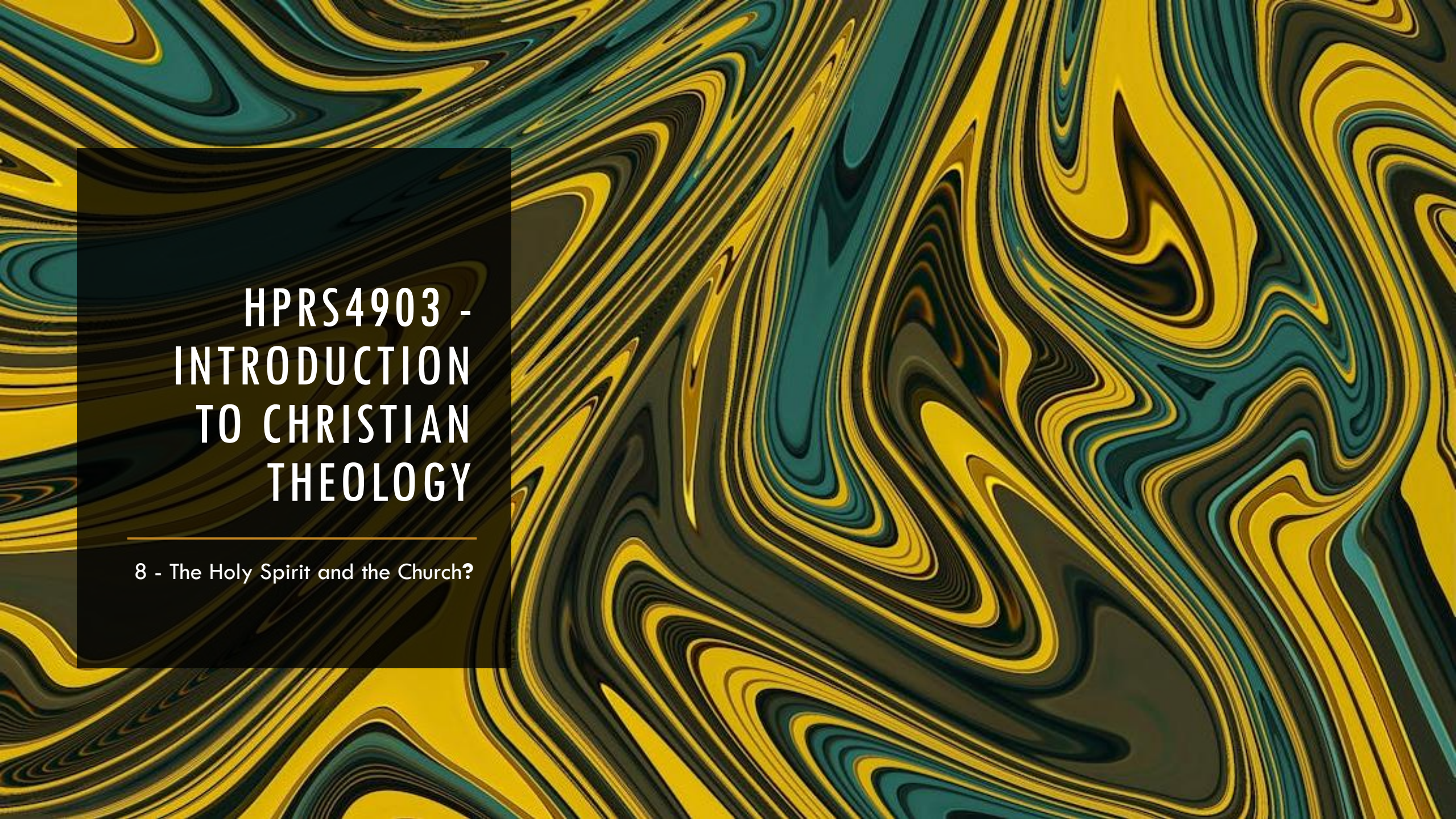




HPRS4903 - INTRODUCTION TO CHRISTIAN THEOLOGY

8 - The Holy Spirit and the Church?



THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE CHURCH

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE CHURCH

If Christian theology begins with the confession of God the Father and is centered upon the person of Jesus Christ, it is sustained, animated, and made present through the Holy Spirit.

Without the Spirit, there is no Church, no living faith, no sacraments, and no ongoing participation in the life of Christ.

Pneumatology, the study of the Holy Spirit, is inseparable from *ecclesiology*, the theology of the Church, because the Church is, in the Christian understanding, the community created and sustained by the Spirit.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE CHURCH

The Nicene Creed confesses belief “in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of life... who has spoken through the prophets”.

This brief statement encapsulates an expansive vision: the Spirit is divine, revelatory, and active across history.

We are going to look at four ways in which this is an important feature of Christian theology; first, the Spirit in Scripture; secondly, the Spirit in sacraments and worship; thirdly, the way that authority and diversity relate to the Spirit; and fourthly, the history and theology of Pentecostal and charismatic movements which draw their inspiration from the Spirit.



THE HOLY SPIRIT IN SCRIPTURE

THE SPIRIT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

An important thing to realise is that the biblical story of the Spirit begins long before the birth of the Christian Church.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the word *ruach* can mean wind, breath, or spirit. It conveys energy, vitality, and invisible yet powerful presence.

In Genesis 1:2, the Spirit of God hovers over the chaotic waters at creation, suggesting that life and order originate through divine breath. This association between Spirit and life continues throughout Scripture: when God breathes into Adam, he becomes a living being (Genesis 2:7).



THE SPIRIT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

In the Old Testament, the Spirit is not yet described in Trinitarian terms as a distinct person, but instead as God's dynamic presence in action.

The Spirit empowers specific individuals for specific tasks — Judges such as Gideon and Samson receive the Spirit for leadership and strength, while Kings such as Saul and David are anointed by the Spirit to govern Israel. Prophets speak by the Spirit's inspiration, becoming instruments of divine revelation.



THE SPIRIT IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

The Spirit is also associated with wisdom and craftsmanship, not only in dramatic moments but also in artistic and communal life. In Exodus 31, Bezalel is filled with the Spirit to construct the tabernacle, for example.

Importantly, the prophets anticipate a kind of future democratisation of the Spirit which prefigures the New Testament's claim that the Spirit will become the defining mark of the messianic age.

For example, Joel proclaims that God will pour out the Spirit on all flesh – “sons and daughters, slaves and free” (Joel 2:28–29). Ezekiel envisions a new heart and a new spirit placed within all God's people (Ezekiel 36:26–27).



THE SPIRIT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

In the New Testament, the Spirit becomes central to the story of Jesus and the formation of the Church as the Gospels portray Jesus as conceived by the Spirit and anointed at his baptism by John the Baptist.

When the Spirit descends like a dove (Mark 1:10), it signals the inauguration of Jesus' public ministry, Jesus goes on to act "in the power of the Spirit," healing, teaching, and confronting evil.

The Gospel of John introduces the Spirit as the *Paraclete*, the Advocate or Helper, who continues Jesus' presence after his departure.

This Spirit teaches, reminds the disciples of Jesus' words, and guides them into truth, which emphasises an important factor – that the Spirit mediates and continues Christ's living presence.



THE SPIRIT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

This continues in the Book of Acts, which presents the Spirit as the driving force of the early Church and particularly connected to the story of Pentecost.

At Pentecost (Acts 2), the Spirit descends upon the gathered disciples as wind and fire. They speak in diverse languages, symbolising the reversal of Babel and the birth of a missionary community to the Gentiles.

Pentecost fulfills Joel's prophecy that the Spirit will be given to all men and marks the beginning of the Christian tradition becoming a missionary and global community.



THE SPIRIT IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Paul's letters deepen this theological connection between the Spirit and the Church.

For Paul, the Spirit unites believers to Christ and the Spirit is the pledge or guarantee of future redemption, e.g. Ephesians 1:13–14. The Spirit produces fruits in us, like love, joy, peace, and distributes gifts (*charismata*) for the building up of the body (1 Corinthians 12; Galatians 5).

Taken together, the New Testament accounts portray the Spirit as life-giver, sanctifier, teacher, empowerer, and unifier of the community. For the Christian tradition, the Church does not merely follow Jesus' memory, it continues to participate in his life through the Holy Spirit.





THE SPIRIT IN SACRAMENTS AND WORSHIP



THE SPIRIT IN SACRAMENTS AND WORSHIP

The Spirit in Baptism

Christian tradition consistently links the Spirit to baptism, in a repeat and memory of Jesus' baptism and the Spirit's presence there.

In Acts, baptism and reception of the Spirit are closely connected, with Paul developing the connection to emphasise the familial nature of the community.

Baptism is not merely a symbolic washing of sin, but also of incorporation into Christ's body.



THE SPIRIT IN SACRAMENTS AND WORSHIP

Different traditions interpret this connection differently which results in difference of belief around baptism.

Some emphasise baptismal regeneration – that the Spirit truly transforms the believer in baptism, while others emphasise covenantal inclusion or symbolic testimony.

Yet, even traditions that stress the symbolism of Baptism affirm that the Spirit works through the rite to confirm the individual's faith and to unite believers to the Church.



THE SPIRIT IN SACRAMENTS AND WORSHIP

The Spirit in the Eucharist

The Eucharist, or Holy Communion, likewise depends on the Spirit being present.

In Eastern Orthodox Christian liturgies, the liturgy explicitly invokes the Spirit to sanctify the bread and wine and the gathered people. Even in traditions without a formal *epiclesis*, the Spirit is understood to make Christ present to the community.

The Spirit's role is twofold in this sacrament, both consecrating the elements and forming the Church into communion, just like with Baptism.



THE SPIRIT IN SACRAMENTS AND WORSHIP

The Eucharist is not only remembrance of Jesus' sharing of bread and wine with his companions, but also participation of the individual believer in the community created by that sharing.

Through the Spirit, believers are united with Christ and with one another, and united with an ongoing story that stretches from the Last Supper to today.



THE SPIRIT IN SACRAMENTS AND WORSHIP

The Spirit in Worship and Prayer

Paul writes that believers pray in the Spirit and that the Spirit intercedes with groans beyond words (Romans 8). Even confession—“Jesus is Lord”—is enabled by the Spirit.

The Spirit animates preaching, song, and communal discernment and for many Christians, worship is fundamentally Spirit-led.



THE SPIRIT IN SACRAMENTS AND WORSHIP

At the same time, the New Testament warns of disorder, with Paul insisting that charismatic expression (e.g. the expression of things fueled by the Spirit) be exercised with love and discernment (1 Corinthians 13–14) and that the Spirit brings both exuberance and order.

Fundamentally, spiritual gifts are given “for the common good”. These can include teaching, healing, prophecy etc which can often be found in Charismatic or Pentecostal churches as a focus of worship.

THE SPIRIT AND ECCLESIAL AUTHORITY

This connection between the Spirit, the community of the Church, and the fruits or gifts of the Spirit poses some interesting questions about authority.

If the Spirit guides the Church, how does the Church discern what is authentic teaching?

Many Christian traditions have developed quite different answers to this question. Catholic and Orthodox traditions have come to emphasise apostolic succession and ecumenical councils, believing the Spirit preserves doctrinal continuity through ordained leadership and social structures. In contrast, and developing from their historical roots, Protestant traditions have tended to emphasise Scripture as the Spirit-inspired norm and stress communal interpretation as the location for authority.

THE SPIRIT AND ECCLESIAL AUTHORITY

The tension lies between stability and renewal in the Christian tradition and in the Christian community. History shows that appeals to the Spirit can both challenge corruption and create division.

Discerning which is likely to arise in a particular situation requires humility, the reading of Scripture, communal testing, and an awareness of tradition.

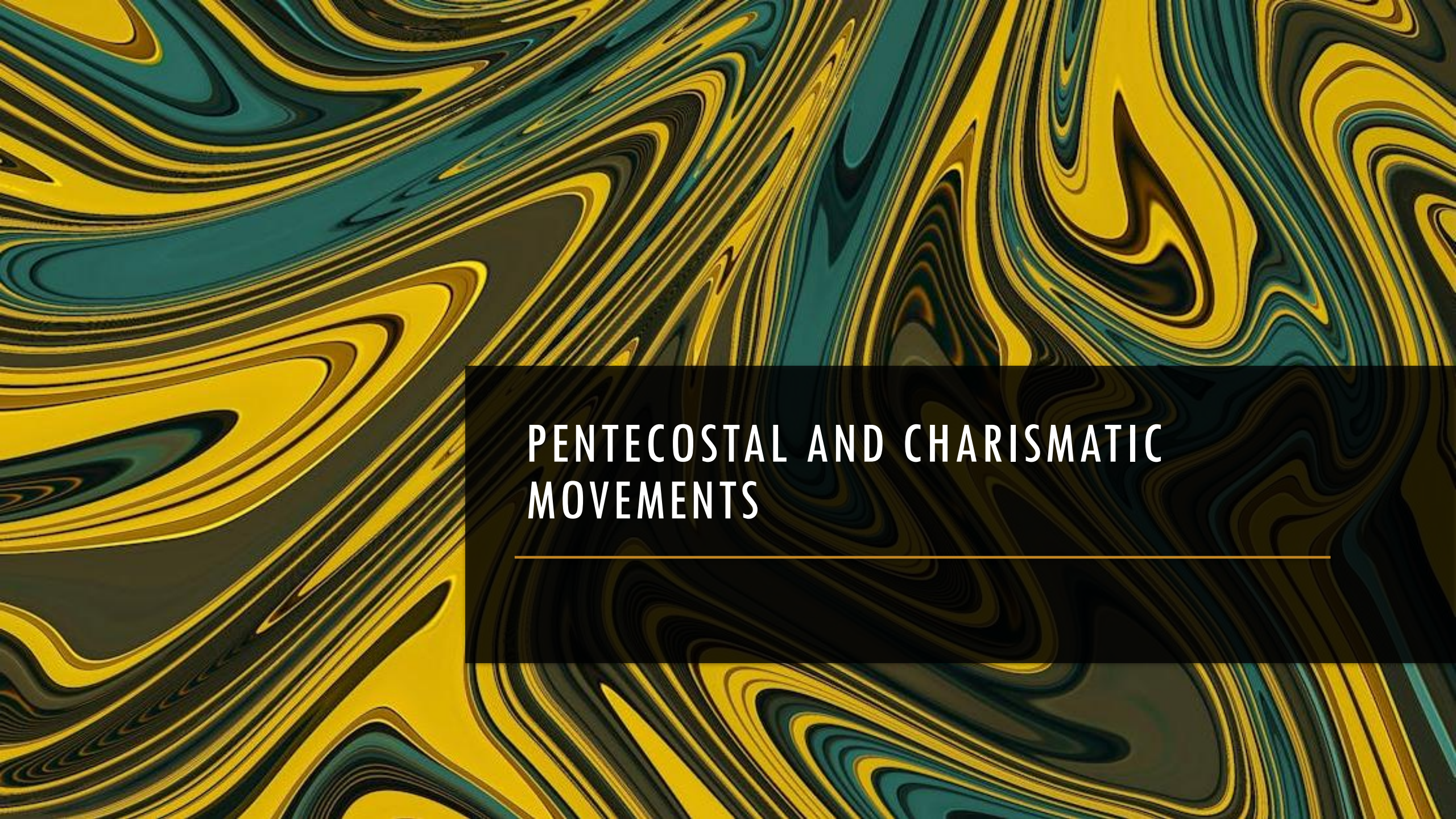
Generally, the Spirit is understood not as replacing institutional structures like the structure of the Church, but as animating them with life and responsiveness.

THE SPIRIT AND ECCLESIAL AUTHORITY

The overarching narrative of the Spirit is an attempt to create unity, without erasing diversity or solidifying the Christian tradition into a fixed account. Pentecost's multilingual proclamation embodies this principle and Paul's image of the Church as one body with many members reinforces it.

A pneumatological vision holds unity as spiritual communion rooted in Christ, even amid institutional plurality and difference. Diversity of worship styles, theological emphases, and cultural forms may reflect the Spirit's creative work in different circumstances and in different places.

This is why many Christian communities are quite relaxed about differences in worship styles across the globe — one of which we will look at next!



PENTECOSTAL AND CHARISMATIC MOVEMENTS

ORIGINS OF PENTECOSTALISM

In the early twentieth century, revival movements emphasising a direct experience of the Holy Spirit gave rise to a stream of Christianity called Pentecostalism.

The Azusa Street Revival (1906) in the USA became a catalytic event where participants reported speaking in tongues, healings, and powerful spiritual manifestations during Christian worship.

Pentecostals, the movement that sprang from this stream, teach that “baptism in the Holy Spirit” is a post-conversion empowerment for witness, often evidenced by *glossolalia* (speaking in tongues) and often adopt forms of worship that is typically expressive and experiential.



ORIGINS OF PENTECOSTALISM

Pentecostalism, drawing on trends in Christianity with a long history, spread very rapidly worldwide, particularly among marginalised communities in the USA, areas in Africa, and Latin America.

Its emphasis on healing and spiritual empowerment resonated in contexts of poverty and social exclusion and often communities can be found in migrant or diaspora communities.

In the mid-twentieth century, charismatic renewal movements emerged within mainline denominations as well – so we began to see, for example, the influence of Pentecostalism in Anglican practice in Africa, which sought to bring renewal within an institutional framework.



CHARISMATIC RENEWAL

Largely, Pentecostalist groups emphasise prayer groups, healing services, and contemporary worship while remaining within traditional ecclesial structures, while Charismatic spirituality crossed denominational boundaries, influencing Catholic, Anglican, Lutheran, and Reformed communities.

In the UK today, Pentecostalist groups and Charismatic groups are some of the fastest growing forms of Christian practice, with large churches like the Assemblies of God being particularly popular in diaspora communities from Nigeria and elsewhere.



THEOLOGICAL CONTRIBUTIONS AND CHALLENGES

Pentecostal and charismatic movements have really reshaped global Christianity with a strong emphasis on experiential faith, the expectation of miracles, and a reliance on the Spirit's immediacy.

They also raise some theological questions:

1. How should charismatic authority be regulated?
2. How do emotional experience and doctrinal formation relate?
3. How should spiritual gifts be discerned?





THE SPIRIT AS THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

THE SPIRIT AS THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

The Holy Spirit in the Christian tradition is seen as the giver of life, the bond of communion, and the source of renewal for the Church.

In Scripture, the Spirit creates and empowers, while in sacraments, the Spirit makes God's grace tangible. In worship, the Spirit animates praise and prayer, and in the structures of authority, the Spirit guides discernment.

What this means is that the Church is not sustained by the memory of Jesus' example alone but also by the ongoing and sustained living presence of God in its community.

THE SPIRIT AS THE LIFE OF THE CHURCH

Therefore, to confess belief in the Holy Spirit is to affirm that Christian community is dynamic ongoing participation in God's life. The Spirit gathers together, sanctifies, and sends the Church into the world to preach the Good News of Jesus.

Thus, understanding the Holy Spirit is essential to understanding the Church as a whole and as a manifestation of Christianity – the Church is the breath of God animating a community called to embody Christ in history and anticipate the fullness of God's kingdom to come.



READINGS

Acts 2

Amos Yong, “I believe in the Holy Spirit: From the Ends of the Earth to the Ends of Time” in Green, Pardue, & Yeo (eds) (2016) *The Spirit over the Earth: Pneumatology in the Majority World*, Eerdmans Publishing: Grand Rapids MI.