WHITHER PENTECOSTAL EXPERIENCE? MEDIATED EXPERIENCE OF GOD IN PENTECOSTAL THEOLOGY

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INTRODUCTION

Roger Meyers: Alright leeches, I want you to see what a good writer looks like. His name is Abraham Simpson, and he's got something that you couldn't get at your fancy schools—life experience.
Writer: Actually, y'know, I wrote my thesis on life experience, and . . .
Roger Meyers: Quiet! Abe, tell them about your amazing life.
Grandpa Simpson: I spent 40 years as a night watchman at a cranberry silo.
Roger Meyers: Wow![1]

In a 1993 episode of The Simpsons entitled, "The Front," Grandpa (Abraham) Simpson is mistaken to be a brilliant children's cartoon writer by a producer, Roger Meyers, who is very impressed with a particular script bearing Grandpa's name. The script was actually written by Grandpa's grandchildren, Bart and Lisa, who are using his name as a front because they are too young to submit a script. Grandpa is immediately

[1] *The Simpsons*, "The Front," episode 78, January 7, 2011 (originally aired April 5, 1993).

hired as a writer, and in the above-cited dialogue is being introduced to a room full of educated but much younger writers. This scene insightfully helps typify an attitude ubiquitous in North American culture—namely, that experience (in this case, life experience) is assumed to be an important resource for understanding and living in the "real world." It is experience that gives Grandpa Simpson an advantage, in contrast to those writers merely trained in academic theory; experience grants one special authority and perhaps even ability because it connects one with reality in a way that theoretical knowledge does not.

Pentecostalism shares an affinity with this view of the importance of experience, especially with regard to experience of God (but also with regard to life experience). This is why Russell P. Spittler notes that, "a quoted aphorism often heard in pentecostal circles runs this way: 'The person with an experience is never at the mercy of another person with a doctrine'."[2] For Pentecostals, experience of the Spirit is of such significance that it is explicitly and implicitly appealed to as an authoritative resource for shaping spirituality and theology.

This essay is about the current state of Pentecostal theology of experience of God, and in particular intends to highlight an evolution of sorts in the way in which Pentecostals are coming to understand their experience of the Spirit. There has been, it will be

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[2] Russell P. Spittler, "Spirituality, Pentecostal and Charismatic," in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, Revised and Expanded ed., ed. Stanley M. Burgess (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 1097a.

shown, a shift within Pentecostal theology from viewing encounters with the Spirit as more or less immediate or direct (and therefore bearing at times an almost incontestable authority), to a more chastened, and yet arguably more fruitful way of viewing such experiences as always already interpreted within, or mediated through, the cultural, linguistic, and theological contexts in which we find ourselves. I believe that this growing appreciation of a mediated view of experience of the Spirit is a positive development, which, rather than diminishing the importance of experience for Pentecostals, actually serves to allow Pentecostal theology to move forward in creative ways.[3]

What follows will begin with a brief review of the Pentecostal affinity for experience of the Spirit and how such experience has functioned within Pentecostal theology and spirituality.[4] After this, the notewor-

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[3] A more detailed and expanded analysis of elements of this essay can be found in Peter D. Neumann, *Pentecostal Experience: An Ecumenical Encounter*, Princeton Theological Monographs Series 187 (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012).

[4] I acknowledge here the challenge of defining what or who is "Pentecostal," and that there are varieties of "pentecostalisms" worldwide. See Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 89; and Allan H. Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 9–15. My focus here, however, is on the understanding of experience of God occurring within the works of theologians who have connection to what can be viewed as classical Pentecostalism, and so I have capitalized "Pentecostal" to represent that designation. That said, I believe that the content of this present discussion can apply to more than those located within that particular Pentecostal tradition—to those that better fall within charismatic or neo-

thy evolution in the way in which some Pentecostals are coming to understand experience of God will be explored. This move will be identified as being connected to an increasing appreciation for the mediated character of the way in which humans experience God. In particular, special attention will be given to three contemporary Pentecostal theologians, Simon K. H. Chan, Frank D. Macchia, and Amos Yong, each of whom serves to illustrate this shift within their theological work. Further, attention will also be drawn to each of these theologians' notable reliance upon and interaction with (but by no means total embrace of) George A. Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic theory of doctrine, which contributes to the way in which these theologians are integrating a more mediated understanding of experience of God into their theological methodology.

PENTECOSTALS AND EXPERIENCE

The experience of the Spirit is important for Pentecostals and almost goes without saying. Mathew S. Clark and Henry I. Lederle argued in the late 1980s that just as some Christian traditions might begin with doctrine as a point of departure, Pentecostals tend to begin with experience, to the extent that Pentecostal theology, "demands more than *belief* in an experience—it demands the *experience of the experience* itself."[5] More

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pentecostal designations. When referencing those sharing this broader "pentecostal" spirituality, I will use the lower case spelling.

[5] Mathew S. Clark and Henry I. Lederle et al, *What Is Distinctive About Pentecostal Theology?* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1989), 36 (italics original).

recently Keith Warrington has suggested that experience is the "heartbeat" of Pentecostalism, without which it would not exist, and he is by no means alone in highlighting this indispensability of experience of the Spirit.[6] Of course the observation that experience of God is treasured and significant to Pentecostal spirituality and theology is not a recent discovery. Pentecostal celebration of experiences with the Holy Spirit have been expressed even in their earliest literature, through personal testimonies to the work of God in baptizing in the Spirit, bringing healing or radical conversions.[7] This is why Douglas G. Jacobsen can describe the faith of early (and later) Pentecostals as follows:

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[6] Keith Warrington, "Experience: The Sina Qua Non of Pentecostalism" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Lee University, Cleveland, TN, Mar. 8–10, 2007), 4. See also Russell P. Spittler, "Maintaining Distinctives: The Future of Pentecostalism," in *Pentecostals from the Inside Out*, ed. Harold Smith, The Christianity Today Series (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1990), 134; Spittler, "Spirituality", 1097a; Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatology*, 89–92; Allan H. Anderson, "Global Pentecostalism in the New Millennium," in *Pentecostals after a Century: Global Perspectives on a Movement in Transition*, ed. Allan H. Anderson and Walter J. Hollenweger, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplemental Series, 15 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 214; Anderson, *Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 14, 196–197; and Brian Robinson, "A Pentecostal Hermeneutic of Religious Experience" (paper presented at the annual meeting for the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, MO, Nov. 12–14, 1992), 2; cf. Neumann, *Pentecostal Experience*, 100–104.

[7] For examples see E. Myron Noble, ed., *Like as of Fire: Newspapers from the Azusa Street World Wide Revival* (Washington, DC: Middle Atlantic Regional Press, 1994).

> In short, then, pentecostals are Spirit-conscious, Spirit-filled, and Spirit-empowered Christian believers. In contrast to other groups or churches that emphasize either doctrine or moral practice, pentecostals stress affectivity. It is the *experience* of God that matters—the felt power of the Spirit in the world, in the church, and in one's own life. Pentecostals believe the doctrine and ethics are important, but the bedrock of pentecostal faith is experiential. It is living faith in the living God—a God who can miraculously, palpably intervene in the world—that defines the pentecostal orientation of faith.[8]

Experience, then, occupies a role in the Pentecostal life of faith that powerfully informs and shapes Pentecostal worship and prayer, but also in the ways in which they read Scripture and develop and articulate their theology. Space does not permit to explore here the ways in which experience has impacted Pentecostalism in particular in these areas;[9] however, at

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[8] Douglas G. Jacobsen, "Introduction: The History and Significance of Early Pentecostal Theology," in *A Reader in Pentecostal Theology: Voices from the First Generation*, ed. Douglas G. Jacobsen (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 4 (italics original).

[9] For more detail on Pentecostal experience in general, see Neumann, *Pentecostal Experience*, ch. 2. On the effect of experience on Scripture in particular, see Kenneth J. Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic for the Twenty-First Century: Spirit, Scripture and Community*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplemental Series, 28, ed. John Christopher Thomas, Rickie D.

least two provisional points do need to be made briefly in order to provide a context for the main thrust of this essay, which is to highlight a particular development within Pentecostal theology of experience in recent years.

First, as implied above, not only has experience of God occupied a place of importance for Pentecostals (and still does), but this experience (however defined) needs to be acknowledged as being appealed to as *an authoritative resource for spirituality and theology*. In other words, testimonies of and appeals to experience of the Spirit occupy a place of authority for Pentecostals, alongside Scripture (not to mention Christian and Pentecostal theological traditions), even when this is not explicitly acknowledged. For this reason, it is important that work be done to attempt to better understand the nature of Pentecostal experience, and the ways in which it impacts Pentecostal theology and practice.[10]

Moore, and Steven J. Land (New York: T & T Clark International, 2004).

[10] Attempts have been made to define the theological nature of Pentecostal experience. See, for example, Steven J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplemental Series, 1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001). Land emphasizes affectivity as the core of Pentecostal experience of the Spirit (which is also highlighted in Jacobsen's description, quoted earlier). Also see Warrington, "Experience," 1–8; and Koo Dong Yun, "A Metaphysical Construct of Experience: Concerning the Problematic Usage of 'Experience' within Pentecostal Horizons" (paper presented at the annual meeting for the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Lee University, Cleveland, TN, Mar. 8–10, 2007). Yun argues that Pentecostal experience needs to be understood as not simply being located in

Second, what tends to grant experience of God such authority for Pentecostals is that, traditionally understood, experiences with the Spirit were *assumed to be quite direct or immediate*, and therefore as almost self-authenticating.[11] Qualifying this understanding as assumed (or implied) is simply to draw attention to the fact that experiences with the Spirit (say, of Spirit baptism) were tacitly granted authority by virtue of their powerful immediate effect on the individual (which, due to its overwhelming and transformative impact, was taken to be evidence of an immediate encounter with God). At the same time, authority was not granted to just any powerful spiritual experience. As Douglas G. Jacobsen notes, "Experience alone did not make one a pentecostal. It was experience interpreted in a pentecostal way that made one pentecostal."[12] Pentecostals assumed that legitimate, authentic experience of God was experience of the Holy Spirit of Jesus Christ (the one found in the pages of Scripture). This was not some sort of generic "religious experience," but rather a personal encounter with the personal God of the Bible. This is why Mark J. Cartledge (among others), has qualified Pentecostal experience as being best

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the affections, but as also marked by a practical (as opposed to philosophical) North American pragmatism.

[11] Harvey G. Cox, Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century (Reading: Addison-Wesley, 1995), 87.

[12] Douglas G. Jacobsen, *Thinking in the Spirit: Theologies of the Early Pentecostal Movement* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2003), 3. Jacobsen notes that doctrine played a significant role among early Pentecostals in qualifying what experience counted as authentic experience of the Spirit.

understood as a theology of encounter—encounter with a particular God by the Holy Spirit.[13] What emerges in highlighting these two points is that, traditionally, Pentecostal experience functioned with authority, and that this was, in part, due to held theological assumptions about God, Jesus, the Spirit and Scripture (among other things).[14]

THE EVOLVING PENTECOSTAL CONFIDENCE IN EXPERIENCE AND ITS CHALLENGES

During the past two decades (at least) there has been an evolution of sorts in the way in which Pentecostals have approached their understanding and appreciation of experience of the Spirit. In short, there has been a move to make more explicit the ways that appeals to

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[13] Mark J. Cartledge, *Encountering the Spirit: The Charismatic Tradition*, Traditions of Christian Spirituality (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2007), 19–20; Mark J. Cartledge, "Testimony to the Truth of Encounter: A Study of Pentecostal-Charismatic Epistemology" (paper presented at the annual meeting for the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Southeastern University, Lakeland, FL, Mar. 14–16, 2002). For other examples of the use of "encounter" with reference to Pentecostal experience, see James K. A. Smith, "Faith and the Conditions of Possibility of Experience: A Response to Kevin Hart," in *The Experience of God: A Postmodern Response*, ed. Kevin Hart and Barbara Eileen Wall, Perspectives in Continental Philosophy, 48 (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 88–91; Anderson, *Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 187–188; and Yun, "A Metaphysical Construct of Experience," 1–8.

[14] Clark and Lederle et al, *What Is Distinctive*, 43–47; Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 18; Donald W. Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism*, Studies in Evangelicalism (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1987), 20–21.

experience of God function within Pentecostal spirituality and theology. In the early 1990s Steven Parker observed that in some cases Pentecostals had, in response to evangelical charges that Pentecostals tended to exegete their experience,[15] began to relegate the role of experience to being that which was descriptive as opposed to normative in the development of theology. Parker was among the early voices suggesting that Pentecostal experience of God be taken more seriously than this, arguing that it needed to occupy a more significant role within theological construction (in Parker's case, as a resource for developing a theology of decision-making).[16]

Experience of the Spirit should, it seemed, be granted a more prominent place if Pentecostals were to be true to their heritage and experience. So, rather than offering an apologetic for experiences with the Spirit, perhaps experience should be viewed more optimistically, as holding potential as a theological resource and for understanding Pentecostalism itself—and Pentecostals in various ways began to reflect on the implications of just such a possibility.[17] By the mid

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[15] For example, Gordon D. Fee, *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1991), 86.

[16] Stephen E. Parker, "Led by the Spirit: Toward a Practical Theology of Pentecostal Discernment and Decision Making" (PhD diss., Emory University, 1992), 50, cf. 24–50.

[17] In particular, the positive role of experience in the hermeneutical process became a noteworthy area of discussion. See, for example, Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 133–148; Timothy B. Cargal, "Beyond the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy: Pentecostals and Hermeneutics in a Postmodern Age," *Pneuma* 15, no. 2 (Fall 1993): 182–186; Dale M. Coulter, "What Meaneth

1990s, Randall Holm was able to report, "Pentecostals are increasingly addressing unapologetically their experiential disposition as not only being a legitimate, but an essential expression of their faith."[18]

This continuing growth in the acknowledgment of the vital role that experience of God occupies for pentecostals in general was notably exemplified in the 2007 meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, entitled, "The Role of Experience in Christian Life and Thought: Pentecostal Insights," which produced a number of papers on this theme. Keith Warrington's paper from that same conference helpfully expressed this optimism toward viewing experience of the Spirit as a theological resource. Specifically, he argued that attempts to define global Pentecostalism theologically (i.e., by doctrine) will always be inadequate due to the diversity of beliefs even within this stream of Christianity. Experience (encounter with the Spirit), howev-

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This? Pentecostals and Theological Inquiry," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 10, no. 1 (2001): 56–63; Paul W. Lewis, "Towards a Pentecostal Epistemology: The Role of Experience in Pentecostal Hermeneutics" (paper presented at the annual meeting for the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Church of God Theological Seminary, Cleveland, TN, March 12–14, 1998), 9–14; Scott A. Ellington, "Pentecostalism and the Authority of Scripture," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 4, no. 9 (Oct. 1996): 16–38; and Christopher A. Stephenson, "Epistemology and Pentecostal Systematic Theology: Myer Pearlman, E. S. Williams, and French L. Arrington" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Lee University, Cleveland, TN, Mar. 8–10, 2007), 6–8.

[18] Randall Holm, "Varieties of Pentecostal Experience: Pragmatism and the Doctrinal Development of Pentecostalism," *Eastern Journal of Practical Theology* 10 (Fall 1996): 1.

er, might provide a more fruitful way forward in understanding Pentecostalism.[19]

Such optimism, however, also raises questions. If experience of God is to take on a more explicit role as a theological resource, then certain intrinsic issues need to be addressed. What, after all, do P/pentecostals mean by "experience" (of God) and just how significant is this experience for understanding and shaping Pentecostalism? Like P/pentecostalism itself, "Pentecostal experience" is quite difficult to define (as is the concept of "experience" itself).[20] Clearly, more care would need to be taken to attempt to define more precisely what was meant by experience, and also to nuance the way in which experience was understood, so as to qualify the extent of authority granted to any appeal to experience. Without getting too far ahead of ourselves, it would appear that there is a growing recognition that theological assumptions are always tacitly involved in the interpretation of encounters with the Spirit, and so different theological attempts to define and qualify the nature of Pentecostal experience have been proposed.

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[19] Warrington, "Experience," 2.

[20] It is not only Pentecostal experience, but the term "experience" itself is very difficult to define. This is why Donald L. Gelpi labels experience a "weasel word," and suggests up to six different definitions for the term See Donald L. Gelpi, *The Turn to Experience in Contemporary Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1994), 1–3; cf. Yun, "A Metaphysical Construct of Experience," 1–4. Yun provides a helpful exposition on Gelpi's definitions. Martin Jay also views "experience" as likely the most difficult concept within philosophy to define precisely. Martin Jay, *Songs of Experience: Modern American and European Variations on a Universal Theme* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 2–3.

Some, like Steven J. Land for example, have emphasized the affections (inner feelings, not to be confused with mere emotion) as the core of Pentecostal experience.[21] Parker also stresses this affective dimension, defining experience as "a complex conscious, affective, physiological phenomenon, involving both cognitive awareness of external events and internal physiological, affective and conscious reactions to such events."[22] In Parker's comment we should also note an emphasis on experience being that which is consciously apprehended. Others, however, are less convinced that Pentecostal experience should be located in the affections, and this seems related to the fact that Pentecostals tend to qualify tacitly what encounters might be considered to be "of God." For example, Koo Dong Yun argues that more attention needs to be paid to the North American pragmatic influence on Pentecostalism. An inherent pragmatism means that inner affections alone cannot serve to identify Pentecostal experience of God; Pentecostals also look for their experiences with the Spirit to be verified by some sort of tangible results, or evidence, in order to be considered authentically Pentecostal.[23] In any case, this means that there is presently no consensus concerning the role of the affections when it comes to Pentecostal experience.

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[21] Land, Pentecostal Spirituality, 13, 23.
[22] Parker, "Led by the Spirit," 11.
[23] Yun, "A Metaphysical Construct of Experience," 8. Cf. Holm, "Varieties of Pentecostal."; and Randall Holm, "A Paradigmatic Analysis of Authority within Pentecostalism" (PhD diss., University of Laval, 1995).

Dale M. Coulter has argued alternatively that experience itself is insufficient for comprehending Pentecostalism, which needs to be understood through a particular theological core.[24] By mining the historical streams informing the emergence of Pentecostalism, he identifies two elements that he believes are central to shaping Pentecostal understanding and experience of God—a "dynamic view of revelation as an ongoing enterprise," and a more synergistic soteriology (accenting sanctification as tied to believer's justification).[25] The point here, however, is not to explore or evaluate Coulter's proposed theological core of Pentecostalism (although I believe it has significant merit), but to recognize more broadly, through its example, that a tension exists as to whether experience or theological articulation holds the most fruitful way forward for understanding the nature of Pentecostalism. What is becoming more apparent is that this is not an either/or question; these two elements—experience and theology—cannot be easily separated. Coulter agrees, arguing it is the "complex interplay" between experience of the Spirit, and Pentecostal doctrines and traditions that provides the clearest way forward for understanding Pentecostalism.[26]

This inseparability of experience of God and the theology that informs such experience is supported by Peter Althouse's attempt to classify the nature of the Pentecostal appeal to experience. Althouse argues that Pentecostal experience of God needs to be distin-

[24] Coulter, "What Meaneth This?," 39.
[25] Ibid., 53, 54, cf. 51–55.
[26] Ibid., 64.

guished from either generic mystical experiences, on the one hand, and transcendental human experience on the other. In contrast to these, Pentecostal appeal to experience of God should be viewed as an "appeal confessional." While Pentecostals have stressed the immediacy of encounter with the Spirit (which might lead some to associate this with mysticism), this encounter occurs and is interpreted (although most often tacitly or naïvely) within a specific confessional framework that affects the way in which experience of God is understood.[27] As already implied above, Pentecostals appeal to, and only accept as authentic, experience of God that falls within a particular theological framework of understanding, which has been received largely (and sometimes naïvely, i.e., unreflectively with regard to theology) through sermons and testimonies (orally)—in short, the "confession" of a particular (Pentecostal) community.

PENTECOSTALS AND EXPERIENCE OF GOD MEDIATED THROUGH CULTURAL-LINGUISTIC CONTEXT

Althouse's observations help highlight the growing awareness that Pentecostal experiences of (encoun-

[27] Peter Althouse, "Towards a Theological Understanding of the Pentecostal Appeal to Experience" (paper presented at the annual meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Tulsa, OK, March 8–10, 2001). Althouse is drawing on George P. Schner's analysis of the appeal to experience within theology in general, and in which a continuum for locating experience is proposed. See George P. Schner, "The Appeal to Experience," *Theological Studies* 53, no. 1 (1992): 40–59.

ters with) the Spirit are not as immediate or direct as might be assumed, but are shaped by the theological context in which Pentecostals find themselves. Context—cultural, linguistic and theological—serves to some degree to *mediate* experience of the Spirit. It is this growing recognition of the meditated nature of experience of God among Pentecostals that this essay is attempting to highlight for at least three reasons.

First, this more nuanced understanding is a growing reality among Pentecostal theologians, enabling them to reflect more insightfully on the implications and meaning of encounters with the Spirit, and to draw upon the rich resources of the broader Christian tradition more intentionally and deeply, in a way that a more unqualified immediate view of experience with the Spirit does not so readily allow. Second, I believe that adopting a more mediated understanding of experience of God would encourage Pentecostals to at least temper the weight of authority granted to personal (individual) encounters with God, since any such experiences are interpreted, influenced already by the theological context in which they occur. Third, a mediated perspective would encourage Pentecostals to investigate the historical, cultural, linguistic, philosophical and theological (etc.) contexts in which they are living out their lives of faith in order to better interpret and articulate their experience of God.

Concerning the growing adaptation of a mediated view of experience among Pentecostal theologians, it is noteworthy that what has, in part, enabled this mediated nuancing of experience of the Spirit is a reliance on some elements of postliberal theology via George A. Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic theory of doc-

trine,[28] reference to which is evident in various places within contemporary Pentecostal theological work.[29] Joel J. Shuman, for example, utilizes Lindbeck's doctrinal theory to argue that Pentecostalism itself needs to be understood as a subcultural-linguistic community, and as such its doctrines are also intricately connected to and inseparable from its practices and experiences. Because of this, Pentecostal doctrine is somewhat relativized to that context. Shuman's focus is the Pentecostal experience(s) of Spirit baptism and speaking in tongues in particular, and he argues that such experience is never private, being shaped by (mediated

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[28] See George A. Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 18–23, 63, 69, 80, 113–124; cf. Neumann, *Pentecostal Experience*, 29, 110. In brief, Lindbeck understands religion to bear resemblance to language and culture. A "cultural-linguistic" approach, then, suggests that Christian doctrine should be viewed through the lens of "regulative" or "rule theory," meaning that doctrine functions within the overall grammar (so to speak) of the activities of a given worship community. Within subcultural religious communities, then, worship and liturgy function as first-order activities and should be viewed as making ontological truth claims. Doctrine, however, functions as second-order discourse, making propositional, but not ontological, statements about the worshipping community. Doctrine is normative, then, insofar as it bears faithful witness to the worship practice of a given community. Also see Joel J. Shuman, "Toward a Cultural-Linguistic Account of the Pentecostal Doctrine of the Baptism of the Holy Spirit," *Pneuma* 19, no. 2 (Fall 1997): 215–218.

[29] See Ralph Del Colle, "Postmodernism and the Pentecostal-Charismatic Experience," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 8, no. 17 (Oct. 2000): 101. Del Colle notes that postliberal theology is becoming the "path that is most commonly taken by the new crop of Pentecostal theologians looking for alternatives to fundamentalism and evangelical theology."

through) the Pentecostal tradition and community, as well as the New Testament story (in particular, the book of Acts). The doctrine of Spirit baptism and tongues, then, makes most sense within the overall theological grammar of the Pentecostal community, and therefore functions normatively within that context, because it bears witness to, and invites participation in this experience.[30]

Other Pentecostal theologians, however, have utilized and interacted with the implications of Lindbeck's theory more fully, and three will serve as primary examples of this evolution toward a mediated view of experience of God. Simon K. H. Chan[31] is a Pentecostal theologian who explicitly appeals to Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic theory in order to preserve Pentecostal experience, which he labels the "Pentecostal reality."[32] He does this not simply to en-

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[30] Shuman, "Toward a Cultural-Linguistic Account," 207–223. Mark J. Cartledge also supports the view that theological discourse can only occur within a cultural-linguistic context. He also correctly identifies cultural-linguistic theory as an expression of a coherence theory of truth. See Cartledge, "Testimony to the Truth," 603–604; and also James K. A. Smith, "The Closing of the Book: Pentecostals, Evangelicals, and the Sacred Writings," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 5, no. 11 (Oct. 1997): 68–70.

[31] Chan holds credentials with the Assemblies of God (Singapore), and is the Earnest Lau Professor of Systematic Theology at Trinity Theological College in Singapore. See http://www.ttc.edu.sg/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=22&Itemid=30 (accessed July 26, 2009).

[32] Simon K. H. Chan, *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplemental Series, 21 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 7. The "Pentecostal reality" is a "cluster of experiences which, Pentecostals believe, distinguish them from other Christians." All pente-

sure Pentecostalism's longevity for its own sake, but to hopefully recover and integrate "Pentecostal-charismatic" spirituality into the broader Christian tradition in general, and evangelicalism in particular.[33] In any case, Chan draws on Lindbeck to address some concerns he has with the Pentecostal doctrines of Spirit baptism and initial evidence. These doctrines, he believes, are founded upon inadequate theological constructs, and are therefore in danger of being lost or at least of becoming benign.[34]

Once upon a time, Chan argues, earlier in Pentecostal history, the traditional articulations of an empowerment subsequent to conversion (Spirit baptism) and of tongues as initial evidence of this experience were appropriate articulations of the Pentecostal subcultural-linguistic community, since such experiences were commonplace. In other words, the doctrines more or less accurately expressed the practice and encouraged similar experience for early Pentecostals.

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costals globally, Chan argues, share an emphasis on "a certain kind of spiritual experience of intense, direct and overwhelming nature centering in the person of Christ." Cf. Neumann, *Pentecostal Experience*, 218–224.

[33] Simon K. H. Chan, *Spiritual Theology: A Systematic Study of the Christian Life* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 16–17, 24–39. Chan uses the term "Pentecostal-charismatic" (39) to describe this form of spirituality that he feels has unfortunately become something of an "aberration" in Christian history (37).

[34] Simon K. H. Chan, "The Language Game of Glossolalia, or Making Sense of the 'Initial Evidence'," in *Pentecostalism in Context: Essays in Honor of William W. Menzies*, ed. Wonsuk Ma and Robert P. Menzies, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series, 11 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 81–83; Chan, *Pentecostal Theology*, 10.

But such traditional explanations have proved inadequate for "traditioning" these experiences to subsequent generations.[35] It is not that Pentecostals have been wrong in their emphasis on tongues or Spirit baptism in practice. They have, in fact, been intuitively correct in their primary theology (Lindbeck's first-order discourse, referring to the worshipping community's practice and experience) in this respect. Where Pentecostals fall short, however, is in their "explicit theology," their systematic theology.[36] So, he calls Pentecostals to "not be satisfied with just having an experience of the Spirit without and undergirding theology. Without a theology experience cannot be sustained for long."[37]

Anaemic Pentecostal theology is largely due, Chan believes, to the Pentecostal "lack of awareness of

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[35] Chan, *Pentecostal Theology*, 10. Chan states that Pentecostals have deviated from their core values are experiencing "spiritual fatigue," including a loss of missionary zeal and a heightening of dogmatism in Pentecostal denominations aimed at self-preservation (7–8).

[36] Simon K. H. Chan, "Encountering the Triune God: Spirituality since the Azusa Street Revival," in *The Azusa Street Revival and Its Legacy*, ed. Harold D. Hunter and Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 2006), 216–217.

[37] Chan, "Language Game", 81. Elsewhere Chan states that phenomenological analyses of Pentecostal experience are inadequate for defining what is truly the "Pentecostal reality" (Pentecostal experience), since "There is, after all, no such thing as a religious experience without any theological interpretation." Simon K. H. Chan, "'Whither Pentecostalism?'," in *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia*, ed. Allan Anderson and Edmond Tang (Oxford, UK: Regnum Books International, 2005), 579, cf. 578–580.

being part of the larger Christian tradition."[38] Pentecostals also often fail to appreciate that they have their own history and theological tradition, due to an inherent ahistoricism as well as a tendency to view spiritual experiences as private matters, disconnected from the worshipping community and its transmission of its values and theology.[39] What this means for Chan is that Pentecostals need to develop an appreciation for the role of the broader historical Christian theological and spiritual tradition, and draw on its resources to reinterpret, revise and rearticulate their doctrines of Spirit baptism and initial evidence in a way that will allow these experiences to be passed on in a meaningful way.[40] To do this, however, entails adopting a far more robust ecclesiology, one that is also able to view the ongoing development of doctrine as part of the Spirit's work in the church. Our purpose here is not to explore how Chan goes about doing this, but only to point out that he does, and that his utilization of Lindbeck's doctrinal theory enables him to stress (as did Shuman) that experience of the Spirit occurs within and is shaped by the worshipping community. Spiritual experience is mediated through the Pentecostal subcultural-linguistic context, but also that of the broader Christian historical tradition. This understanding of Pentecostal experience is considerably more qualified than the traditional Pentecostal view of experience of God as direct or immediate, and it pro-

[38] Chan, Pentecostal Theology, 11.
[39] Ibid., 17–20; Chan, "Encountering the Triune", 224.
[40] Chan, Pentecostal Theology, 24.

vides Chan with robust resources by which to develop his Pentecostal theology.

CHALLENGES TO CULTURAL–LINGUISTIC OVER-DETERMINATION: THE DEATH OF EXPERIENCE?

We will return to our two other primary examples of Pentecostal theologians integrating a mediated concept of experience of God shortly. First, however, it is important to recognize that not everyone is fully convinced that a cultural-linguistic approach is fully compatible with Pentecostal experience. Paul W. Lewis, for example, states that Lindbeck's theory limits "doctrine, ethics and religious experience" to the "community of the cultural-linguistic grouping," and in doing so tends to reduce "religious experience and theology to anthropology without the Divine ability of immediately impacting the individual apart from the cultural-linguistic group."[41] He goes on:

> The problem with this position is that it does not adequately account for a living God who directly interacts with the present world. Since this is a basic tenet of Pentecostal belief, I cannot wholly accept the cultural-linguistic approach, yet, there is little doubt of the decidedly important and normal aspects of the cultural-linguistic limitations. This approach should be seen as normal without being normative. . . .[42]

[41] Lewis, "Towards a Pentecostal," 4.
[42] Ibid.

What needs to be preserved, argues Lewis, is that Pentecostal experience is "enigmatic—which seems to be contrary to the natural order, but is fundamentally within the natural order."[43]

Here Lewis is recognizing a potential loss of the significance of powerful, interruptive encounters (experiences) with the Spirit, which might be precluded by adopting an overly vigorous cultural-linguistic approach. This, to me, is a correct assessment. There needs to be an acknowledgment of the affect of tradition, culture, language, and so forth upon Pentecostal experience of God without losing the mystery (Lewis' 'enigma') of a transformative encounter with the Spirit, which is so central to Pentecostal spirituality.[44] Pentecostals are by no means the only ones concerned about over-determining the shape of experience through a cultural-linguistic approach, with its coherence-centred epistemology.[45] The ubiquity of discus-

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[43] Ibid., 8.

[44] James K. A. Smith makes a similar point, arguing that while experience of God happens by finite creatures within a limited (cultural-linguistic) horizon, God gives God's self to be experienceable in this way, and so does not become an object, but is rather encountered. See Smith, "Faith and the Conditions", 89–91.

[45] See David Brown, "Experience Skewed," in *Transcending Boundaries in Philosophy and Theology: Reason, Meaning and Experience*, ed. Kevin J. Vanhoozer and Martin Warner (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 160–165, 170–173. Cf. Lieven Boeve, "Theology and the Interruption of Experience," in *Encountering Transcendence: Contributions to a Theology of Christian Religious Experience*, ed. L. Boeve, Hans Geybels, and S. Van den Bossche (Leuven: Peeters, 2005), 13–24; and Kevin Hart, "Introduction," in *The Experience of God: A Postmodern Response*, ed. Kevin Hart and Barbara Eileen Wall, Perspectives in

sion surrounding the concept of and the appeal to experience in Christian theology and in philosophy in general in the last century has made this a point of debate for a broader audience.[46] University of California Professor of History, Martin Jay, for example, speaks about the need for preserving the "paradox" of experience. On the one hand, "the word 'experience' has often been used to gesture toward precisely that which exceeds concepts and even language itself." It identifies "what is so ineffable and individual . . . that it cannot be rendered in conventionally communicative terms to those who lack it. Although we may try to share or represent what we experience, the argument goes, only the subject really knows what he or she has experienced."[47] At this point one might wonder if Jay is speaking as a Pentecostal—one who perhaps cannot quite put into words, say, the experience of Spirit baptism—but that is hardly the case. Jay is simply reciting the way in which the appeal to experience operates in everyday life, philosophy and theology, particularly in western culture.

On the other hand, Jay continues, "the lessons of the so-called linguistic turn that increasingly dominated twentieth-century philosophy" raised significant doubts concerning such "experiential self-sufficiency. . . . Since nothing meaningful can appear outside the boundaries of linguistic mediation, . . . no term can escape the gravitational pull of its semantic context." In

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Continental Philosophy, 48 (New York: Fordham University Press, 2005), 5–7.

[46] The ubiquity of experience is noted by Jay, *Songs of Experience*, 4.

[47] Ibid., 5–6.

this view experience can no longer be considered "foundational or immediate," and it loses its self-authenticating authority.[48] Taken to an extreme, this linguistic-turn might indicate that experience itself is suffering a considerable loss of influence, possibly even a slow death.[49] Neither extreme, however, is convincing to Jay; and he wants to retain the paradox of maintaining the truth behind both these positions: "That is, we need to be aware of the ways in which 'experience' is both a collective linguistic concept, a signifier that yokes together a class of heterogeneous signifieds located in a diacritical force field, and a reminder that such concepts always leave a remainder that escapes their homogenizing grasp."[50]

Pentecostals have traditionally erred, it seems to me, in paying too little attention to the impact of the collective, the worshipping community and its theological and spiritual tradition (both in its particular Pentecostal and broader Christian expressions), upon experiences with the Spirit. Some Pentecostal theologians are correcting this, adapting cultural-linguistic theory to interpretations of spiritual experiences into their theological method. At the same time, a movement like Pentecostalism cannot embrace this "linguistic turn" unreservedly without risking giving up a vital element of its self-identity, since it is largely experiential in its spirituality. This explains Lewis' caution to-

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[48] Ibid., 6.

[49] Ibid., 3–4.

[50] Ibid., 6. Jay goes on: "'Experience,' we might say, is at the nodal point of the intersection between public language and private subjectivity, between expressible commonalities and the ineffability of the individual interior" (6–7).

wards embracing cultural-linguistic theory wholeheartedly. For the remainder of this essay, then, I want to highlight two other significant Pentecostal theologians, wrestling to preserve the paradox suggested by Jay (cf. Lewis' 'enigma') concerning experience of the Spirit and its function in theological construction.

FRANK D. MACCHIA AND AMOS YONG IN THE PARADOX OF PENTECOSTAL EXPERIENCE

Pentecostal theologian, Frank D. Macchia's understanding of experience of God is shaped by an appreciation of at least three theological viewpoints: 1) his own Pentecostal tradition and personal encounter(s) with the Spirit,[51] 2) the holistic view of experience of God found (for example) within "counter-cultural" liberation theologies (which assume experience of God is "only inadequately expressed in our symbols and interpretive frameworks"),[52] and 3) postmodern critiques, such as that of Lindbeck, that stress experience of God as deriving from "symbol systems" or "cultural

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[51] See, for example, Macchia's testimony to his experience of Spirit baptism in Frank D. Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006), 11–13. On this entire discussion of Macchia see Neumann, *Pentecostal Experience*, 164–168. Macchia holds credentials with the Assemblies of God (USA), and presently is Professor of systematic theology at Vanguard University of Southern California. See "Vital Theology," http://www.vitaltheology.com/advisory.shtml (accessed March 16, 2009).

[52] Frank D. Macchia, "Christian Experience and Authority in the World: A Pentecostal Viewpoint," *Ecumenical Trends* 31, no. 8 (2002): 11.

and linguistic frameworks."[53] Following Lindbeck, Macchia acknowledges that it is "difficult to conceive of a religious experience apart from a symbolic framework that includes deeply and corporately held doctrinal concepts, which function not only to express but also to cradle such experience."[54] This means that transcendental understandings of experience of God rightly need to be called into question, since experience is mediated through cultural-linguistic contexts.[55] Elsewhere, Macchia appeals to Lindbeck's approach as a means by which to relativize all doctrinal confessions as fallible, and potentially requiring revision.[56]

So, on the one hand, Macchia can say, "Experience is certainly culturally mediated and will vary in nature from person to person, from context to context."[57] Yet, on the other hand, he is not satisfied that a cultural-linguistic position can sufficiently account for the Pentecostal appreciation for experience of the Spirit. With regard to his own experience of Spirit baptism, Macchia refers to this encounter as "overwhelming" and a "God intoxication," in which one's "consciousness [is] wholly taken up with God so that one feels especially inspired to give of oneself to others in

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[53] Ibid.
[54] Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, 54; cf. Macchia, "Christian Experience," 11.
[55] Macchia, "Christian Experience," 12.
[56] Frank D. Macchia, "Groans Too Deep for Words: Towards a Theology of Tongues as Initial Evidence," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 1, no. 2 (July 1998), http://www.apts.edu/ajps/98–2/98–2-macchia.htm (accessed Jan. 15, 2001).
[57] Macchia, Baptized in the Spirit, 14.

whatever gifting God has created within."[58] Macchia finds it difficult to imagine a context in which a human could be transformed (empowered) in this way by God without having "some kind of powerful experience of the divine presence, love, and calling . . . , one that loosens our tongues and hands to function under the inspiration of the Spirit."[59] Put another way, Pentecostals would not be content that it is simply the cultural, linguistic or theological context that determines revelation and experience of God.[60] Further, experience of God must not be so radically dichotomized from revelation.[61] Rather, experiences with God are affected by the very personal presence of the Spirit acting upon the individual. As such, "Our religious experience is to be experience of God and not most fundamentally of our interpretive frameworks!"[62] What is needed, then, is an appreciation that

> symbols function in dialectical relationship with the presence of God through the Holy Spirit. As such, it is not only changing contexts for lived experience that accounts for the transformation of symbols but even more fundamentally the presence of God that calls forth renewed impulses within believers in relation to

[58] Ibid., 13.
[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid., 55; cf. Macchia, "Christian Experience," 12.
[61] Macchia, "Christian Experience," 10. Here Macchia states that he agrees "with Moltmann's dissatisfaction with the conflict between a theology of experience (à la Schleiermacher) and a theology of revelation (à la Barth)."
[62] Ibid., 12.

> new contexts. In other words, since God's Spirit is ultimately at the root of all genuinely religious experience, there is a depth to experience that causes all symbols to remain "broken" (R. C. Neville) and destined for change. And there is the possibility that "the Spirit can move" and grace be "magnified" to the point that we are thrown upon the depth and ultimate horizon of our experience and dramatically reminded of the provisional and relative nature of even our most cherished systems of interpretation.[63]

Elsewhere, Macchia challenges Lindbeck, arguing that glossolalia (the preeminent Pentecostal gift) operates sacramentally, and demonstrates that cultural-linguistic environments do not entirely operate determinately with regard to experience of God because tongues symbolizes a "theophanic experience of God," a divine "self-disclosure." Tongues, in other words, mediates God's presence physically, and as such can transcend the determination of cultural-linguistic boundaries.[64]

Pentecostals, nevertheless, do function within a particular symbol system, and Macchia wants Pentecostals to be aware of both its strengths and weaknesses, so that the meaning of their encounters with the Spirit may be better understood and correspond more accurately with God's mission in the world. Pen-

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[63] Ibid.

[64] Frank D. Macchia, "Sighs Too Deep for Words: Toward a Theology of Glossolalia," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 1, no. 1 (Oct. 1992): 54–55.

tecostals do have "broken" symbols in their experiential framework, such as a sometimes otherworldly and dualistic view of God's activity in the world based in an "eschatology from above."[65] Positively, Pentecostals also exemplify holistic and this-worldly tendencies as well, seen in their emphasis on divine healing, although this too is somewhat deficient in its focus on individual bodily healing and underemphasis on social transformation.[66] In any case, Macchia aims at resolving the weaknesses in the Pentecostal symbol system by offering a revisioned understanding of Spirit baptism, which might serve as the "organizing principle of a Pentecostal theology,"[67] and expounds this in his book *Baptized in the Spirit*. Of note for our purposes, then, is that what in part raises Macchia's awareness that Pentecostal theology is in need of revision is his appreciation of the mediated quality of experience of the Spirit. This understanding also allows him to draw on resources from the broader Christian tradition in developing his theology of Spirit baptism.[68]

Amos Yong is another Pentecostal theologian who appreciates the insights of the cultural-linguistic perspective, and yet attempts to overcome the impasse that appears to arise from an over-determined view of experience of God.[69] Yong's work overall is vo-

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[65] Macchia, "Christian Experience," 13, cf. 12–14.
[66] Ibid., 14.
[67] Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, 17.
[68] Neumann, *Pentecostal Experience*, ch. 3.
[69] Yong is a Pentecostal theologian, licensed with the Assemblies of God (USA), and is currently the J. Rodham Williams Professor of Theology at Regent University School of Divinity in Virginia. See

luminous and complex, including proposals for a general metaphysic and hermeneutics based in pneumatology, as well as theoretical and practical groundwork for dialogue between Christians theology and other religions and the sciences.[70] While this is not the place to review these topics, it is worth noting that Yong believes that "Pentecostal-charismatic"[71] experience of the Spirit helps to generate a "pneumatological imagination" for viewing God, self and the world.[72] This enables him to construct a "foundational pneumatology," in which theology can be viewed as a public enterprise—in other words, the Spirit provides the foundation for and means by which all people (potentially)

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http://www.regent.edu/acad/schdiv/faculty_staff/yong.shtml (accessed June 13, 2009).

[70] Among Yong's more extensive works in this regard, see Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series, 20 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000); Amos Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective* (Burlington: Ashgate, 2002); Amos Yong, *Beyond the Impasse: Toward a Pneumatological Theology of Religions* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003); Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2005); Amos Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disability in Late Modernity* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2007); and Amos Yong, *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor*, Faith Meets Faith (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008).

[71] Yong does not limit Pentecostal-charismatic experience to classical Pentecostalism, but supplements this with insights from the charismatic movement (including 'third wavers'). See Yong, *Spirit Poured Out*, 18–20; Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*, 151–157; and Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 75, cf. 74–81.

[72] Yong, Discerning the Spirit(s), 102.

may have access to knowledge and experience of God.[73]

With regard to Lindbeck and cultural-linguistic theory, then, we can already perhaps see a potential impasse emerging. Cultural-linguistic and postmodern epistemological approaches emphasize that experience of God is shaped by and mediated through a particular context, which would appear to contradict the possibility of Yong's foundational and public pneumatology.[74] Yet Yong explicitly affirms the mediated character of experience of God as being formed by the theological "root metaphors"[75] of a given worshipping community, meaning that Pentecostal claims to "direct experience of God" need to be significantly qualified.[76] Yong utilizes this communally mediated emphasis to assert, therefore, that appeals to experience of God need to be evaluated empirically, and that each cultural-linguistic group needs to be understood on its own terms, rather than by a priori theory or categorization.[77]

By affirming the above, however, Yong faces a two-fold challenge and possible impasse. He must be able to show how his foundational pneumatology (which implies a "universal rationality and gram-

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[73] This is outlined in most detail in Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*. I present a summary of Yong's foundational pneumatology and pneumatological imagination in Neumann, *Pentecostal Experience*, 279–293.

[74] Yong, Beyond the Impasse, 67.

[75] Yong, Spirit-Word-Community, 133.

[76] Ibid., 207, cf. 207–211.

[77] Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 175–176, cf. 35, 81, 107, 121–122, 185, 188, 191.

mar")[78] is compatible with this mediated approach, and he must preserve the disruptive nature of encounter with the Spirit found in his Pentecostal tradition—an encounter possible of transforming cultural-linguistic frameworks.[79] To this end Yong proposes at least the following four points.[80] First, he affirms that his Pentecostal-charismatic inspired foundational pneumatology can potentially account for experience of the Spirit "regardless of cultural-linguistic-religious background."[81] Yet he also acknowledges that this form of foundational pneumatology is a fallible one that, while seeking to establish universal applicability, is empirically testable in the particulars.[82] He asserts that he avoids, then, an idealist (i.e., Cartesian) foundationalism, while still affirming the universal possibility of experience and knowledge of God (through the Spirit) discoverable via empirical means.[83]

Second, the Pentecostal-charismatic experience upon which his foundational pneumatology is based should be considered a legitimate resource for theological (and philosophical) construction, since experience of the world, self, and God cannot but influence our theology, even if this happens unconsciously.[84] Experiences thus "function as objects for theological

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[78] Ibid., 66, cf. 67.
[79] Yong, *Spirit Poured Out*, 297.
[80] These four points are discussed in more detail in Neumann, *Pentecostal Experience*, 295–300.
[81] Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 67.
[82] Ibid., 71, 78–81.
[83] Ibid., 80–81.
[84] Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 246, cf. 245–273.

interpretation,"[85] and any and all theological reflection (articulation of) said experiences "are always-already semiotic interpretations of perceptual experience from the start."[86] Again, our experiences cannot but function normatively to inform our theology—and no one is exempted from this process.[87] Pentecostals, of course, need to recognize that their experiences with the Spirit are mediated by assumed theological frameworks that shape the way such experiences are understood.[88] But even Pentecostal experience, which Yong believes provides justification for a foundational pneumatology, cannot be discounted as illegitimate as a theological resource (even in its 'enthusiastic' expressions), since every Christian tradition (even Reformed Protestantism with its cessationist tendencies) cannot help but integrate its own experiences (or lack thereof) with God.[89]

Third, as mentioned, the Pentecostal-charismatic experience gives rise to a pneumatological imagination, a way of perceiving reality as that in which the Spirit is universally present and active. Since the Spirit undergirds this imagination, it is no wonder that creative and novel theological interpretations can emerge (due to experiencing the Spirit) bringing discontinuity even within cultural-linguistic frameworks.[90] Fourth, the boundaries of cultural-linguistic communities are not as high or impermeable

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[85] Ibid., 246.
[86] Ibid., 247.
[87] Ibid., 252–253.
[88] Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 77–78.
[89] Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 247–249.
[90] Ibid., 222–224; cf. Yong, *Beyond the Impasse*, 80.

as might be believed. Worshipping communities cannot help but interact with and be influenced by the broader culture, including the theologies of other faiths.[91] Yong summarizes:

> This is why Wittgenstein and Lindbeck are so right and yet so wrong. Yes, cultures and theological traditions operate according to certain grammars, narratives, and assumptions. . . . Yet such otherness is never completely other; otherness can be bridged through encounter. Further, cultural and religious grammars are never pure or homogenous, but always exist in a complex togetherness of multiple histories, traditions, sources and experiences. . . .[92]

In sum, Yong believes that he can overcome the potential limitations of cultural-linguistic theory, which can tend to over-determine the nature and meaning of experience of God within a theological framework. In other words, we can see here Yong's appreciation of the mediated nature of experience of the Spirit (indeed, for Yong it is the Spirit who ultimately mediates all experience), while also transcending the boundaries of cultural-linguistic frameworks. This appreciation of the mediatedness of experience allows him to enter into considerable dialogue with other Christian traditions, as well as with other religions and the sciences.

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[91] Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 301.
[92] Ibid., 302; cf. Yong, *Hospitality and the Other*, 53.

EVALUATING THE EVOLUTION OF PENTECOSTAL EXPERIENCE AND CONCLUSION

We have seen, then, an evolution of sorts in the way in which some Pentecostal theologians understand experience of God. Experience of the Spirit can only naïvely be considered direct or immediate, and requires considerable qualification. In particular, special attention was drawn to the work of Chan, Macchia and Yong as examples of theologians who have integrated elements of cultural-linguistic theory into their theological method, enabling them to revision aspects of Pentecostal theology. Yet each of them, in doing so, attempts to retain the vital and powerful dynamic of Pentecostal encounters with the Spirit, lest such experience find itself silenced as a theological resource. There is, it appears, a parallel to (not to imply reliance upon) Martin Jay's desire to live in the paradoxical tension of experience as that which is shaped by cultural-linguistic context, and yet also that which transcends language and culture.

But to what degree have these three theologians been able to preserve the paradox—the sense that Pentecostal encounter with the Spirit is something of an enigma (Lewis)? While answering this would require a much broader analysis, I will simply offer the following brief observations. First, of the three, Chan utilizes Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic approach without explicitly giving attention to its potential drawbacks. This is not to say that Chan fully endorses Lindbeck without reserve, but only that he does not (as far as I know) explicitly identify the utilization of this method as detrimental to Pentecostal experience.

One reason that Chan might not feel the need to do so is that he operates from a higher ecclesiology than either Macchia or Yong. This means, for Chan, that experience of the Spirit is more directly tied to life in and through the ecclesial community, and not so much outside of it[93]—the story of the church is the story (and experience) of the Spirit.[94] He would also, however, want to broaden this community of the Spirit to encompass the entirety of the Christian spiritual and theological tradition, including the "Pentecostal reality," as part and parcel of this general context in which encounter with the Spirit occurs.[95] So, Chan does retain the experience paradox, but may find it more of a challenge to view experiences with the Spirit as having the potential to disrupt the community in the sense of introducing radical discontinuity.

Yong, on the other hand, while drawing on Pentecostal experience, tends to accent the diffusion of experience of the Spirit into human life in general in order to support his foundational pneumatology and advocacy of public theology. Universalizing the Spirit's

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[93] The fullest exposition of Chan's ecclesiology can be found in Simon K. H. Chan, *Liturgical Theology: The Church as Worshiping Community* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2006).

[94] See Chan, *Liturgical Theology*, 32–35; Simon K. H. Chan, "Mother Church: Toward a Pentecostal Ecclesiology," *Pneuma* 22, no. 2 (Fall 2000): 190–193; Chan, *Pentecostal Theology*, 106–108; and Simon K. H. Chan, "The Church and the Development of Doctrine," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 13, no. 1 (Oct. 2004): 64–66.

[95] Chan argues that a healthy and holistic Christian spiritual theology involves three criteria: it must be "global-contextual," "evangelical," and "Pentecostal-charismatic." See Chan, *Spiritual Theology*, 24–39.

presence and activity into the public realm, however, does raise questions as to whether he is at risk of losing something of the way in which the Christian, and more particularly, Pentecostal community, informs understanding of experience of the Spirit.[96] In other words, Yong may be in danger of making experience of the Spirit simply transcendent in all human experience. This does maintain experience of the Spirit as something of an enigma, but also makes it difficult to identify the Spirit's actions in any given context, since the Spirit is not necessarily connected to the activity of the Christian community (contra Chan). Yong is aware of this challenge, and attempts to overcome this by offering a robust theology of discernment in order to track the Spirit's presence and activity (or absence).[97] That aside, as a Pentecostal, I am left wondering whether Yong retains enough of certain Pentecostal emphases on encounters with the Spirit that affect the disposition of the individual and community into a more intense relationship with Jesus and toward mission in the world. This is not to imply an absence of these themes in Yong, but only to suggest, perhaps, an insufficiency of emphasis in this regard.

With Macchia, I think we find a stronger accent on the Pentecostal emphasis on transformative encounters with the Holy Spirit, and more directly tied to

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[96] Chan criticizes Yong for not paying enough attention to the "concrete narrative of the triune God"; instead, "what we see is a Trinitarian *pattern* of working expressed in terms of metaphysical principles as a way of finding common ground with other religions." Chan, "Encountering the Triune," 218.

[97] For his fullest attempt at developing a criteria for discerning the Spirit's activity, see Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*.

a change in the inner dispositions (affections) toward Jesus and Christian mission. His development of his theology of Spirit baptism is strongly rooted in the biblical account of Christ's mission as Spirit baptizer, which helps him retain this emphasis.[98] Macchia, of course, would want to expand the understanding of mission to be far broader than evangelism and individual conversions, including a more holistic and universal application of healing,[99] but I do think that he retains a more traditional Pentecostal emphasis. In other words, I believe that he sufficiently preserves the tension of the paradox between experience of God as enigma and also as robustly informed by a Pentecostal theological subcultural-linguistic framework. I would tentatively suggest that of these three, Macchia best preserves the tension with regard to incorporating a mediated understanding of experience of the Spirit with the Pentecostal idea of encounter.

That said, my main goal here was simply to draw attention to one side of the paradox that I believe holds significant potential in advancing Pentecostal theology, namely, that experience of the Spirit must be appreciated as being mediated within theological, cultural, and linguistic contexts. To give insufficient attention to this reality is to remain somewhat naïve concerning the way the Spirit works within creation, and to grant too much weight to the subjective elements of encounters with the Spirit. Further, Chan, Macchia, and

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[98] Macchia emphasizes, for example, his understanding of Spirit baptism as being grounded in the proclamation of John the Baptist found in the Gospels. See Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, 84–88.

[99] Ibid., 279–280; Macchia, "Sighs Too Deep," 71.

Yong all serve as examples of Pentecostal theologians, who have integrated a mediated view of experience into their theological method, which has helped advance their respective theological projects in creative ways. I believe that integrating this mediated emphasis into theological construction and method holds promise for advancing Pentecostal theology in general.