specific character of personal being is that we are what, as perfect ears, we *hear*. Moreover, if for the Greeks ‘to be’ generally is to endure, to hang on to oneself, for Luther ‘to be’ is to share oneself by speaking: thus for Christ ‘to be’ is to share himself in his word.” (Jenson & Braaten 1998, 24). Jenson also touches upon the same in his *Systematic Theology*, using the terms ‘phenomena’ and ‘legomena’. (Jenson 1999, 36).

anything that has language / personhood has so as a gift of the Spirit. The gift of the Spirit is the Spirit – and the giver of personhood must him/herself be a person - and in that sense there is an intimate connection between the Spirit – one of the trinity – and any person whatsoever, whenever and wherever.⁷⁸ That is also how we can distinguish Spirit from spirit, and spirit from other spirits. Capitalized Spirit is the one Spirit of the triune God, as the Language which grants the Father and the Son personhood and is the Language of the Father's creating out of nothing by his Word. Further, one could think that spirit is distinguished from other spirits as one language is distinguished from another; they are each a vehicle or a worldview of some power.

Further, another explanatory gain of saying that the Spirit is a language would be to be able to integrate the Heideggerian perspective that Being, ultimately, is tied up with language,⁷⁹ such that each and any language carries a ferment deep ontology within⁸⁰. So also Robert W. Jenson:

Western intellectual history has for the most part continued the Greek tradition for which 'to be' meant to have form and so to appear and be seen, whether with the body's or the mind's eye. But there plainly is another possibility: that to be is to be *heard of*; and it is this interpretation that is demanded by the doctrine of creation. Within such an interpretation, instead of apprehending immediately encountered realities as 'phenomena,' 'things that appear,' we will apprehend them as '*legomena*,' 'things that are spoken of.' Things are as we hear of them, from third parties or themselves. And if beings are apprehended in their being itself, this is apprehended 'from the speech and address of... God.'⁸¹

⁷⁸ It is possible to build on this in order to say that, intra-trinitarily speaking, the Spirit is the one who grants personhood even to God the Father and Jesus Christ the Son. The Spirit is the Language in which the Father speaks of the Son (*logos*). Which is similar to Jenson (Jenson 1997, 156) when he says "The Spirit is indeed the love between two personal lovers, the Father and the Son, but he can be this just *in that* he is antecedently himself. He is another who in his own intention liberates Father and Son to love each other."

⁷⁹ Værnesbranden, project description, page 8-9

⁸⁰ See also Jenson (1999, 210), in which he refers to Mayr who builds on Heidegger in saying "'Being' received its still effective interpretation... from the Greek starting point with... 'phenomenal' being, with beings insofar as these 'appear' to a 'seeing.'" A different beginning-point is 'to understand being by hearing what is said of it by someone.' Mayr proceeds, perhaps not along the lines of Heidegger anymore, that "The being of beings... is then apprehended from the speech and address of the gods or God, is more originally experienced from 'hearing' than from 'seeing'." Further, Jenson himself (1999, 35) says 'To be, as a creature, is to be mentioned in the triune moral conversation, as something other than those who conduct it.'

⁸¹ Jenson 1999, 36.

This trace is further developed by Jacques Derrida to the extent that he states that “there is nothing outside the text,”⁸² but such a statement is not scary when one takes into consideration that the one who at bottom is this language is the Spirit of God. Everything is linguistically relative, that is, except that all this relativity takes place within the triune God, which makes it relative in a relative sense. In such a scheme, Spirit baptism is a connection with Being and the Giver of being, a connection with the source of everything and anything we are. Again, and as such, this event is eschatological in so far as the Spirit is, to use Robert W. Jenson’s words, the divine future⁸³ – and by implication our future also. The place of the Spirit is the future, and that, to answer an earlier question, is maybe where the ontological place of the Spirit is: the Spirit is not first and foremost immanent or transcendent, visible or invisible, but rather the Spirit comes from the future, as the future, as – with reference to Jenson, “what God has to say becomes actual and not merely possible utterance”⁸⁴ – as potentiality over against actuality. The Spirit comes from the end of the story, not just from the beginning.

That, in turn, has ontological implications in so far as what we see is not all there is, because what is, is not a substance to be caught in timelessness, but is rather a function of what is to become. And this “is to become” in turn is closely related with the workings of the Spirit, who in the Language that s/he is writes our life stories. In these stories particular events on earth harbor an encounter with something beyond, and these events almost have an incarnational dimension.

Therefore, the third explanatory gain of saying that the Spirit is a language is that a connection with faith could be done through saying that having faith is having the Spirit in the sense of learning, or taking part in, the language that the Spirit is.⁸⁵ This language, in turn, determines reality. Also, by saying that the Spirit is language, the incarnation takes on a triune character. Not only is Christ God incarnate, as body, but so is the Spirit, as the language in which the Logos speaks/is spoken, and lastly, in the incarnation the one that speaks is the Father. Thus, the incarnation is the incarnation of speaker (the Father), language (the Spirit), and bodily message (the Son). These then, in turn, are personal in that the Speaker (the Father) represents

⁸² Caputo 2007, 37.

⁸³ Jenson 1999, 347.

⁸⁴ Jenson 1999, 159.

⁸⁵ Værnesbranden 2019a, 9.

will or origin, Language (the Spirit) is what yields personhood,⁸⁶ even to the Father – and is thus personal itself (the gift of the Spirit is the Spirit),⁸⁷ and the bodily message (Christ) is personal in that it lets itself be spoken (*vita passiva*).⁸⁸

All this stands in need of clarification (amen). In so doing I will present a chain of arguments, taken from Værnesbranden’s model, and then proceed to comment on each part of the chain. The six-part argument chain goes as follows:

1) From linguistics we learn that sight is conditioned, or at least co-conditioned, by language.⁸⁹ This is supported by the Saphir-Whorf hypothesis.⁹⁰ To this Værnesbranden adds that language learning begins in the womb, in the blind. Language learning also, then, is co-conditioned by hearing. Temporally and epistemologically, hearing is prior to sight.

2) According to Værnesbranden, Martin Luther and parts of later Lutheran theology (i.e. Robert W. Jenson), as well as parts of continental philosophy (i.e. Hans-Georg Gadamer) correctly point out that hearing – not sight - is and should be the primary epistemological and ontological root metaphor.⁹¹ This highlights the role of language in epistemology and ontology.

3) In such a set-up, faith, like Spirit, resembles language. That is, having faith is having the Spirit. This goes beyond currently existing rhetorical use of language as metaphor for faith.⁹²

4) Værnesbranden highlights how Jacques Derrida argues that the nature of language is best understood as what Derrida labels *archi-writing*.⁹³ *Archi-writing*, according to

⁸⁶ Regarding personhood: «[one] with whom other persons – the circularity is constitutive – can converse, whom they can address... Father, Son, and Spirit are plainly persons in the sense of this definition.» (Jenson 1997, 117). It follows that if the Spirit is Language, He yields personhood.

⁸⁷ «The Holy Spirit is God given by God» Robert Jenson, referring to Augustine, in Jenson 1997, 147.

⁸⁸ Værnesbranden connects Luther’s idea of *vita passiva* to a move from sight-as-primary-metaphor for epistemology and ontology, to *hearing* as the primary metaphor – thus a move from activity to passivity. See also the second argument, in Værnesbranden’s chain of six arguments, on this page and the next.

⁸⁹ Værnesbranden 2019a, 8.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, 8.

⁹¹ Værnesbranden 2019a, 6. «...the most basic metaphor of epistemology and ontology is no longer sight, but hearing.» Værnesbranden connects this to Luther’s category of *vita passiva* in that it entails a move from activity to passivity.

⁹² Værnesbranden (2019a, 5) argues that «many thinkers and texts have used language as metaphor for faith, e.g. Schillebeeckx and George Lindbeck» but that «language as metaphor for faith [in e.g. Schillebeeckx and Lindbeck] has not been thematized as such». Værnesbranden seeks to «[take] one step back from rhetorical use of the metaphor (‘Faith [Spirit] is a language’) to a theoretical investigation cast as simile (‘Language as metaphor for faith [Spirit]’). Although Værnesbranden’s project is entitled «Language As Metaphor for Faith», he develops the twin metaphor, and thesis, of «Language as metaphor for Spirit».

⁹³ Værnesbranden 2019a, 5.

Værnesbranden's reading of Derrida, is the source of language, phenomenologically speaking, even as it only exists in language.⁹⁴

5) In such a set-up, Værnesbranden aligns archi-writing, and hence language, with the Spirit.⁹⁵

6) Lastly, through the sacramental model of Aquinas, highlighted by Robert W. Jenson, Værnesbranden says that language is the *signum*, Spirit is the *res*, and faith is the *signum et res*. That is, in faith, Language (the Spirit) and language (our ordinary language) meet, and incarnational meaning happens.⁹⁶

To the first, that sight is constituted by language and that language learning in turn is constituted by hearing: Værnesbranden's main point here is to highlight the role of language – language is like a filter through which we see the world; language is necessary for us to see at all. Language compartmentalizes and marks the divisions – the grid, the graphics – through which we see. Like computer graphics, ultimately reducible to a language script. Such is the make-up of our sight, our gaze.

The status of this language, however, is not always one of ordinary language. Take the infant, for example, attached to its mother, which is clearly marked out from the rest of its world, still the infant does not in any sense yet have ordinary language as we think of it. This is where we, with Værnesbranden, see the emergence of what Jacques Derrida calls archi-writing, the spatialization or demarcation that takes place before speech or writing but which nevertheless makes up the grid through which reality is perceived. Thus, the first step in the line of Værnesbranden's argumentation is to argue that every gaze is “contaminated” by language, there is no pure vision, neither epistemologically nor ontologically.

To the second, that hearing as a consequence is ontologically and epistemologically “prior” to seeing. This ties in with the creation theology in which God creates by his word; he speaks, and it stands there. The relationship between language and the senses, however, is a little bit more complicated. If there is an archi-writing prior to both speech and writing, is not this archi-writing seen rather than heard? Is not sight, then, prior to hearing anyways? The answer to this would be to say, over against the two modes of language, oral and written, that archi-writing is

⁹⁴ Ibid, 5.

⁹⁵ Ibid, 11.

⁹⁶ Ibid, 11, n47.

one half of what constitutes the “need” for language – oral or written – in the first place. The compartmentalizing and spatialization that takes place in any human endeavor is the beginning of language.⁹⁷

To the third, that faith thus resembles language. Having faith is having the Spirit, and according to the theology of some major denominations, in water baptism both is given simultaneously. That is, they are two sides of the same coin. We could say that Christian initiation is the initiation into the language community (or, Language community) that the Church is, and from this initiation onwards the individual is to live and learn (learn to speak, later to read and write) and grow into his or her role. If it is a community constituted by the Spirit (Language), becoming a member is like learning the language. And, like the toddler growing up in a language community, one’s identity is not modeled on capacity or competency, but on future or potential (sometimes even, or, just, hypothetical) competency.

To the fourth, archi-writing is what takes place in the production of real-life graphics.⁹⁸ The question is what takes place in an experience of the Spirit. The bodily sensation often involved is like being two-in-one, and this character of overlay raises the question of how to retrace and understand the experience. Is it like a software (or hardware, for that matter) glitch? Is it part of the built-in potential of the world? If one interprets the experience with Derrida’s archi-writing in mind, one could say, it is the visiting of something which jolts us into new or renewed linguistic behavior (in an expanded sense – even acts can have linguistic meaning).⁹⁹

To the fifth, the alignment of archi-writing, language and Spirit is an attempt by Værnesbranden to build a model which generates new or renewed talk of, and grasp of, the Spirit and the Spirit’s doing. In traditional theological language, the location of the Spirit as a person of the trinity is the end station for specification of what the Spirit is. That is, the most specific thing to be said of the Spirit, is to say that the Spirit is God (God is spirit) and that the Spirit is the Spirit of Christ. There is generally an underdeveloped pneumatology in a theoretical, theological sense, that is: underdeveloped in the theoretically oriented denominations (the established churches), and, on the other side, un- or rather pre-critical practice in the practically oriented denominations (the free churches). In seeking to go beyond the present impasse,

⁹⁷ Værnesbranden 2008, 54.

⁹⁸ Værnesbranden 2019b.

⁹⁹ If you ask someone to close the door and they do so, their act takes on the meaning of a reply.

Værnesbranden considers that spirit is (metaphorically) language and that the Spirit is the name of (the) language.

This language, the Spirit, in turn constitutes, or at least co-constitutes, our sight. That is, we see through the Spirit, we discern through the Spirit, the world. Dare I say, Spirit baptism constitutes our sight, and is thus (not to entirely forget Macchia) “[a] lens through which to view...”¹⁰⁰ the world.

And lastly, to the sixth, sacramental model, in which language, ordinary language, is the *signum*. Ordinary language is something we know and are familiar with, and it is something which points outside of itself, language is a sign system which signifies. The real matter in the Church, of course, is not ordinary language in itself, it does not do linguistics proper for the sake of it, even though there are few institutions as vibrantly and inherently linguistic as the worldwide Church (the Pentecostals even speak the angelic tongue). Rather, the real matter of the Church, that is, what sets the Church out from other corporations, is the spiritual, or, to put it pointedly (with a certain ecclesiological bias), *the Spirit*. That is, the Spirit is the *res* (latin: thing) which is really real in the Church. And in between them, faith is the *signum et res* (latin: sign and thing), that is: in faith is *both* ordinary language *and* the Spirit who is one of the Trinity. There is thus a kind of incarnation taking place, in which the Spirit “incarnates” into us through the language community of which we are a part and in which faith is individualized.¹⁰¹ In such a sacramental model, language gets to function as a sacrament, and this would then be an example of a theology of language.

3.3 *Baptism*

We now come, under the heading of baptism, to the second issue of time, and the question of the eschatological and pneumatological implication of Spirit baptism as it is phenomenologically described. There are two kinds of time; ordinary time (clock measured) and the extraordinary time of the filling, which significance substantially outweighs the briefness of its duration. This goes both for water baptism and Spirit baptism. We may pose it

¹⁰⁰ Macchia 2006, 117.

¹⁰¹ See further Lev Vygotsky’s theories of internalization below, and also Værnesbranden (2018), 9.

as a question: *How* does the significance of the extraordinary time of the filling outweigh (the briefness of) its duration? It has to do with the Spirit as the future of God – and thereby of us.

In this section I will develop my thoughts in tandem with Orthodox Christian theologian Olivier Clément.¹⁰² In the eschatological time one is taken up into at baptism, eternity is united to time. Time itself is deified, as the Spirit “brings forth the time of the Savior, which is forever present in the eternal present in which his glorified humanity – his being-in time – dwells.”¹⁰³ In baptism, we are swallowed up by eternity. During the experience of Spirit baptism, we are lost in time and space, and as with the computer game metaphor above – we’re lost in the game – we enter another world which is at the same time closely tied in with the ordinary world. As we play the game, we are actually being played – affected – transformed, by the game. We think we are moving along linear time, trapped in half of the dimension of time (not being able to go back, stuck in the forward direction), but in reality we are, in the Spirit, receiving eschatological, deified time, time “permeated with the eternity of the Savior.”¹⁰⁴ The Language of the Spirit can be paralleled to the Time of the Spirit, where “the ninth hour is every day identified with that ninth hour on which Christ was crucified, once and for all”¹⁰⁵ and “the events reported in the Gospels are not simply read and heard, but are seen in the Church.”¹⁰⁶ In this way I am called to be a witness. Not a witness of my “personal relationship to Jesus”, but an *eyewitness* to the events of the Gospel – which are not just read about but *seen* in the deified time where the Spirit makes the Son forever present.

The Hidden God hides the hidden “reality”, the really real reality. In the Body of Christ, which is the church, humans are “deified”, as we receive the Holy Spirit. If the Spirit is the Language, if language creates vision, and our faith *is* the Spirit, one might say that the faith of the linguacultural community which the Church manifests itself in each individual as the capacity

¹⁰² Olivier Clément (1921-2009) was an Orthodox Christian Theologian, who taught at St. Sergius Orthodox Theological Institute, France. He actively promoted the reunification of Christians (he was friends with Pope John Paul II), dialogue between Christians and people of other beliefs, and the engagement of Christian thinkers with modern thought and society. In his book *Transfiguring Time*, only made available in English in 2019, he meditates on the mystery of time and eternity. In it he affirms that time was not made for death; but through the incarnation and resurrection of the Son of God, it becomes the vehicle for eternal communion with the Persons of the Holy Trinity.

¹⁰³ Clément 2019, 100.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid, 104.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 104.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid, 104.

to *see*. Baptism enables in us a new kind of seeing, it actualizes the potential in us to see. In the words of the Clément,

what is consecrated is nothing less than the uniqueness of the person: this is so fundamental that it cannot be subsumed into part of the whole, whether that be the Church or another person, not even the person of Christ. The unique person takes on the totality of the Church and must become the Body of Christ through the contemplation of his face and through communion with all other persons. This communion in which individual conscience becomes personal conscience is catholicity – that is to say, an opening to Spirit-Tradition in the lived unity of the Body of Christ.¹⁰⁷

Here, Clément describes beautifully what happens, but I’m still left with the question of *how*? How would Clement explain this? If we use the framework of language as metaphor for faith, we can actually explain this. The uniqueness of the person, indeed personality *per say*¹⁰⁸, is constituted by participating in the Spirit, or in other words, receiving participation in the Spirit as Language through faith. In this kind of framework, faith belong to the community of the Spirit (the language community which the Church is), and through *internalization* (as expounded by the Soviet philosopher Lev Vygotsky) each person takes on, internalizes, the faith for himself.

Vygotsky’s sociocultural theory of learning¹⁰⁹ is at the same time a theory about the cognitive development of children, and a theory about how culture and society “makes a dwelling”¹¹⁰, *is internalized* in the individual. From the moment the child is born (and later research clearly show it can be extended to the fetus as well) the child lives in a social network where language plays an essential part, or indeed *is* the essential part¹¹¹. Language, for Vygotsky, is not only a means for communicating, but also for consciousness and thinking. Knowledge is not just attached a person’s cognitive system; knowledge is a part of a language and has grown out from hundreds of years of labor and praying and living – or in the case of the Eschaton’s presence in our world, for about two thousand years. In schools all around the world Vygotsky’s theories are being applied because his theory emphasizes the importance of social relations and use of

¹⁰⁷ Clément 2019, 106. Underline added.

¹⁰⁸ Play on the expression *per se*, which in the context of language I chose to spell *per say*.

¹⁰⁹ Imsen 2005, 251-254.

¹¹⁰ As in John 1:14 – *the Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us*.

¹¹¹ Imsen 2005, 255.

language in the process of learning and developing, and the leap from school to church in this context is a short one indeed.

Much of theology and philosophy in our time, and indeed of philosophical and theological history, has *sight* as the root metaphor for ontology and epistemology. The same is evident in Clément: “The ‘new birth’ shines an eschatological light onto the present, that reveals all things in the light of the Kingdom.”¹¹² If we turn this around and say – with Luther and Gadamer – that hearing is prior, we can explain this new birth – baptism – in terms of initiation into the language community that the Church is. Internalization and individualization of this community’s language is preceded by language learning through, mainly, hearing. Therefore, revelation of “all things in the light of the Kingdom” is preceded by the establishment of this sight through faith (as language).

Just as there is time and “time” there is also life and “life,” and thirdly, just like time and “time,” life and “life,” there is also language and “language.” The dynamics of incarnation lead us to state that just as life breaks into “life” and time breaks into “time”, language also breaks into ordinary language. There is a dynamic of incarnation also in language. It is my conviction that the Spirit has something to do with this language and its in-breaking / “incarnation” into ordinary language. If we consider that language learning, according to Vygotsky, takes place from the social to the individual,¹¹³ we may say that knowledge and rationality is mediated through language and the language learning process.

Baptism, like language learning, is both punctual and a process. Through birth (indeed, before birth) we are initiated into the language community. Baptism (water baptism) can be seen as a confirmation of this punctual beginning. Then, like growing up in a language community, faith learning takes place, and through the faith “filter” established in us, the reality and visibility of the Kingdom emerges in front of our eyes.

Regarding “punctual” and “process”, one might ask; does the toddler speak the domestic language? Yes, and no. Yes, in the sense that it is already determined which language the child

¹¹² Clément 2019, 126.

¹¹³ Imsen 2005, 255.

will grow up to speak, and there is but one language the toddler belongs to; but no, in the sense that the toddler strictly speaking does not speak yet at all.

As stated earlier, this language learning begins in the blind, just like faith is blind, in the sense that we do not see (a condition for faith at all), but faith comes by hearing.

As we grow up, just as when language “clicks,” that is, a new word or a new phrase takes on meaning or new layers of meaning, or we are brought by the experiences of life to new vocabulary, our faith language will also grow with our spiritual life. Along this way there might be moments when our faith- and Spirit-language “clicks.” Could this be something of what I experienced on a bench in London those many years ago? Certainly, the words “for these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is the third hour of the day”¹¹⁴ (Acts 2:15 KJV) and the concept of “baptism in the Spirit” that I had merely heard of and read about, took on new layers of meaning for me. My strong spiritual experience was a participation in the Spirit who is the Language of which reality is constituted.

To turn to the metaphor of computer programming, if the Spirit is the Language of the programming code of the operation system that reality is, an encounter with the Spirit is to experience reality at its most powerful, in the same sense that computer code language sometime can be experienced at its most powerful, with real-life graphics almost indistinguishable from reality. In strong moments of Spirit-filling, like speaking in tongues, language and reality meet. In this filling we experience a kind of certainty not often experienced elsewhere.

In this context we can read this quote from Clement:

Chrismation, a later sacrament in the history of the Church, completes baptism (with which it forms a single rite in the Eastern Churches) by emphasizing its character of baptism in the Spirit. Incorporated into Christ by baptism, the candidate now receives the strength of the Spirit, the strength to “realize” in a unique personal way the new

¹¹⁴ Interestingly, my experience of Spirit baptism was at around 9 in the morning – “the third hour” in New Testament language.

being that has been received. But these two sacraments must not be separated unduly. For the humanity of Christ is suffused with the energies of the Holy Spirit.¹¹⁵

“Chrismation”, which we may call the process of language learning throughout life, “completes baptism”, which may be seen as the punctual initiation into the language community. This is done “by emphasizing its character of baptism in the Spirit”, where one may say the Spirit is the Language, and our language learning (faith) is participation in the Spirit, which in turn is an event of the Spirit giving itself.

In finishing this section, I will include an Olivier Clément quote of substantial length.

Thus, life in the Spirit means gradually becoming aware of “baptismal grace,” and this awareness transforms the whole person. The baptismal sequence of death and resurrection is repeated throughout our pilgrimage, enlightening its “initiatory” moments. When everything seems lost, baptismal grace, if we pay heed to it, can convert a situation of death into one of resurrection, an apparent deadlock into a necessary breakthrough. We have to learn – and this is the whole meaning of asceticism – to get around obstacles, to tear away dead skin, to let the very life of Christ arise in us by the power of his resurrection. Each present moment has to become baptismal: a moment of anguish and death if I seek to cling to it and so experience its non-existence, but a moment of resurrection if I accept it humbly as “present” in both senses of the word, almost like the gift of manna – but here we pass from the mystery of baptism to that of the Eucharist. We come finally to the moment of agony when we are overwhelmed by the waters of death. Through our baptism, according to the measure of our faith, they will be transformed into the womb of eternity.¹¹⁶

Baptism in the Spirit is nothing other than this becoming aware of baptismal grace, when the water of baptism is identified with the water of tears, transforming our hearts into “hearts of flesh” rather than “hearts of stone”, on which “the Spirit freely writes, whenever he chooses, the demands of love.”¹¹⁷ In conclusion of this section, we go back to Derrida’s concept of archi-writing. The writing of the Spirit (“the Spirit freely writes”) is the Language breaking into my

¹¹⁵ Clément 2019, 106.

¹¹⁶ Ibid, 106.

¹¹⁷ Ibid, 107.

“ordinary” language, constituting the grid through which we perceive reality, positively “contaminating” our sense of seeing and hearing with the Spirit.

3.4 *Spirit baptism*

We are now at the third question raised at the beginning of the chapter: Which features of a systematic-theological framework are able to – or necessary in order to - account for Spirit baptism as a phenomenon? In this section we will develop our answer with the help of some quotes from Philoxenus of Mabbug.¹¹⁸ But let us first of all take note of the fact that the inclination to operate with two separate baptisms, a water baptism – the Johannine baptism for the forgiveness of sins – and a separate and later Spirit baptism, comes from reading the plain wording of some texts of the New Testament. If we are to, as Macchia does, integrate the two baptisms into a whole, and thereby at least come closer to the mainstream Churches’ theology of baptism, we must provide a theological framework in which to bring out the better meaning of these Biblical texts. Pentecostals have tried to stress the importance of the experience of Spirit baptism in interpreting the Bible, sensing the power and profundity of the experience gets lost in a too narrow theological framework. But their attempts to create a robust framework granting the “Pentecostal experience” sufficient relevance in theology has failed and has operated within the too narrow limits of Biblical theology. Philoxenus, the Syriac bishop from the 5th century can teach us something useful in this regard, in a way that in my view may tie together the loose threads from the thesis up to this point.

According to Philoxenus,¹¹⁹

The spiritual sensation given at baptism, grows and develops after baptism as one struggle “to put on the new person... by the true experience of the knowledge of the Spirit.” The sensation given in initiation only becomes experience through the ascetic discipline. Christ lives in the Christian only if the believer dies to every bodily sensation. If the Christian dies, then the believer will be able “to see, hear, taste, touch in a sense (more) interior than the body (can)... In fact, the sensing of all the (mysteries) proper to

¹¹⁸ Philoxenus of Mabbug (c. 440-523) was an ascetic and hermit from a Christian Aramaic family in modern day Iraq. He was well acquainted with the Syriac masters through his studies at the well renowned “school of the Persians” in Edessa. He became bishop of Mabbug, near modern day Aleppo in Syria, in 485.

¹¹⁹ Or, to be precise, Kilian McDonnell’s reading of Philoxenus.

the new person is far from the sensing of the old (person), who does not know what these mysteries are.”¹²⁰

Here Philoxenus talks about a *new kind of sensing*; new sight, new hearing, new taste, new touch – *sensing* in a way that is more interior than the body could normally sense, senses that are substantially “*realer*” than what the body’s own sensory apparatus would be able to convey through its nervous system. The echoes of Clément’s deified time can be heard here. The royal way for Philoxenus is that of asceticism, or, living the kenotic life of the crucified Christ in the power of the Spirit, which is what Macchia views Christian empowerment as. Hearing and seeing in a way more interior than the “normal” hearing and seeing of the body itself, reminds us of Derrida’s concept of *archi-writing*, in that there is a hearing and seeing that is interior to an Ultimate being into which we can be taken up – the Spirit of the Triune God.

Philoxenus continues,¹²¹

Faith gives a kind of vision: “For the body sees bread, wine, oil, and water. But faith compels sight to see spiritually what the body cannot see. In other words, instead of bread we eat the body, and instead of wine we drink the blood, instead of water we see the baptism of the Spirit, and instead of oil the power of Christ... ..the whole world of the Spirit is perceived by faith, and it is faith which sees, and faith which senses.” The one who responds to this grace by weariness and labor “shall enter the mysteries of the Spirit.”¹²²

The vision that faith gives (“Faith gives a kind of vision”) is provided by the Language that faith, metaphorically, is. This also goes for our interpretation of water baptism. With the words of Philoxenus from the above quote, “instead of water baptism we see baptism of the Spirit.” That is, in faith (as language), we see the Spirit at work (as Language). Thus also, Philoxenus writes in the quote above: “it is faith which sees, and faith which senses.” Without faith, as the language through which reality, indeed ultra-reality, is perceived, we would not have seen and sensed.

¹²⁰ Montague & McDonnell 1991a, 307.

¹²¹ In the words of Kilian McDonnell.

¹²² Montague & McDonnell 1991a, 308.

Thus, we may listen to what Philoxenus says in that

only afterwards [after baptism in the Spirit] such a one will know the power of the words confided to the faith, only afterwards receiving the spiritual vision, only afterwards also feeling the mystery hidden in each of those words.”¹²³

And, with Vygotsky’s theory of internalization in mind we can read the following Philoxean quote:

Now we are in a wholly new situation. Today “through baptism (the spiritual wealth) has been given freely to all,” though only those sense it who exercise ascetic discipline and faith. Therefore, the one baptized in infancy does not inherit the sensing of the newness of life. Or to state it in a more Philoxean mode, the baptized infant inherits the capacity of sensation, but not the actualized sensing.¹²⁴

The capacity that the infant inherits (“the baptized infant inherits the capacity of sensation”) could be aligned with the infant’s initiation into a language community, which in our model is aligned with water baptism. The actualized sensing could be aligned with the *use* and *continued learning*, that is, experiencing, of language, which in our model is aligned with Spirit baptism.

Overall, Philoxenus’ metaphorical paradigm of three births and two baptisms¹²⁵ is useful to explore further, for the sake of providing features necessary for a theological framework that can account for Spirit baptism as a phenomenon. The *first birth* is the natural birth from the womb of the mother; The *second birth* is for Philoxenus the same as the *first baptism*; the sacramental baptism from the womb of baptism into the womb of the world; the *third birth* is the same as the *second baptism*; out of the world into the fullness of the Spirit by self-emptying and the ascetic life. McDonnell’s exposition of Philoxenus continues:

¹²³ Ibid, 311.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 311.

¹²⁵

| First birth | Second birth | Third birth |
|---------------------------------------|---|--|
| Natural birth from womb of the mother | First baptism; from the womb of baptism into the womb of the world; sacramental baptism | Second baptism; out of the womb of the world into the fullness of the Spirit by self-emptying and the ascetic life |

Significant here is the logic which binds the second and third births. What is given in the second matures under ascetic discipline until it blossoms in the third birth. The reality given to infants in sacramental baptism is actualized in a new way, so the second and third births are organically linked. The third birth adds experience to the second birth. Quite concretely Philoxenus describes the third birth as the full realized, actualized awareness of our former birth, sacramental baptism in infancy. When we journey from the second to the third birth, we begin a journey into a limitless place [*khora*]. No matter how long the road, no matter how often we travel from place to place in this eternal spaciousness, no matter how deep we penetrate, no matter how high we ascend, we are in a country without borders. The world of the Spirit is beyond boundaries, beyond limit.¹²⁶

The Spirit comes from the end of history to “(actualize) the reality given... in sacramental baptism... in a new way”, to write *our* story as participants in eschatological time, or, participants in the Triune God, where the Spirit comes from the future to write Spirit’s story in the world through us. Or, to say with Gregory of Nyssa¹²⁷, the Spirit establishes the kingdom in us and through us.

The “ascetic discipline” resembles the “tarrying” of the old Pentecostals, which was considered a “prerequisite” for the experience of Spirit baptism, based on the Scripture from Luk 24:49: “And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high.”

If, for the sake of the argument, we are to proceed (further...) into speculative territory, we could align the three births thus:

1) Through our coming into being there corresponds the baptism of having been born/conceived. All human beings thus participate in what we could call the baptism of the Father. This in turn is aligned with the first article of the Creeds, and creation theology. We are here given *being* (participation in Being). Our reason for coming to be is simply justified this

¹²⁶ Montague & McDonnell 1991a, 312.

¹²⁷ As quoted by Macchia above.

way; God wanted us to be. This is the beginning and root of all *justification*; God the Father wants us to be.

2) Through our coming to Church there corresponds the baptism of water. All baptized participate in what we could call the baptism of the Son. This is in turn aligned with the second article of the Creeds, and Christology. We are here given *eternal life* (participation in the *totus Christus*). This is our *sanctification*, our taking-part in the saintly reality.

3) Through our coming to see and experience, there corresponds the baptism of the Spirit. All believers participate in what we could call the baptism of the Spirit. This is in turn aligned with the third article of the Creeds, and pneumatology. We are here given *participation in the Kingdom*. This is our *theosis*, being invited into the intra-trinitarian conversation.

Here below, on earth, Christians are forever to be bilingual, both fluent in the languages and the reality of the world, and ever learning the Language and thereby the reality of the Kingdom. We are to speak and do – language and culture belong inseparably together – a new language, the Christ language.

Being baptized in the Spirit is being taught the language of faith, being in the proximity of Language as the Spirit to the point of a *theosis* union. This happens as we are permeated more and more by the kingdom of God, where the language of the Spirit – which is the Language in the triune conversation – is internalized and actualized in us. We sense and experience, we live and learn and grow, on the basis of us taking part in the Language that faith and Spirit really is.

I have tried to explore the questions posed at the beginning this section creatively, knowing full well that I will, strictly speaking, never arrive at a satisfactory set of answers. The exploration has touched upon the ontological, the eschatological and the pneumatological implications of Spirit baptism as it is phenomenologically described, and it has wrestled with the question of which features of a systematic-theological framework are able to account for Spirit baptism as a phenomenon. All the while, my personal aim has to answer my simple question from the beginning of this project: What was this power that came upon me, with which I am to witness?

4 Conclusion

Writing this thesis has certainly broadened the scope of my answer to the above question. What was the power that came upon me? It was the Triune God, arriving from the future in an eternal present. As such, it was not something that happened just there, in a punctual moment in time. It was the presence of God actualizing in me yet more of me, and His kingdom (which is the Spirit) in me. The experience expanded my categories, and, being in the presence of God in my journey forward will actualize yet more of me, His kingdom (which is the Spirit) in me, and His kingdom (which is the Spirit) in the world around me. The words sound pompous, but are merely a broken attempt by a broken human being in a broken world to convey some of the enormity of the implications of that outrageous thing happening to me outside the Ivybridge Estate: Jesus baptizing me with His Spirit in a way similar to that of His own apostles. And how could it be anything but *broadening of my horizon* if it was in fact the Triune God involved in the experience.

Apart from this, what insight has my analysis of Frank D. Macchia's work, and my phenomenological analysis of Spirit baptism, given me? That is the question I will devote the last pages of this thesis to.

Firstly, that there is a need for theology to be informed by *experiences*, even the extraordinary ones. Granting *phenomena* relevance in the outworking of systematic theology opens up new avenues for possibly fruitful exploration. It goes without saying that such ventures, as have been the case with my one, is by nature speculative and more focused on metaphor, creativity and a certain eclectic way of connecting theory¹²⁸.

Secondly, it seems clear to me that mainline churches should search within their traditions as well as the Scriptures, for points of contact with what's distinctive about Pentecostals and charismatic Christians around the world. It seems to me that there is much potential for learning in this regard, and a serious effort in ecumenism is surely the way forward in this matter. My own desire for ecumenical work has increased greatly.

¹²⁸ Which, in my view, is allowed – for the sake of meaning – in the field of phenomenology, as opposed to the somewhat stricter methodological principles in empirical analysis.

Thirdly, it is obvious to me that Macchia was absolutely right in stating that Pentecostals doesn't really have a broad pneumatological framework to couch their understanding of Spirit baptism within¹²⁹. This saps the experience of meaning and theological relevance, and I suspect many believers around the world question the genuineness of their Spirit baptism experience, feeling a sense of disillusionment and embarrassment at the memory of it. One of my hopes is that my insight gained here can be used pastorally in conversation with fellow believers whose paths will cross mine in the future.

My fourth insight gained will be that language as a metaphor for Spirit can function in a useful way to account for a way of speaking about and understanding Spirit baptism in a more philosophically and theologically robust manner, and that lets the phenomenon of baptism in the Spirit inform its conclusions. It's a daunting task, with a scope of considerable magnitude, but one that is worth pursuing, nevertheless. As a side note, a broader understanding of Spirit baptism which affects the ecosystems around us can only be a good thing in this time ecological crisis.

My fifth and final insight is a humbling one: Sitting in my office, reading books and writing about the awe-inspiring experience of the highest degree that I had all those years ago, feels, in a very real sense, utterly ridiculous. At the risk of appearing overly pious, I'm brought to the NKJV version of Psalm 8, verse 4: *What is man that You are mindful of him, and the son of man that You visit him?* Words fall flat to the ground, especially those, it feels, who are needed to hand in an assignment. Writing about the Trinity, the timelessness of the Spirit, the kingdom of God and Jesus as the Messiah who baptizes in the Spirit can only be done in humility. Although my text has reached heights perhaps too lofty, being completely out of bounds many times, I hope it at some time might be of some use to others. And, ultimately:

Ad maiorem Dei gloriam

¹²⁹ Of course, there *could* be examples of literature from Pentecostal theologians disproving this statement – but if so, it has somehow managed to escape my attention even in my extensive rounds of searching for literature of that kind.

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