

The Holy Spirit in Relation to Mission and World Christianity: A Reformed Perspective

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Abstract

Despite perceptions to the contrary, the Reformed tradition has historically emphasized the person and work of the Holy Spirit. The significance of the Holy Spirit with respect to mission has not always, however, been highlighted. While the remarkable growth of the Church in the Majority World, and particularly of “Pentecostal/Charismatic/neo-Pentecostal” churches, has become evident recently, there has been relatively little engagement with these trends in the writings of Reformed theologians. In this paper, I argue that (a) the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is a key aspect of Reformed Theology; (b) while some Reformed authors have been paying greater attention in recent years to the relationship between the Holy Spirit, mission, and World Christianity, these topics demand greater emphasis; (c) the remarkable growth of Pentecostal/Charismatic/neo-Pentecostal churches is a phenomenon that demands attention from Reformed authors; and (d) Reformed Christians form a significant

proportion of World Christianity, which should be recognized.

1. Introduction

Reflecting on her initial understanding of the Holy Spirit, Kirsteen Kim (2007, v) writes:

The first thing I understood of the theology of the Holy Spirit was that, when God calls us to follow Jesus, we are not simply expected to emulate the behaviour of a distant historical figure by “being good,” but we are offered the power to become like Jesus.

Kim (2007, v) found, however, that this “made little sense to many of those around me,” adding “It also seemed foreign to the preaching in my Reformed church tradition.” It is unfortunate that this impression should have been given, and Kim does not elaborate on why precisely that was the case. Yet the perception reflected

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in Kim's words is that the Holy Spirit plays a marginal role in (at least some expressions of) Reformed theology. If we consider a Reformed perspective on the Holy Spirit's role in global mission and "World Christianity," that perception is only likely to be magnified.

In spite of such a view, I wish to make several claims in this paper:

- The person and work of the Holy Spirit lie at the heart of Reformed Theology.
- As a Reformed Christian, I recognize that one aspect (among several) of the work of the Holy Spirit is to enable God's people to be Jesus's witnesses. This, I believe, requires more attention from Reformed thinkers.
- The huge growth of Pentecostal and neo-Pentecostal Christianity in recent decades demands reflection and engagement from Reformed theologians and missiologists.
- Reformed Christians form a significant part of World Christianity and therefore a Reformed perspective on the Holy Spirit should be recognized as well as a Pentecostal perspective.

In order to develop this argument, I will observe the following procedure: First, I will clarify my use of terminology; second, I will consider how the Holy Spirit, mission, and World Christianity have been treated in recent literature; I will then provide a rationale for Reformed writers giving greater attention to these related topics; finally, I will suggest ways in which Reformed writers might engage more effectively with these matters.

2. Terminology

My topic, "The Holy Spirit in Mission and World Christianity: A Reformed Perspective," includes several key terms which require a measure of clarification.

2.1 *Holy Spirit*

The only term in my title which does not require significant discussion, ironically, is that which relates to the greatest and most incomprehensible reality of all: The Holy Spirit of God. According to Smail (2016, 421):

A formulated doctrine of the Holy Spirit was a relatively late arrival on the Christian theological scene and has never been developed in as full and detailed a way as many other dogmatic themes.

Nonetheless, numerous studies written since the earliest days of the Christian church contribute to our understanding of the orthodox confession relating to the person and work of the Holy Spirit.² While theological debates about the Holy Spirit continue, the meaning of the term is clear enough.

2.2 *Mission*

By the term "mission," I refer to the modern concept of "global mission." This terminology has recently been contested by Stroope (2017), who raises important points relating to the history and current ambiguity of the term. While recognizing the strengths of Stroope's argument, I believe that "mission" remains both unavoidable (due to its longstanding and widespread use in both academic and popular communication) and, when carefully defined, useful terminology. I acknowledge that there is considerable debate about the scope and appropriate referent(s) of the term "mission." For the purposes of this paper, however, the term may be used without adjudicating these various debates.

² Survey articles that discuss both historical and global developments are provided by Smail (2016, 421–425) and Kärkkäinen (2008, 659–669).

2.3 *World Christianity*

The specific terminology, “World Christianity,” is of relatively recent origin and can be used in at least two different ways. When Kwiyani (2020, 28) states, “The phenomenon of world Christianity is new. And it seems to have taken many by surprise,” it seems clear that he is referring to the reality of the growth of the church throughout the world, particularly in the “Majority World.” On the other hand, Kim and Kim (2016, 7) use the phrase to refer to an academic discipline: “Despite its limitations, statistical and topographical analysis has helped to create the discipline of ‘world Christianity’.”

In this paper, I am interested both in how Reformed writers take account of the reality of a church that is growing rapidly in the Majority World and in the extent to which they engage with the academic discipline of “World Christianity.” Hence, I may use the term with either sense. I will aim to make the sense clear in any specific instance (see the discussion in Sanneh and McClymond 2016, 34–39).

2.4 *Reformed*

This term is perhaps the most difficult to define. According to McKim (1992, v),

Theologians varied in perspectives and orientations have claimed the name ‘Reformed.’ They have developed theological expressions portraying their understandings of Christian faith and God’s revelation in Jesus Christ known through Holy Scripture. The plurality of these expressions—both by theologians and by church bodies through confessions of faith—show the varied nature of Reformed faith and Reformed theology. No single definition of ‘Reformed’ faith has emerged from a consensus. Yet those who claim this name as their own do so with some common allegiances to past theological articulations.

In an attempt to provide a framework for understanding “Reformed Theology,” Kopic and Van der Lugt claim that Reformed theology is *canonical, creational, comprehensive, covenantal, Christ-centered, concordant, confessional, and contextual*.

It seeks to bring God’s revelation and the lordship of Christ to bear on all areas of life in each culture and context, impacting everything from our corporate worship to our everyday work. In other words, Reformed theology articulates a comprehensive worldview, arising in response to creation, canon, creeds and confessions while always oriented toward particular contexts and aiming to interpret every idea and to orient every activity toward the glory of God in Christ (Kopic and Van der Lugt 2013, 97–100).

As noted by McKim, the term “Reformed” is applied to many diverse individuals, churches, and organizations ranging from some that are evangelical and confessional to others that are conciliar and (in some cases) less committed to theological confessions (see Allen and Swain 2020). In this paper I engage primarily with those who are evangelical. To aid clarity, I will normally use the term “Reformed” to describe those who either belong to churches in the Scottish Presbyterian or Dutch Reformed traditions, or to those who explicitly draw attention to their Reformed perspective. I recognize, however, that some who do not fall into these categories would still wish to be considered “Reformed.” We might, for example, include many Anglican Christians who would describe themselves as “Reformed,” although not every Anglican would choose that self-description.

What do I mean by the phrase, “a Reformed perspective”? First, on a personal note, I acknowledge that I stand firmly and gladly within the Reformed theological tradition. Second, I recognize that this paper presents only my personal perspective. I do not claim (it should go without saying) to speak for everyone within the Reformed tradition.

3. The Holy Spirit, Mission, and World Christianity in Recent Literature

A study of the relationship between the Holy Spirit, mission, and World Christianity requires that we devote some attention to “Pentecostal and Charismatic”³ churches for at least two reasons. First, the Christian communities associated with this broad category emphasize the centrality of the Holy Spirit in their life and teaching. Second, this category of churches has experienced remarkable growth in recent decades, particularly in the Majority World. Zurlo, Johnson, and Crossing (2021, 18–19) define “Pentecostals” as “members of explicitly Pentecostal denominations” while “Charismatics” are those who consider themselves “renewed by the Spirit” but remain within their “non-Pentecostal denominations.” In addition to these categories, various terms such as “Independent Charismatics” and “Neo-Pentecostals” are used to describe Christian groups that share some characteristics with Pentecostals and Charismatics but do not fit neatly within these categories. This includes many independent churches in the Global South. I will generally follow these definitions, although I may sometimes use “Pentecostal” as an all-inclusive description of these groups. Anderson (2016, 715) notes that, according to statistics (which Anderson acknowledges are “highly debatable”),

[I]t was estimated that there were 68 million “Pentecostals/Charismatics/neo-Charismatics” in the world in 1970. Thirty years later this figure had risen exponentially to 505 million, and in just

eight years (2008) another 100 million were added to make a total of 601 million, about a quarter of the world’s Christians. This figure is projected to rise to almost 800 million by 2025.⁴

Anderson (2016, 715) adds, “Whatever one may think about the accuracy of these numbers, at least they do illustrate that something remarkable has happened in the history of Christianity in recent times.” In light of this phenomenon, I would argue that it is essential for contemporary theologians (of any theological tradition) to take account of the astonishing growth of Pentecostal, Charismatic, and neo-Pentecostal churches and the huge theological questions raised by this phenomenon.

Yet, in recent books on the doctrine of the Holy Spirit by self-consciously Reformed authors, there is generally little, if any, engagement with Pentecostal theology or theologians.⁵ Nor, generally, is there much reference to mission or World Christianity. For example, there is no entry for “mission” in the index of Sinclair Ferguson’s book, *The Holy Spirit* (1996), although Ferguson (1996, 59) does comment briefly that “The fulfilment of the Great Commission takes place in the power of the Spirit.” While there is an entry for “mission” in Michael Horton’s, *Rediscovering the Holy Spirit* (2017), the term is used in the more general sense of “purpose,” not with reference to global mission or “witness.” There are only five entries in the Scripture index of Horton’s book for Acts 1:8,⁶ although Horton (2017,

³ Different authors employ different terminology and different conventions of capitalization. I will generally use capitals for these terms.

⁴ The work cited by Anderson in the quotation is not part of the bibliography of this paper. The most recent statistics available at the time of writing are provided by Zurlo, Johnson and Crossing (2021, 22). They provide the figure of 655,557,000 as of mid-2021 for “Pentecostals/Charismatics” or “Renewalists.”

⁵ The situation is rather different in the discipline of biblical studies, in which the work of Pentecostal/Charismatic scholars such as Gordon Fee and Max Turner is frequently discussed by biblical scholars who belong to the Reformed tradition.

⁶ The first entry is apparently misprinted as “Acts 1–8” in the scripture index.

314) does state specifically that, “the chief purpose in sending the Spirit according to Jesus was that his disciples would be made his gospel witnesses to the ends of the earth until he returns (Acts 1:8).”

The situation is somewhat different in the multi-author work, *An Introduction to Christian Theology* (Plantinga, Thompson, and Lundberg 2010), three professors at Calvin College. The authors refer to Pentecostals and Charismatics in discussions of the Holy Spirit and World Christianity. They also have a chapter on “The church and its mission” (2010, 334–358), but there is no reference to the work of the Spirit in mission other than a reference to the Pentecost narrative in the NT (338).

Contrast this with Anderson’s, *To the Ends of the Earth: Pentecostalism and the Transformation of World Christianity* (2013). Anderson provides an extensive discussion of the engagement of Pentecostals in mission and in the growth of World Christianity. This gap has been noted by reviewers. In a (generally positive) review of Horton’s *Rediscovering the Holy Spirit* (2017), Graham Cole comments:

What is surprising is the relative lack of interaction in the main text with charismatic and Pentecostal scholars who are now a force to be reckoned with in pneumatology (e.g., Max Turner, Gordon Fee, Robert P. Menzies, Roger Stronstad, Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, Amos Yong). Cole (2017)

It is important to note that Horton does, in fact, engage briefly with the work of Kärkkäinen on several occasions, and with some other Pentecostal scholars, but none of the other scholars mentioned by Cole are included in the index of subjects and names. The lack of reference to the work of Gordon Fee and Amos Yong, for example—both highly-regarded and extensively-published scholars who represent a Pentecostal perspective—gives the impression that Pentecostal scholarship is not particularly significant for

Horton’s theology of the Holy Spirit, whether that impression is accurate or not.

The lack of reference to mission and World Christianity in some recent Reformed scholarship stands in striking contrast to Amos Yong’s book, *Renewing Christian Theology: Systematics for a Global Christianity* (2014), written from a Pentecostal perspective. In the Preface, Yong (2014, xxiii) states, “This textbook seeks to provide a summary exposition of central teachings of the Christian faith relevant to the twenty-first-century global renewal context.” Yong (2014, 6) uses the term “renewal” “all inclusively” to refer to Pentecostal, Charismatic, and neo-Charismatic churches. The first main section of the book’s introduction is headed, “World Christianity: An Overview.” In this section, having noted the dominance of Western voices in much contemporary theology, Yong (2014, 5) comments:

The problem of a Western-dominated theology is exacerbated when we consider that Christianity is increasingly becoming a non-Western religion (Jenkins 2002; Sanneh 2008). Many of the reasons for the shifting of the center of gravity from the West to the South can be traced to the emergence of Pentecostal and charismatic forms of Christianity over the course of the twentieth century (Shaw 2010). Pentecostal and charismatic renewal movements have always emphasized the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in the life and mission of the church. If the nineteenth century was designated the “great century of foreign missions” (Latourette 1941), the twentieth has been dubbed “the century of the Holy Spirit” (Synan 2001).

Thus, Yong identifies a strong connection between the Holy Spirit, mission, and, in recent years, World Christianity. Similarly, chapter six of the book is entitled, “The Church and its Mission: The Spirit of the Reconciling God.”

This chapter brings together discussion of ecclesiology, pneumatology, and mission. Yong (2014, 165) refers to the earlier work of Kärkkäinen, commenting, “The claim that Pentecostals have yet to develop a cohesive ecclesiology ... is partly true,” indicating a healthy readiness to be self-critical of his own tradition.

Although Pentecostal scholars seem to have been more consistent in highlighting the connections between the Holy Spirit, mission, and World Christianity than have Reformed scholars in recent years, this is not always the case. It is surprising to note that mission and World Christianity do not appear to play any significant part in Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen’s major work, *Spirit and Salvation* (2016).

Having considered how some recent literature connects (or fails to connect) the Holy Spirit, mission, and World Christianity, I will now argue that these matters are already important within the Reformed tradition, and that there is still greater scope for careful reflection on them.

4. The Importance of the Holy Spirit in Reformed Theology

My brief opening point is that, in the face of any perceptions to the contrary, the Holy Spirit is vitally important to Reformed Christians in both doctrine and experience. Adhinarta (2012, 211–212) claims that:

the doctrine of the Holy Spirit is of paramount importance in the Reformed tradition, as the Holy Spirit is discussed in relation to almost all other doctrines. The Holy Spirit is presented in the Reformed confessions as playing an indispensable role not only in doctrines that have been identified by scholars who studied the theology of the confessions in the past, such as the doctrines of Scripture, the Trinity,

Christ, salvation, the church in general, and sacraments, but also in other doctrines such as creation, providence, the church’s unity, diversity of spiritual gifts, mission and good works.

This point does not require extensive elaboration. Warfield (2008, 21) famously described John Calvin as “The Theologian of the Holy Spirit.” Crisp’s essay (2015) and Horton’s book (2017), as just two recent examples, provide ample evidence of serious theological reflection on this topic, drawing on a rich heritage of Reformed theological reflection by figures such as Calvin, Owen, and Kuyper. It is worthwhile, however, for Reformed Christians to consider why a perception has arisen that the Holy Spirit is not central to life and faith in Reformed theology.

4.1 Problematic terminology

Perhaps the false perception has arisen, at least in part, because of the use of ambiguous language by some Reformed people, whether in academic writing or in daily conversation. Two issues of terminology seem worthy of careful reflection and more nuanced usage:

- (i) The distinction between “cessationist” and “continuationist.”
Words and their usage have a history, and sometimes it is hard to change popular usage. I have been unable to trace a precise origin for the term “cessationist” (Kidd 2017 is a helpful guide). The term seems misleading to me, as no Reformed theologian I know claims that the Holy Spirit has ceased giving gifts to the church. Horton (2017, 242) expressed a nuanced statement of the common view that goes under this name, concluding, “that whatever use the Spirit may still make of them in his marvelous freedom, the sign-gifts of healing, tongues and prophecy are no longer normative.” Horton’s position, then, is that a small number of the gifts listed in the NT are no longer normative. It

is not that the Holy Spirit has “ceased” to be active or to give gifts to Christians.

(ii) The distinction between “Charismatic” and “non-Charismatic.”

Similarly, the use of the term “Charismatic” for a particular grouping of Christians based on their theology and practice, with the inevitable alternative of “non-Charismatic” churches is not at all helpful for clear theological thinking. Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 12:1–11 make it clear that the Spirit distributes “gifts of grace” (Van der Kooi and van den Brink 2017, 579) to all believers as he wills for the common good. A “non-charismatic” church is an oxymoron! Note, the list of “gifts of grace” in Romans 12:6–8, where the emphasis falls not on spectacular gifts but rather gifts which enable mutual service.

In this regard, it is important to note that there are many Christians who identify broadly with “Reformed theology” who nonetheless do not hold to a “cessationist” position (e.g., Wilson 2018).

4.2 Doctrinal statements

While there is no distinct chapter on the Holy Spirit in the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (which remains a foundational confessional statement—a “subordinate standard”—of Reformed churches throughout the world, including my own), there are numerous references to the person and work of the Spirit throughout the *Confession*. Some have seen the lack of a specific chapter on the Holy Spirit as a significant weakness, but Warfield (1900) argued that this is a simplistic perspective which fails to recognize the pervasive emphasis on the Holy Spirit in discussion of other topics. He offers the following firm rebuttal of this view:

How easily one may fall into such an error is fairly illustrated by certain criticisms that have been recently passed upon the *Westminster*

Confession of Faith—which is (as a Puritan document was sure to be) very much a treatise on the work of the Spirit—as if it were deficient, in not having a chapter specifically devoted to ‘the Holy Spirit and His Work.’ The sole reason why it does not give *a* chapter to this subject, however, is because it prefers to give *nine* chapters to it.... It would be more plausible, indeed, to say that the Westminster Confession comparatively neglected the work of Christ, or even the work of God the Father⁷ (Warfield 1900, xxvii).

Nonetheless, there is little development of any of the brief statements on the Spirit in the *Westminster Confession of Faith*, and this has been identified by some Reformed theologians as a matter that might be addressed. In 2011, the World Reformed Fellowship, an association of Reformed and evangelical institutions and individuals, produced a *Statement of Faith*. According to the Introduction, “It has never been and is not now our intention that our Statement of Faith *replace* any of the historic confessions (Statement of faith).” The *Statement* did, however, aim to express the teaching of the historical confessional documents in a way that addressed contemporary questions and reflected the voices of a global constituency. One section (VI) is devoted to “the Person and Work of the Holy Spirit.” This is a substantial section, consisting of five paragraphs, namely: “the Holy Spirit as a Person of the Trinity”; “the work of the Holy Spirit in redemption”; “the sending of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost”; “the Holy Spirit and spiritual revival”; and “the Holy Spirit and spiritual warfare.” While the section offers a clear and careful presentation of biblical teaching on the Holy Spirit, there is no specific reference in this section to the role of the Spirit in mission or

⁷ I am grateful to my colleague, Dr. Bob Akroyd, for drawing my attention to this quotation.

witness. Another section (X) is devoted to “Mission and Evangelism.” There is only a brief reference to the Holy Spirit there, and that is not directly related to his role in mission.

It is clear enough, therefore, that the Holy Spirit is not neglected in carefully-thought-out Reformed theology—although the emphasis, and thus impression given, may be different in specific local churches. But the question of how Reformed theology relates the Holy Spirit to the task of mission is another matter to which we now turn.

5. Mission as an Important Aspect of the Holy Spirit’s Work in Reformed Theology

It appears that it is largely left to biblical exegetes and missiologists to engage with the relationship between the Holy Spirit, mission, and World Christianity within the Reformed world, as I have already suggested.⁸ The only recent book that I could identify dealing very specifically with this topic is Gary Tyra’s book, *The Holy Spirit and Mission* (2011), written from a Pentecostal perspective. Missiologist Michael Goheen is notable as a Reformed scholar currently active in teaching and writing (he is, at the time of writing, listed as a faculty member at Covenant Theological Seminary), who has addressed the relationship of the Holy Spirit to mission and World Christianity. In his book, *Introducing Christian Mission Today* (2014), Goheen highlights the role of the Spirit in several ways. In the chapter on “Theology of Mission and Missional Theology,” he makes frequent reference to the

⁸I am grateful, however, to my colleague, Thomas Davis, for drawing my attention to the following quotation from George Smeaton (1882, 347), a Professor of Divinity in the Free Church of Scotland, who wrote in the nineteenth century, “The great outstanding work of the Holy Spirit in the present century is the success in missions.”

Spirit. For example, in a discussion of the notion of “God’s mission,” he writes:

The Spirit must be understood in terms of eschatology and mission. The Spirit is a gift of the end time that brings the powers of the age to come into history. The Spirit gives this life of the new creation to the church and empowers it for witness in life, word and deed. (Goheen 2014, 77)

In a similar vein, Goheen (2014, 100) devotes a section of the chapter to “Pneumatology.” Drawing on the work of Hendrikus Berkof, he again draws attention to eschatology and mission as the appropriate context for understanding the Holy Spirit.

Likewise, Goheen is well aware of the current shape of World Christianity and includes a significant survey of the current situation in his book. His survey is marked by both cautious appreciation and careful evaluation. In contrast to some discussions that speak without much qualification of “the work of the Spirit” in the remarkable growth of the Church globally, Goheen notes that there are reasons for hope but also reasons for concern in many parts of the world. For example, in discussing the growth of the church in Latin America, Goheen notes that “Evangélicos,” at the time he was writing, numbered around 90 million (of which about 75% were Pentecostal), whereas in the first part of the twentieth century their numbers had been insignificant. Nonetheless, he (2014, 202–203) comments, “Pentecostalism is not without its problems,” noting churches that “adhere to a radical prosperity gospel.”

Looking back beyond Goheen, we may note two Reformed writers on missiology: J. H. Bavinck, and Bavinck’s student, Harry R. Boer. In fact, there seems to be a greater emphasis on the role of the Holy Spirit in mission among writers in the Dutch Reformed tradition than is evident in authors

in the Scottish Presbyterian tradition, perhaps partly due to the influence of Bavinck and Boer.

Bavinck (1960) emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit as he argues for the rebuking or challenging of false belief, which he calls “elenctics” (from the Greek verb, *elenchein*; see John 16:8), as an aspect of Christian mission. In this regard, he writes:

[W]e must emphasise that the subject of elenctics is in the deepest sense the Holy Spirit. He alone can call to repentance and we are only means in his hand. This truth is also of tremendous importance with respect to the basis of elenctics. It is the Holy Spirit himself who creates a basis. He awakens in man that deeply hidden awareness of guilt. He convinces man of sin, even where previously no consciousness of sin was apparently present. The Holy Spirit uses the word of the preacher and touches the heart of the hearer, making it accessible to the word. If elenctics were only a human activity, the situation would be nearly hopeless. But it is much more, infinitely more. Now this certain knowledge that the Holy Spirit is the true author ought not to give us any excuse to shirk our duty or to take our work any less seriously. On the contrary, the Holy Spirit demands of us a true and complete surrender to the task he has assigned to us, and it is only after we have so yielded that he will use us as his instruments. With anything less, we can accomplish nothing. But, this knowledge gives us the comfort that in the last instance the results do not depend upon our weak powers, but that it is the Holy Spirit who would make us powerful in Christ. (Bavinck 1960, 229)

Boer in his book, *Pentecost and Missions* (1961), argues that mission is rooted in the event of Pentecost. He comments:

If the missionary witness of Acts is inseparable from the Church, it is equally inseparable from the Spirit. The Holy Spirit launched the witness of the Church at Pentecost and He continues to carry and qualify it in all its manifestations. (Boer 1961, 162)

The impact of Bavinck and Boer is seen in the work of the distinguished Dutch dogmatician, G. C. Berkouwer. Berkouwer devotes his final chapter in *The Church* (1976) to “Holiness and Mission.” In this chapter he refers to Boer’s work as follows:

According to Harry Boer, the stimulus for mission was not so much the great commission, as the reality of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. An emphatic command, as if it were something new, was actually not necessary! The Church does not simply receive a commission or command from without but is also moved by the Spirit from within. (Berkouwer 1976, 393–394)

We see, then, within this Dutch Reformed tradition, a consistent recognition that an important aspect of the biblical presentation regarding the Spirit of God is the Spirit’s role as the initiator and enabler of mission. We do not, however, see an emphasis on the work of the Spirit in the “Global Church” in these earlier writings because, even though the church in the Majority World was already experiencing significant growth by the mid-to-late twentieth century, limited attention was given to these matters in most academic theological writing at the time.

In the more recent work of Van der Kooi and van den Brink (2017), we find a much more developed integration of these themes. They devote a section of their chapter on Pneumatology (“Holy Spirit, Giver of Life”) to “The Spirit as the Founder of a New, Global Community” (2017, 512–516), in which they acknowledge and discuss the spread of the gospel. In this

context, they state (513), “The new community around Christ is worldwide and diverse.” Later in the same chapter, the authors discuss views of the Holy Spirit found in different global traditions (526) and also the impact of the growth of the “Pentecostal movement” (526–529).

Similarly, and again in the Dutch Reformed tradition, Stefan Paas (2019, 93–100) includes reflection on “Neo-Pentecostalism,” including recognition of the impact of Christians from the Majority World migrating to Western Europe.

In recent years, then, we see some encouraging signs of greater acknowledgement of and engagement with the relationship between the Holy Spirit, mission, and the realities of World Christianity in the works of Reformed writers.

6. The Holy Spirit and Mission in Acts

Bavinck (1960, 36) states, “The book of the Acts of the Apostles is a missions document par excellence.” Some Reformed theologians (other than missiologists) writing on the Holy Spirit appear to give limited attention to the narrative of Luke-Acts, whereas biblical scholars (and especially scholars standing in the Pentecostal tradition, such as Max Turner and Robert Menzies) often pay particular attention to Luke-Acts. It seems to me that serious attention to Luke-Acts cannot fail to alert a careful reader to the connection between the Holy Spirit and “witness.” (Newkirk [2020] provides recent work from a Reformed perspective that recognizes this connection.)

In this section, I want to mention briefly four passages that are significant for recognizing the connection between the work of the Holy

Spirit and witness. I treat Luke’s writings primarily as “descriptive” rather than “prescriptive” documents. In other words, Luke describes what happened. We are not intended to assume that Luke means “go and do likewise” in all respects! Nonetheless, both Luke’s Gospel and Acts present important information about why the Spirit is sent.

6.1 Acts 1:8

Here Luke records Jesus’s response to the question of the disciples about the restoration of the kingdom: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”⁹ The promise of the Spirit is combined with the declaration that the disciples will be witnesses. That is, they will testify to Jesus. This text is similar to Luke 24:45–49 (Keener 2020, 222) where, again, there is a link between receiving “what the Father promised,” being witnesses, and “repentance for the forgiveness of sins will be preached in his name to all nations, beginning at Jerusalem” (Marshall 1980, 65; Ngewa 2020, 298).

6.2 Acts 2

Two striking features of the narrative deserve attention here. First, the giving of the Spirit at Pentecost is understood as an eschatological event. These are the “last days” that the prophet Joel spoke of. As Marshall (1980, 78) states, “Peter regards Joel’s prophecy as applying to the last days and claims that his hearers are now living in the last days. God’s final act of salvation has begun to take place.” The Spirit comes upon the disciples as the sign that the new age has dawned, that the new creation has come. The second feature of this passage that is striking, and perhaps surprising, is that the result of the pouring out of the Spirit at Pentecost was a sermon! While the dramatic description of tongues like fire and foreign tongues

⁹ Unless otherwise indicated, all quotations of Scripture are from the New International Version.

(notice the use of the same word) catch the attention, the gift of languages that was given was a means to communicate “the wonders of God” (Acts 2:11) in the various languages of the peoples gathered (Ngewa 2020, 300). The Spirit acts to achieve cross-cultural communication. The languages were probably not essential for basic communication, since many people in the Greco-Roman empire would have had some ability to use Greek. Yet God gives them communication in their “heart language.”

6.3 Acts 8:26–40

In this narrative we find the Spirit directing Philip’s encounter with the Ethiopian official, sending Philip (the Angel of the Lord and the Spirit appear to be interchangeable in this narrative) to the most unlikely place (v. 26), prompting him to approach the chariot (v. 29), and then removing him when the encounter was complete (v. 39, though there is some question about the original text here). Luke presents the Spirit as choreographing a mission encounter which would lead to the gospel being taken to Africa.

6.4 Acts 13:1–4

In this brief but pivotal narrative, the Spirit is said to choose Saul and Barnabas to be set apart (v. 2) and then to send them on their way (v. 4). Interestingly, the agents of sending in verse 3 are the church (leaders?) while in verse 4 it is the Holy Spirit, so the implication is that the Holy Spirit acts through the church. Yet it is quite evident that the Spirit drives this new missionary moment.

These passages are only some of the texts we could mention that show that the Spirit of God is at the heart of mission. As Bartholomew and Goheen (2014, 198) comment, “Mission is first of all a work of the Spirit.” Van der Kooi and van den Brink (2017, 512–513) draw attention to what they call “the boundary-crossing character of the work of the Holy Spirit.”

They explain this phrase as follows:

In his efforts to let the entire world share in Christ, the Spirit propels people over lines they had never thought they would cross. Paul himself is one of these, but the book of Acts provides other impressive examples. (Van der Kooi and van den Brink 2017, 512–513)

This theme of “boundary-crossing” is found in each of the texts from Acts I have mentioned. Of course, the question of how these particular events fit into Salvation History will be debated by Reformed and Pentecostal interpreters. Wright (2010, 164) comments on Acts 1:8, “Like its companion verse in Luke 24:48, this probably refers primarily to the special place of the original disciples/apostles as eyewitnesses of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus himself.” Wright goes on to suggest, however, that believers who have come to trust in Jesus through the apostolic witness are also called to testify to the truth of the gospel. The texts I have identified in Acts highlight an important aspect of the work of the Holy Spirit: The Spirit directs and empowers the church to take the gospel of Jesus across boundaries of various kinds.

Thus, while it is entirely appropriate for Reformed theologians to emphasize essential teaching on the person of the Holy Spirit, his role in creation and providence, the gifts he gives to the church, and so on (as Horton does very effectively), there also needs to be an emphasis on the Spirit who empowers for witness. In fact, Horton (2013, 165) includes a clear statement on this in his discussion of the “tongues” at Pentecost:

The Spirit hereby equips the church to be witnesses to Christ—that is the whole purpose of Pentecost. Furthermore, this speaking in other languages was meant to be a sign. Miraculous signs are not normally ongoing events but remarkable signposts of something new that God is doing. Here, it is the sign, first of the ingathering of diaspora Jews.

Yet as Acts unfolds, it is the harbinger of God's ingathering of the nations, crossing all ethnic and linguistic barriers.

This is a welcome comment. However, this reference to the missional significance of a manifestation of the Spirit's power is "hidden" within a discussion of "tongues" rather than highlighted more prominently as a significant aspect of a fully-orbed doctrine of the Holy Spirit. This means that it might easily be neglected.

7. Reformed Christians and World Christianity

When contemporary authors discuss the role of the Holy Spirit in the growth of World Christianity, they typically point to the huge growth of Pentecostal/Charismatic/neo-Pentecostal churches. This is not surprising given the vast numbers of people involved. From a Reformed perspective, I recognize the need to take due notice of this. It is also important, however, to recognize that Reformed Christians are not onlookers, merely observing World Christianity. They are part of World Christianity, and they are worthy of due attention.

To illustrate this, we might consider the denominational membership list of the World Reformed Fellowship (WRF). The seventy-three (wrfnet.org 2020) denominational members of the WRF represent the following countries: Angola, Argentina, Australia, Bangladesh, Brazil, Burundi, Canada, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Haiti, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Italy, Kenya, Lithuania, Madagascar, Malawi, Mexico, Myanmar, New Zealand, Pakistan, Scotland, Senegal, South Africa, South Korea, Uganda, and the USA. If we consider the theologically broader conciliar organization, the World Communion of Reformed Churches, we find that they indicate they have 233 (as of March 2021) denominational members spread all over the world. Park (2008, 735) cites Hesselink's (1988, 7–8)

assessment that, by the late 1980s, "The largest Reformed/Presbyterian congregations in the world today are no longer in traditional centers such as Geneva, Amsterdam, Edinburgh, or Pittsburgh, but rather in Nairobi, Seoul, and Sao Paulo!" This state of affairs has been reflected in the *Oxford Handbook of Presbyterianism* (Smith and Kemeny 2019), which includes chapters that discuss Presbyterianism in Africa, Asia, Latin America, and the Middle East along with those on North America, Britain, and Europe.

8. A Reformed Perspective on Pentecostalism in World Christianity

I have already indicated that the scale of growth of Pentecostal-type churches is such that Reformed Christians (along with other evangelicals who do not belong to that movement) must reflect carefully on how to respond (see now the essay by Michael L. McClymond in Smith and Kemeny 2019, 425–437). I suggest that at least three qualities are required of Reformed (and other) contributors to this discussion:

8.1 Nuance

The term "Pentecostal" is not adequate for the astonishing diversity of groups. Anderson (2013, 252) comments:

It can no longer be said without qualification that there are now over 600 million "Pentecostals" worldwide. When considering what diverse and mutually independent movements are included in the statistics, any attempt at definition will fall short of precision, and Pentecostalism can probably never be defined adequately.

This number includes Christians who would be "Reformed" in their general theological outlook, but not "cessationist" (Kidd 2017). It also includes those who apparently stand outside the bounds of trinitarian orthodoxy (notably

“Oneness Pentecostals”). It is not helpful or fair to Christian brothers and sisters with whom we largely agree, to use a term that fails to distinguish between orthodox Christians and those whose beliefs and/or practices are hugely problematic. Related to this is the need for nuance in choosing the strongest and most persuasive representatives of a “continuationist” position with whom to engage, and in resisting the temptation to make sweeping generalizations.

8.2 *Discernment*

Kirsteen Kim (2012, 36) states:

British New Testament scholar James Dunn has remarked that if mission is defined as ‘finding out where the Holy Spirit is at work and joining in,’ then ‘discernment is the first act of mission.’

Discernment (at least one form of it) is itself a gift of the Spirit (1 Cor 12:10). Whether it is a “sign gift” is debated, but it seems likely that the need to discern that which is from God and that which is not continues beyond the initial establishment of the early Christian communities. Similar care is also commanded in 1 Thessalonians 5:21 and in 1 John 4:1. The precise process is not explained, but perhaps the Bereans of Acts 17:11 provide a model of testing teaching, which is based on their evaluation of what is said against the standard of Scripture (see Van der Kooi and van den Brink 2017, 522–524).

8.3 *Generosity*

If Reformed Christians are to make a constructive contribution to the global church, it is essential that they be characterized by various forms of generosity:

8.3.1 *Listening*

One of the most important acts of generosity a human being can show to others is to listen well to what they say. Reformed Christians should ensure that they are listening carefully to voices beyond their own tradition and beyond their own geographical and cultural context. What is more, they should identify the strongest and most persuasive representatives of other positions with whom to engage. Listening to voices from the Majority World has not always been a simple matter because of limited access to literature, but the work of Langham Literature has transformed the ease with which the voices of Majority World authors can be heard. Various other publishers are also making Majority World voices accessible (e.g., Green et al. 2020). A generous attitude to listening will involve taking the trouble to locate voices we might not have heard in our circles. Such an attitude is not incompatible with significant disagreement.

8.3.2 *Judgement*

As we recognize that diversity of the Global Church, with its strengths and its faults, we need a generous attitude that acknowledges Christian unity wherever possible, even where significant issues require to be addressed (compare the Corinthian church). We also need to be ready to listen to the evaluation of our own tradition, beliefs, and practices by others and to truly hear what they may teach us.

8.3.3 *Resources*

Wherever the church requires greater theological depth (and it should not be assumed that this is always “somewhere else”), Reformed Christians should be ready to share our resources—human, intellectual, financial—rather than adopt a critical attitude from a position of detachment.

9. Conclusion

Some people may think that the Holy Spirit is not a central theme for Reformed Christians. Some may think that Reformed Christians have little interest in how the Spirit is active in the mission of the Church and in the growth of the Church globally. Reformed Christians cannot be responsible for what others think, but they can take responsibility for ensuring that they engage with these issues as fully and as constructively as possible. As those of us who belong to the Reformed tradition become more aware of the many fellow-Christians throughout the world who belong to the same tradition, and as we also give serious thought to how we can acknowledge and serve fellow-Christians who belong to other traditions, we will more fully recognize our need of the Spirit's work among us. And as we look beyond the boundaries of the church, we will become more convinced of our need of the Spirit's work to direct and empower the mission of the church.

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