

## Pentecostalism as a theological tradition

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## **PENTECOSTALISM AS A THEOLOGICAL TRADITION**

### **An Ideological, Historical, and Institutional Critique**

There exists a persistent and widespread ignorance and confusion among Pentecostals and the wider Christian community about Pentecostalism as a theological tradition. Identified in contrast to the ecclesiastical establishment, Pentecostal theology seems to offer no more than a sporadic collection of additional doctrines derived from the spurious invention of beliefs and practices exaggerated to maintain the longevity of a revival movement. Shaped by influential micro and macro dynamics that both assert and question the idea of a global tradition while insisting on the endurance of particularity, the movement has begun to solidify its religious presence worldwide without asserting its theological identity. The tendency to define anything as “Pentecostal” that does not fit other traditions seems to have become commonplace. Amidst the countless competing options and pressures from other more readily identifiable traditions, Pentecostalism risks that a diversification of too many tongues, doctrines, and practices will diminish the movement in the theological worldview of the Christian confessions.

Far from an internal debate, the pursuit of a theological tradition among Pentecostals responds to pressing questions of the recognition, invention, and rejection of tradition in the late-modern world. Tradition, to put it succinctly, is a concern not for the past but for the future of Pentecostalism. This essay critically examines the challenges of designating Pentecostal theology as a global tradition by asking (1) what theological elements constitute Pentecostalism as a tradition; (2) what are the dominant theological patterns of its reenactment; and (3) how do these constructs aid or resist the formation of Pentecostal theology in the future. What is at stake for

Pentecostalism as a theological tradition is not so much *what* Pentecostals believe but *how* they believe, because the patterns that guide the reenactment of their tradition in a cosmopolitan conversation determine not only the identity of what we recognize as Pentecostal but also its endurance as a global movement. I begin with a definition of tradition amidst a discussion of Pentecostal anti-traditionalism before offering a critical assessment of the dominant elements that constitute Pentecostal theology as a developing and emerging tradition.

### **A Movement between Tradition and Anti-traditionalism**

Although rarely articulated, Pentecostals typically follow the most elementary definition of tradition as “anything which is transmitted or handed down from the past to the present.”<sup>1</sup> Tradition is the quality of that “which is believed to have existed or to have been performed or believed in the past.”<sup>2</sup> More precisely, the reenactment of the past “is not the tradition; the tradition is the pattern which guides the reenactment.”<sup>3</sup> In this sense, to speak of a Pentecostal tradition refers to the patterns of Pentecostal theology developing in a multiplicity of contexts that seemingly resist singular proposals of Pentecostal identity. The global diversity of the movement has led some to claim that “it is inaccurate to refer to Pentecostalism as a Christian ‘tradition.’”<sup>4</sup> Anthony Giddens, known for his contributions to the study of globalization, similarly suggests that the “experimental” character of modernity contradicts the very idea of tradition because a unified global identity can arise only at the cost of forsaking the diversified

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<sup>1</sup> Edward Shils, *Tradition* (London: Faber, 1981), 12. See Aaron T. Friesen. “Pentecostal Antitraditionalism and the Pursuit of Holiness: The Neglected Role of Tradition in Pentecostal Theological Reflection.” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 23, no. 2 (2014): 191–215; Simon Chan, *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition*, JPT Supplement 21 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

<sup>2</sup> Shils, *Tradition*, 13.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, 31.

<sup>4</sup> Allan Heaton Anderson, *To The Ends of the Earth: Pentecostalism and the Transformation of World Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 5.

traditional contexts.<sup>5</sup> Undeniably, global Pentecostalism has developed amidst a variety of changing contexts including the suppression, creation, and legitimization of a myriad of Pentecostal, charismatic, and Pentecostal-like reenactments of the past. Giddens has suggested five essential patterns of tradition challenged by this global trajectory: (1) collective memory, (2) ritual expression, (3) a formulaic conception of truth, (4) guardians of the tradition, and (5) its normative content.<sup>6</sup> These patterns are significant because they identify a tradition by delineating its greatest challenges. The demands overlap, in almost narrative fashion, and applying these elements to Pentecostalism can chart the territory for recognizing the existential questions the movement faces in its struggle for a genuine theological identity.

However, the entire endeavor is threatened by a persistent but vague “anti-traditionalism” among Pentecostals that holds to the idea of tradition but rejects a particular reenactment of the past.<sup>7</sup> Pentecostals harbor an ideological anti-traditionalism reflective of the modern age that principally questions the validity of the dominant confessional traditions. This ideological critique surfaces primarily as the dismissal of the validity of a collective historical consciousness.<sup>8</sup> Christian history is associated with reaching “a broad consensus of what elements are fundamental to the Christian faith,” and Pentecostals are reluctant “to give this consensus a status of tradition.”<sup>9</sup> To prevent applying this critique also to their own history, this skepticism manifests itself mostly as a criticism of the institutional practices and ecclesiastical creeds of Christendom and interprets Pentecostal theology instead as functioning through

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<sup>5</sup> Anthony Giddens, “Living in a Post-Traditional Society,” In *Reflexive Modernization: Politics, Tradition and Aesthetics in the Modern Social Order*, ed. Ulrich Beck, Anthony Giddens, and Scott Lash (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 1994), 59, 96.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 63.

<sup>7</sup> Friesen. “Pentecostal Antitraditionalism,” 202–6.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 207–12.

<sup>9</sup> “Final Report of the Dialogue between the Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity of the Roman Catholic Church and Some Classical Pentecostals, 1977–1982,” in *Pentecostalism and Christian Unity: Ecumenical Documents and Critical Assessments*, ed. Wolfgang Vondey (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2010), 113–32 (nos. 20 and 57).

alternative means.<sup>10</sup> Hence, Pentecostals can affirm doctrines that have shaped their own particular history, as part of a larger restorationism with focus on the apostolic tradition, yet are unable to agree whether to embrace or reject historical dogmas that form the indisputable heart of the established Christian confessions.<sup>11</sup>

In what follows, I want to show the consequences of this ideological, historical, and institutional critique by offering a classification and interpretation of the challenges we find in Pentecostalism as a global theological tradition. In the Pentecostal world, to appropriate Giddens' typology, the theological identity of the movement will have to be negotiated in discursive action or risk stagnation and further segmentation.<sup>12</sup> Even if we challenge the ambiguous Pentecostal anti-traditionalism and Giddens' own assertion of a post-traditional global modernity, the task ahead is to identify the authenticity of Pentecostalism as a tradition amidst a worldwide dynamic that proceeds in no obvious direction. The most immediate challenge to the identity as a tradition is how Pentecostals organize the reenactment of their past without falling prey to their own anti-traditionalism.

### **Collective Memory and Pentecostal Anamnesis**

Memory is of indisputable importance for the community that recalls God's actions in the past, preserves this remembrance in the present, and projects it onto the future. "Tradition," says Giddens, "is an *organizing medium of collective memory*."<sup>13</sup> Giddens is not pointing merely to an

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<sup>10</sup> See Wolfgang Vondey, *Beyond Pentecostalism: The Crisis of Global Christianity and the Renewal of the Theological Agenda* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 78–170.

<sup>11</sup> For a discussion of disagreements see Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostalism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

<sup>12</sup> Giddens, "Living in a Post-Traditional Society," 105.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 64. Emphasis original.

actual, shared history (which admittedly is shorter for the young Pentecostal movement than for other traditions) but to the mechanisms which tie a community to the roots of the convictions and ideas that mark their existential identity. For Christians, and the central importance of the gospel, the anamnesis of the Last Supper presents undoubtedly the most decisive mnemonic device of this collective memory.<sup>14</sup> In the church's eucharistic tradition, anamnesis proceeds "as the ceremonial re-presentation of a salutary event of the past, in order that the event may lay hold of the situation of the celebrant."<sup>15</sup> The collective memory is fully embedded in a sacramental system of liturgical celebration in which not only the past but all time is made "eschatologically transparent."<sup>16</sup> The memory of Christ illuminates the entire life of the Christian community so that what the church remembers becomes present again, not as past event but as re-presented reality in a present that points to the future.

Yet, eucharistic anamnesis is only marginally important to the Pentecostal world where eucharistic practices are scarce, and a global sacramental theology is virtually non-existent. Pentecostals reject neither sacramentality nor eucharistic celebration.<sup>17</sup> However, a eucharistic anamnesis has not proven effective for commemorating the core memory of what Pentecostals find essential to their identity. Instead, if communal anamnesis is indispensable for the Christian tradition, an alternative must be found, which incorporates eucharistic sacramentality into a memory in which Pentecostals can identify themselves collectively.<sup>18</sup> It is not a novel argument to suggest that the Pentecostal tradition is deeply rooted in the day of Pentecost. Yet, if the

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<sup>14</sup> Nils Alstrup Dahl, *Jesus in the Memory of the Early Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1976).

<sup>15</sup> Karl Rahner and Herbert Vorgrimmler, "Anamnesis," in *Dictionary of Theology*, rev. ed. (New York: Crossroads, 1990), 10.

<sup>16</sup> Alexander Schmemmann, *Introduction to Liturgical Theology*, trans. Asheleigh E. Moorhouse (Crestwood, NY: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1966; 1986), 71.

<sup>17</sup> Chris E.W. Green, *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Lord's Supper: Foretasting the Kingdom* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2012), 74–181.

<sup>18</sup> Although Oneness Pentecostals focus on water baptism, they have not articulated its significance for their collective identity.

Pentecostal memory prefers Pentecost over the Last Supper, does this “Pentecostal” anamnesis proceed analogous to a eucharistic remembrance?

Pentecostal anamnesis is not located in the past (at Pentecost) but in the community that has been transformed by Pentecost in the present. The memory of Pentecost is a specific construct and representation of the original Pentecost that interrupts and intensifies, challenges, and critiques the present community in light of Pentecost’s eschatological transparency. Eucharistic anamnesis is perhaps not “transparent” enough to signify Pentecost as “an event that ‘makes the church.’”<sup>19</sup> Concerns about “the linkage between sacraments and the Spirit,”<sup>20</sup> the unity “between the formal structure of the eucharistic celebration and the spontaneity of the charismatic gifts,”<sup>21</sup> and an overdeveloped sacramental theology<sup>22</sup> have kept Pentecostals from developing a specifically eucharistic anamnesis. However, even if a Pentecostal memory is not strictly bound to the Last Supper, the preference for Pentecost does not disqualify a sacramental theology and its ritual (eucharistic) enactment.<sup>23</sup> Instead, if the Last Supper is contained in the memory of Pentecost, the challenge for Pentecostal anamnesis is precisely in identifying the organizing medium for this comprehensive memory. The rise of Pentecostalism as a global movement urges the forsaking of any claims that Pentecostal anti-traditionalism is rooted in an anti-liturgical, anti-ritual, and anti-sacramental praxis.

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<sup>19</sup> Frank Macchia, “The Nature and Purpose of the Church: A Pentecostal Reflection on Unity and Koinonia,” in Vondey, *Pentecostalism and Christian Unity*, 243–55 (244).

<sup>20</sup> “Final Report of the International Dialogue between Some Classical Pentecostal Churches and Leaders and the Catholic Church,” *ibid.*, 135 (no. 91).

<sup>21</sup> “Final Report of the Dialogue between the Secretariat for Christian Unity of the Roman Catholic Church and Leaders of Some Pentecostal Churches and Participants in the Charismatic Movement within Protestant and Anglican Churches, 1972–76,” in *Pentecostalism and Christian Unity*, vol. 2, *Continuing and Building Relationships*, ed. Wolfgang Vondey (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), 101–12 (no. 34).

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 122 (no. 70)

<sup>23</sup> See Daniela C. Augustine, *The Spirit and the Common Good: Shared Flourishing in the Image of God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2019), 121–59.

## Dangerous Rituals and Oral Sacramentality

Ritual is important for Giddens because its deep involvement in practice confers integrity upon the tradition.<sup>24</sup> Rituals provide collective memory with recognizable forms in a productive (and reproductive) framework that allows for not only identification of but also participation in the tradition. Yet, the rejection of strict ritual practices is a significant part of Pentecostal anti-traditionalism and its insistence that Pentecost, for all its continuity with the past, marks a decisive new and transformative event for the church. Pentecostals are concerned that ritualizing a Pentecostal anamnesis suppresses the vibrancy and spontaneity of their response to the Holy Spirit. Helpful is here the insight of Johann Baptist Metz that anamnesis always consists of “dangerous memories . . . which make demands on us” because “they break through the canon of the prevailing structures of plausibility and have certain subversive features.”<sup>25</sup> Appropriating Metz for Pentecostal anamnesis, the memory of Pentecost is dangerous because of its “apocalyptic consciousness” which allows the experience of the Spirit of the ascended Christ to be transformed by “a future that is still outstanding.”<sup>26</sup> The subversive power of this memory resides in being “made explicit in narrative form”<sup>27</sup> in the gospel of a church that articulates its collective anamnesis to prevent that its “dangerous quality is extinguished by the mechanisms of its institutional mediation.”<sup>28</sup> Pentecostals must come to terms with the subversive forms of their own memory bound to their particular narrative expressions of the gospel. Collective memory cannot function without an indigenous articulation and communication: the form of remembering

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<sup>24</sup> Giddens, “Living in a Post-Traditional Society,” 64.

<sup>25</sup> Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Practical Fundamental Theology*, trans. David Smith (London: Burns and Oates, 1980), 109–10. See Bruce T. Morrill, *Anamnesis as Dangerous Memory: Political and Liturgical Theology in Dialogue* (Collegeville, MN: Pueblo Books, 2004), 19–72.

<sup>26</sup> Metz, *Faith*, 185, 200.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, 202.

Pentecost must be located in the memory of Pentecost itself. Put differently, authentic rituals originate from the memory they transmit, and for an anamnesis of Pentecost, the primary ritual medium is orality.

Walter Hollenweger has highlighted the “oral roots” and “oral liturgy” of global Pentecostalism.<sup>29</sup> The preference for oral transmission of a tradition is sometimes called “oral culture” to denote that there is more to orality than a simple contrast to literacy.<sup>30</sup> Oral cultures depend on memory to preserve the permanence of their tradition.<sup>31</sup> For Pentecostals, orality is itself a form of anamnesis: the memory of the word of God spoken and heard, the Spirit poured out and received, and the human response in prophetic witness, tongues, testimonies, preaching, poems, prayers and songs.<sup>32</sup> Pentecostal orality is not simply a mode of witness to the gospel familiar to the speaker; it is dangerous because it proceeds “in *other* languages” (Acts 2:4) and in the “native language” (v. 8) of those who hear and understand (v. 11) even when this exceeds the mode of speaking (and understanding) of the speaker. In the multiplicity of languages at Pentecost, theological orality escapes pure subjectivity and becomes the cradle of a global tradition.

The global orality of Pentecost emerges from a theological epistemology that is born with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and its manifestation in many sounds, languages, and tongues. Pentecostal orality emerges from the voice of the Spirit embodied by the community in worship and witness to the world.<sup>33</sup> What this pneumatic orality communicates is the immediate and volatile nature—the dangerous memory—of the outpouring of God’s Spirit “on all flesh” and

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<sup>29</sup> Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1997), 99–105, 269–87.

<sup>30</sup> Walter J. Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 3rd ed. (London: Routledge, 2012).

<sup>31</sup> Jerry Camery-Hogatt, “The Word of God in Living Voices: Orality and Literacy in the Pentecostal Tradition.” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 27, no. 2 (2005): 225–55.

<sup>32</sup> Vondey, *Beyond Pentecostalism*, 61.

<sup>33</sup> Andrea Hollingsworth, “Spirit and Voice: Toward a Feminist Pentecostal Pneumatology,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 29, no. 2 (2007): 189–213.

that those who have received the Spirit cannot but speak, even if their flesh neither commands nor understands what is pronounced. Orality as ritual medium refers to the entire array of embodied functions needed to articulate and communicate the encounter with God facilitated by the Spirit. Where, in principle, the proclamation that “the Word of God became flesh” indicates that the oral embodiment of God proceeds along the full range from the spoken to the incarnate Word, experienced at Pentecost in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, Pentecostal orality refers to the whole range of human embodied proclamation: tongues, lips, hands, feet, head, chests, lungs, and heart—all of the body participates in the encounter to facilitate its mystery. In the terms of a eucharistic anamnesis, orality is a sacramental embodiment of the Pentecostal memory because it has the capacity to manifest God’s presence as an outward sign to humanity.

It is therefore more accurate to speak of an oral sacramentality among Pentecostals, an anamnesis that is focused not only on the word but on the entirety of embodied rituals. Pentecost (as reception of the Spirit) — analogous to the eucharist (as reception of Christ) — is an event within language *and* the body as the site of the encounter with God. Symbols, larger than words, are the medium of orality and, as Paul Tillich suggests, it is precisely the “symbolic material” which determines the dangerous potential of religious memory.<sup>34</sup> Pentecostals may respond to Tillich that the dangerous potential of sacramental rituals lies not merely in their capacity but in their actualization of a personal, transformative encounter with God. Pentecostal sacramentality is oral (and dangerous) because it affirms the orality of a common humanity that embraces all the signs and symbols which communicate the material, embodied, spiritual, and mystical manifestations not only of God’s presence but of God’s power.

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<sup>34</sup> Paul Tillich, “The Meaning and Justification of Religious Symbols,” in *Hermeneutical Inquiry*, vol. 1, *The Interpretation of Texts*, ed. David Klemm, (Atlanta: Scholars, 1986), 165–71.

Yet, many Pentecostals, especially in the West and the northern hemisphere, have domesticated their orality and the range of its symbolic reach. The effects of industrialization, urbanization, globalization, and the digital revolution have challenged oral tradition and hindered the development of a comprehensive Pentecostal hermeneutic that pays tribute to its oral cultures.<sup>35</sup> Suppressed by the politics of language, the subversive nature of Pentecostal orality has been smothered by concerns for exegetical, empirical, psychological, and sociolinguistic analysis,<sup>36</sup> which offer little focus on the tradition. A preference for the supernatural has ignored the incarnational principle at the root of sacramental convictions about how the natural world can function as media for the outpouring of God's presence and power. In turn, the lack of a sacramental aesthetic of resistance has downplayed the dangerous potential of the tradition. The primary challenge of this semantically reduced orality is not the authenticity of its rituals, for nonauthentic rituals can still function as mnemonic devices, but the truth of its sacramental symbols and the degree to which these embody Pentecost. Despite their cosmopolitan roots and global languages, Pentecostals must first remember *how* to speak as an oral tradition to a world unaccustomed to the language of the Spirit.

### **Formulaic Truth and the Language of Pentecost**

Ritual language is important, Giddens insists, because it conveys "certain *communicative events*"<sup>37</sup> that identify the truth of a tradition. While the life, death, and resurrection of Christ

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<sup>35</sup> Néstor Medina, "Orality and Context in a Hermeneutical Key: Toward a Latina/o-Canadian Pentecostal Life-narrative Hermeneutics," *PentecoStudies* 14, no. 1 (2015): 97–123.

<sup>36</sup> Ekaputra Tupamahu, "Tongues as a Site of Subversion: An Analysis from the Perspective of Postcolonial Politics of Language," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 38, no. 3 (2016): 294–311.

<sup>37</sup> Pascal Boyer, *Tradition as Truth and Communication: A Cognitive Description of Traditional Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 20. Emphasis original.

clearly delineate the communicative events of the eucharistic anamnesis, Pentecostals struggle to identify the events at the core of their collective memory and its corresponding oral expression. That orality is a problem in the life of the tradition is particularly apparent in the manifestation of glossolalia, the language of Pentecost but notably absent from the language of Pentecostal theology. There is very little “residual orality”<sup>38</sup> in Pentecostal formulations of doctrine despite the origins of their sacramental orality in worship and witness. Pentecostals tend to articulate the meaning of tongues almost exclusively in terms of function, primarily as evidence of the baptism in the Spirit.<sup>39</sup> In the terms of a eucharistic tradition, Pentecostals celebrate that glossolalia signify Spirit baptism “by the power of performing the act” (*ex opere operanto*) without asking how this ritual can achieve its end “through the power of the one performing the work” (*ex opere operantis*). The ideology of an embodied literalism interprets the function of glossolalia in predominantly causal and evidential language at the cost of neglecting the symbolic reach and existential material of the communicative event. Significant for the concerns of its theological tradition is that the formulaic language of tongues as the “initial physical evidence” of Spirit baptism denies glossolalia its enduring iconic (and iconoclastic), (broken) symbolic, and (dangerous) sacramental power.<sup>40</sup> The truth of glossolalia has encountered a global crisis of signification: Pentecostals practice glossolalia (formally and ritually) without any consensus on its meaning for the tradition.

It is noteworthy that for Giddens, formalized or ritualized language can convey truth even if the discourse itself constitutes an obstacle, because “formulaic truth is an attribution of causal

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<sup>38</sup> Ong, *Orality and Literacy*, 123.

<sup>39</sup> Aaron T. Friesen, *Norming the Abnormal: The Development and Function of the Doctrine of Initial Evidence in Classical Pentecostalism* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2013), 154–93; Mark J. Cartledge, *Charismatic Glossolalia: An Empirical-Theological Study* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), fig. 3.1.

<sup>40</sup> See Frank Macchia, “Discerning the Truth of Tongues Speech: A Response to Amos Yong,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 6, no. 12 (1998): 67–71.

efficacy to ritual . . . not to the propositional content of statements.”<sup>41</sup> While causal efficacy may determine authenticity, Spirit baptism does not derive its truth from the literal quality of glossolalia but from their symbolic material, the dangerous potential, of speaking with tongues. Tongues *are* the language of Pentecost and its theology, a native expression of oral sacramentality,<sup>42</sup> because they can hold the symbolic material appropriate to communicate the truth of encountering the Spirit throughout the life of the tradition.<sup>43</sup> Pentecostals, however, have mistaken the correspondence of form for the carryover of value contained in the experience of Pentecost.<sup>44</sup> Hence, the insistence on glossolalia as a formulaic notion of authenticity assumes the whole meaning of Spirit baptism, which in turn is mistaken for the entire event of Pentecost communicated by the tradition.

As formulaic truth, neither tongues nor Spirit baptism can contain the collective memory of Pentecost. Instead, the communicative events we call “Pentecost” are manifested in a corresponding narrative that exists both in linguistic content and ritual embodiment, word *and* body, rather than beliefs and doctrines alone. Beyond tongues, identifying the truth of Pentecostal theology depends on recalling, preserving, and projecting the communicative events in the collective memory of the community. Amos Yong reminds Pentecostals that their “truth claims have to be assessed not as abstractly isolated propositions, but as members of the larger narrative sets . . . within which they find themselves.”<sup>45</sup> For a global Pentecostal tradition, this means, first of all, to identify the set of conventional symbols associated with the communicative events of encountering Pentecost so that the meaning attributed to the events finds its greatest

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<sup>41</sup> Giddens, “Living in a Post-Traditional Society,” 65.

<sup>42</sup> Frank D. Macchia, “Sighs too Deep for Words: Toward a Theology of Glossolalia,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 1 (1992): 47–73 (61).

<sup>43</sup> See Amos Yong, “‘Tongues of Fire’ in the Pentecostal Imagination: The Truth of Glossolalia in Light of R.C. Neville’s Theory of Religious Symbolism,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 6, no. 12 (1998): 39–65.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*, 64.

<sup>45</sup> Yong, “Tongues of Fire,” 172. See also Amos Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2002), 172.

liberation rather than its most concise propositional articulation. Arguably, the historically most consistent and theologically comprehensive narrative set of events among Pentecostals is the full gospel.<sup>46</sup> The proclamation of Jesus as savior, sanctifier, Spirit baptizer, divine healer, and coming king offers a formulaic notion of truth that is hospitable to the symbolic material of Pentecost. In principle, the truth of this narrative depends on the meaning attributed to it by the collective memory of the community. The fact that Pentecostals have a four- or fivefold narrative suggests the significant influence of gatekeepers or guardians of what is considered the truth of the tradition.

### **Guardians of the Pentecostal Tradition**

Tradition relies on guardians in Giddens' framework because "they are believed to be the agents, or the essential mediators, of its causal powers."<sup>47</sup> The guarding of the collective memory, its ritual communication, and narrative are necessary to prevent the tradition from becoming either arbitrary or routinized. Guardians are particularly responsible for preserving a tradition that is still developing, like Pentecostalism, that can be invented or re-invented, and that lends itself to conflicting interpretations. They are the guardians of the tradition, not because of their knowledge or competence, but because of the status attributed to them by the community.

For Pentecostals, the question of guardianship of their tradition has never been answered; it is inevitably bound up with a weak and undeveloped ecclesiology. The memory of Pentecost is deeply connected with the outpouring of the Spirit on sons and daughters, young and old, men and women (Acts 2:17–18). In the wider Christian tradition, where priests or prophets might be

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<sup>46</sup> See Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology: Living the Full Gospel* (London: Bloomsbury, 2017).

<sup>47</sup> Giddens, "Living in a Post-Traditional Society," 65.

expected to serve as guardians, Pentecostals have vested status to the ideals of the priesthood and prophethood of *all* believers. Yet, Spirit baptism has remained a largely individualistic doctrine; glossolalia is seen as manifestation not of the collective memory but the individual narrative of empowerment. The institutionalization of global Pentecostalism reveals a dominance of sacerdotal and episcopal forms of ecclesiastical organization and a hierarchical view of the priesthood that contains features of vocational and ontological selectivity. In a movement where social status has been a significant aspect of its self-understanding, guardianship is often conferred to individual leaders (mostly men), pioneering figures (mostly Western), successful churches (mostly affluent), or influential (mostly political) fellowships. In a tradition of sacramental orality, Pentecostals have neglected that their guardians act not only *in persona Christi* but also *in persona ecclesiae*, representing a community that consists predominantly of women, the majority world, the poor, the elderly, and the powerless.

The ideals of reconciliation, equality, and the renunciation of status in light of the outpouring of the Spirit struggle for realization amidst the still dominant model of a global western culture and patriarchal order, on the one hand, and the sobering global challenges of the prosperity gospel, political corruption, racism, and migration, on the other. The colonial African guardianship of Pentecostal missionaries differs from the postcolonial tradition of African initiated churches.<sup>48</sup> The memory of African slave narratives among black Pentecostals remains largely foreign to the white city scape plots of neo-Pentecostal and charismatic fellowships.<sup>49</sup> The memory of Pentecostal women accentuates a fundamental divide between the prophethood

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<sup>48</sup> Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 3–146.

<sup>49</sup> Wolfgang Vondey, “The Making of a Black Liturgy: Pentecostal Worship and Spirituality from African Slave Narratives to Urban City Scapes,” *Black Theology* 10, no. 2 (2012): 147–68.

and priesthood asserted to all believers.<sup>50</sup> Oneness and trinitarian Pentecostals serve as guardians of different theological traditions with no sustained attempt of reconciliation.<sup>51</sup> The emergence of a Pentecostal academy as potential guardian is largely ignored by the ecclesiastical leadership. The sacramental potential of Pentecostal theology (or what Pentecostals call the power of God) is bound by the chains of ethnicity, gender, age, nationality, educational background, social and ecclesiastical status. The problem of the Pentecostal tradition is not that it has no guardians but that it has too many. What is at stake in a tradition with too many guardians is ultimately a proliferation and confusion of its normative content among too many authentic and nonauthentic possibilities.

### **The Normative Content of Pentecostal Theology**

In light of the preceding assessment, the content of Pentecostal theology cannot simply be listed. Statements of faith never take the step from Christian self-description to second-order reflection. The normative components of a tradition speaking with *other* tongues are not necessarily spelled out in well-worn doctrines and practices. Instead, Pentecost as communicative event, embedded in the sacramental orality and interpretive processes which guide its reenactment, is invested with robust emotional and affective underpinnings. For Giddens, tradition has binding force precisely because of its moral and emotional content.<sup>52</sup> Yet, although it has long been asserted that Pentecostal theology is an affective tradition, Pentecostals are generally unclear of the

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<sup>50</sup> Joy E.A. Qualls, *God Forgive Us for Being Women: Rhetoric, Theology, and the Pentecostal Tradition* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2018), 121–50.

<sup>51</sup> Vondey, *Pentecostalism and Christian Unity*, vol. 2, 268–90.

<sup>52</sup> Giddens, “Living in a Post-Traditional Society,” 65.

consequences of this assertion.<sup>53</sup> We arrive at a normative theology of global Pentecostalism only when we can identify the affective epistemology operative in the “tongues” of the tradition. Important for the future of Pentecostalism as a global tradition is understanding its quest for the identification, solidarity, and transformation of the human condition rooted in the affections, desires, and transformative passions.

In a system of dysfunctional guardians, we cannot transfer the rituals and symbols of the collective memory exclusively to the material body; neither is it enough to emphasize the elusive anointing of the Spirit. Both incarnational theology and pneumatological imagination depend radically on the affective transformation resulting from the reception of the Spirit. The dangerous memory of Pentecost warns us that a pneumatological ontology does not automatically become a pneumatological epistemology apart from an authentic transformative encounter with the Spirit. Pentecostalism is a tradition of the Spirit because the encounter with the Spirit is a real and critical expression of authentic human transformation. To understand the normative content of Pentecostal theology, *narrating* the memory of Pentecost in the full gospel is therefore not enough—we need to identify where and how this authentic transformation actually takes place among Pentecostals.<sup>54</sup> Considering the oral sacramentality of Pentecostal theology and its roots in worship and witness, I suggest that the central and formative locus of this transformative encounter is the altar call and response.<sup>55</sup> The altar, as a place of encounter with Christ, is at the same time the fountainhead of the theological convictions that shape the Pentecostal tradition.

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<sup>53</sup> Steven J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom*, JPT Supplement 1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 136.

<sup>54</sup> Samuel Solivan, *Spirit, Pathos and Liberation: Toward an Hispanic Pentecostal Theology*, JPT Supplement 14 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1998).

<sup>55</sup> Wolfgang Vondey, “The Theology of the Altar and Pentecostal Sacramentality,” in *Scripting Pentecost: A Study of Pentecostals, Worship and Liturgy*, eds. Mark J. Cartledge and A. J. Swoboda (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2016), 94–107.

The affective memory of Pentecostal theology is born in the encounter with Christ at the altar and is structured by its transformative moments: Jesus is the *norma normans non normata* because he is encountered as savior, sanctifier, Spirit baptizer, divine healer, and coming king. These experiential moments with Jesus at the altar form the normative events of the global tradition because they are transformative moments of the *memoria salutis*. That the Pentecostal tradition “cannot keep from speaking” (Acts 4:20) of the full gospel results from the “overacceptance” of the Spirit who draws the community into and guides it alongside the encounter with Christ in a coming to, tarrying and transformation, commissioning and release from the altar. This altar narrative is normative because it is invested with the affective memory of human suffering and triumph bound up in the salvation of Christ’s suffering and victory culminating with the outpouring of the Spirit.

The memory of Pentecost at the altar contains the anamnesis of Christ and extends it further through the epiclesis of the Spirit toward the coming kingdom of God. This eschatological reach of affectivity, although not unfamiliar to Giddens, extends beyond his idea of a mere anticipation of the future to its transformative power that cannot be colonized because it is identical with the presence of God. That the tongues of a global Pentecostal tradition are kindled at the altar signifies an eschatological transparency in which the present recapitulates the past only through an affective encounter with this future. Yet, Pentecostalism’s global shift from an eschatological movement to a religion of the present has attenuated its affective repertoire. As a result, the altar is often reduced to an encounter of the moment in an endless repetitive circle of leaving and returning. The affections are directed to the altar and its memory of the past rather than to the apocalyptic event of the coming presence of God. As a post-eschatological tradition, Pentecostalism remains subject to the transformative events of its past only insofar as it

rediscovers a future which profoundly challenges its self-sufficiency as a purely historical tradition.

## **Conclusion**

The importance of the task to identify in the enormous diversity of Pentecostal groups worldwide a single theological tradition cannot be overestimated. Giddens' patterns of tradition suggest that Pentecostals have either ignored or abandoned this task prematurely in favor of identifying so closely as a localized revival or renewal movement that a unified global theological identity has become unnecessary. That Pentecostalism exhibits constantly changing forms has made the movement vulnerable to its own ideological, historical, and institutional critique of tradition. The greatest challenge of global Pentecostalism is how its theological distinctiveness is recognized and affirmed in the ideology, history, and institutions of the movement without reinforcing the stereotypes and extremes that have begun to dissolve this identity.