

Worship: A Pentecostal Perspective¹

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Abstract

This article explores worship from a Pentecostal perspective. Grounded in a framework of Pentecostal spirituality, the biblical foundations for Pentecostal corporate worship are first discussed. This leads to, second, a consideration of the rites of Pentecostal worship, which are outlined using the categories of Daniel Albrecht. This includes worship as a way of Christian life; the entire liturgy of a worship service; and a specific portion within the liturgy (or a section, or rite). Third, the distinctive features of Pentecostal worship are identified as experiential, embodied, narrational, and missional. Pentecostal corporate worship is an experience in which participants express their loving devotion to God while encountering the transforming presence of God. This results in mission as an eschatological hope of Pentecostal worship, as the renewed community reflects the love of God in mission to the world.

Keywords

worship – Pentecostal – rites – narrative – embodiment – spiritual gifts

Introduction

Worship, from a Pentecostal perspective, can generally be defined as our human expression of reverence and devotion directed towards God. It is considered a heart-felt response to the divine revelation of God's love and goodness, as experienced in our lives.² Steven Félix-Jäger defines worship "as turning our hearts toward God as a response to God's self-revelation."³ Similarly, Jonathan Alvarado writes,

The church is a community of persons who have been called out and called together as the people of the Lord. These people are to show forth their allegiance and fidelity to their Sovereign Lord and to the continuum of God's plan for the earth, which from

¹ This article is a modified version of a paper delivered to the third meeting of the seventh phase of the Catholic-Pentecostal International Dialogue, Millennium City, Ghana, 13-18 July, 2023.

² Daniel E. Albrecht, "An Anatomy of Worship: A Pentecostal Analysis" in Wonsuk Ma & Robert P. Menzies (eds) *The Spirit and Spirituality: Essays in Honor of Russell P. Spittler* (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 71. See also *Rites in the Spirit* by Albrecht.

³ Steven Félix-Jäger, *Renewal Worship: A Theology of Pentecostal Doxology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2022), 33.

the beginning has been to draw people unto himself for his purposes and for his glory.⁴

These definitions emphasise worship as relational; worshippers are responding to a relational God. Pentecostal corporate worship is active and participatory, recognizing both the human and divine elements involved in worship, while firmly establishing its beginning and end with God. This accent on relationality reflects the affective dimension of Pentecostal spirituality; our grateful response of worship flows from God's self-revelation of love. As a relational activity, there is a conviction that God is truly present in our corporate worship and continues to reveal Himself.⁵ The sense of immediacy of God's presence is both sought and anticipated in the public worship of the Pentecostal community.⁶ While definitions, theologies and practices of worship reflect the commitments and emphases of each faith tradition, this paper will explore some of the key characteristics of Pentecostal worship as practised in the corporate setting.⁷ As Daniel Albrecht observes, "worship is normally contextualized by a faith community that over time has developed particular forms and styles of worship expressions (for example, acts, practices, rites)."⁸ For Pentecostals, worship flows from and is informed by their spirituality.

Pentecostalism is often identified as a heart religion, shaped by a spirituality rather than a doctrine. Therefore, before launching into a discussion on worship from a Pentecostal perspective, it is helpful to ground this exploration in the framework of Pentecostal spirituality. Steven J. Land's landmark work, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom*,⁹ has provided a significant contribution "in orienting scholarship on Pentecostal theology to the tradition's embedding of its theology in its lived spirituality—in its many songs, tongues, dances, fervent prayers, practices of faith, habits of Christian life."¹⁰ Land's monograph focuses on the first ten years of the Pentecostal movement since this period represents for Land (like Hollenweger) the heart of Pentecostal spirituality. He unpacks certain Pentecostal beliefs and practices using songs, testimonies, and early eye-witness accounts to tell the story of Pentecostalism. Essential to Land's thesis is that Pentecostal beliefs and practices are rooted in the affections. Affections form the heart of a Pentecostal spirituality. The affections are not mere emotions or intense feelings, but are objective, relational, and dispositional. As Land explains, "Christian affections integrate and undergird Pentecostal beliefs and practices. A mutual conditioning is noted among orthodoxy (right

⁴ Jonathan E. Alvarado, "Worship in the Spirit: Pentecostal Perspectives on Liturgical Theology and Praxis," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, Vol 21 (2012): 137.

⁵ Félix-Jäger, *Renewal Worship*, 5.

⁶ Josh P.S. Samuel, *The Holy Spirit in Worship Music, Preaching, and the Altar: Renewing Pentecostal Corporate Worship* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2018), 1.

⁷ Félix-Jäger, *Renewal Worship*, 2.

⁸ Albrecht, "An Anatomy of Worship," 71.

⁹ Steven J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press 1993).

¹⁰ William L. Oliverio, Jr., *Pentecostal Hermeneutics in the Late Modern World: Essays on the Condition of Our Interpretation* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2022), xii.

praise/belief), orthopraxy (right practice), and orthopathy (right affections).¹¹ God is the source and object of Christian affections.¹² Worship then “is the integration of beliefs and practices in the affections which are themselves evoked and expressed by those beliefs and practices.”¹³

Land also observes that Pentecostal spirituality is driven by an eschatological impulse. It embodies the already-not yet tension through its practices (such as healing, Spirit baptism, sanctification), that Christ has already come and not yet come. Christ’s first advent announced the presence of God’s kingdom, but his anticipated return indicates that the kingdom still awaits consummation. The confession of Jesus as “soon coming king” in the four-fold gospel (or sometimes fivefold for Pentecostals from more Wesleyan roots) and belief in the imminent return of Christ, invigorates Pentecostal practice and spirituality.¹⁴ Many of these aspects of Pentecostal spirituality are also reflected in the work of James K.A. Smith in his monograph *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy*.¹⁵ Smith extends the work of Land by noting the openness of Pentecostals to the continuing work of the Spirit in the church and world, particularly through hearing God’s voice, seeing the gifts of the Holy Spirit in operation in the local church, and being touched by God’s inbreaking into our world through miracles, signs and wonders. This results in a “nondualistic affirmation of embodiment and materiality.”¹⁶ That is, in Pentecostal worship their whole bodies are engaged and their whole person transformed. All this suggests, as Michael Wilkinson notes, “that worship is not only important for Pentecostals but central to who they are, how they understand God, themselves, and the world in which they live.”¹⁷

So, how do Pentecostals approach the worship of God? And what is the role of the Spirit in Pentecostal worship? This paper will first explore the biblical foundations for Pentecostal worship and corporate prayer. Secondly, the forms and rituals of Pentecostal worship will be described. This includes observing some commonalities of practice among the global Pentecostal family, as well as noting some distinct practices and rites practiced in specific cultural and geographic contexts. These observations on Pentecostal practice and ritual will lead, thirdly, to the identification and analysis of some of the key distinctives of Pentecostal worship. That is, Pentecostal worship can be characterised as experiential, embodied, narrational, and missional.

¹¹ Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 1-2.

¹² Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 131.

¹³ Marius Nel, “Attempting to develop a Pentecostal theology of worship,” *Verbum et Ecclesia* 37(1), 2016: 2.

¹⁴ Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 35.

¹⁵ James K. A. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010).

¹⁶ Smith, *Thinking in Tongues*, 33.

¹⁷ Michael Wilkinson, “Worship: Embodying the Encounter with God,” in Vondey, W. (ed) *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2020), 117.

1. Biblical Foundations of Worship

The biblical texts prioritised by a worshipping community indicate volumes about their theology of worship. While a thorough biblical theology of worship from a Pentecostal perspective is beyond the scope of this paper, we will highlight four key texts (Psalm 100; Acts 2:1-13; 1 Corinthians 14:1-25; Revelation 5:11-13) from across the canon of Scripture that are arguably of importance to the Pentecostal community when conceptualising worship.

The book of Psalms often provides an entry point for Pentecostals into worship, particularly as a model of genuine and heartfelt adoration of God. Utilising the Psalms in our worship engages our affections and whole person. Lee Roy Martin shares his testimony of their significance: “When I first came into Pentecostalism, I heard the Psalms being used to validate the general loudness, exuberance, and bodily involvement in Pentecostal worship, as well as more specific Pentecostal practices like shouting, leaping, dancing, clapping, lifting the hands, and the use of musical instruments like the tambourine.”¹⁸ Martin highlights the example of Psalm 100 as one such model for contemporary Pentecostal worship. Psalm 100 focuses on God as the exclusive recipient of our praise and the affective dimensions of the community’s exuberant worship, which includes joy, gladness, shouting, and crying out to God. For many Pentecostals, this psalm even provides instruction for the ordering of corporate singing; it begins by entering the assembly with praise and joyful songs before entering the throne room of God’s loving presence (100:4-5). By adopting and adapting the words and actions from the Psalter, Pentecostals join in chorus with ancient Israel and the historic church. Like the Psalms, the corporate singing of the Pentecostal community embodies our communal beliefs and transmits “our corporate ethos to new believers and to each new generation.”¹⁹ However, it is noted that while the Psalms are often utilised as models for public worship, this is not necessarily true of the psalms of lament, which have historically been neglected by Pentecostals despite increased interest in their retrieval in recent years.²⁰ Similarly, Pentecostals arguably are still yet to fully learn from the Psalter the intentional integration of careful theology into their experiential worship. It would bode well for current songwriters to examine closely the theology their music and lyrics convey.²¹

Acts 2:1-13 describes the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. The disciples, all together in one place, were filled with the Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled. This cacophony of voice was heard by the amazed crowd of Diaspora Jews (2:5-13) as the disciples declared the wonders of God by “the miraculous ability to worship God charismatically in languages they have not learned (2:4).”²² James Shelton observes that

¹⁸ Lee Roy Martin, “The Book of Psalms and Pentecostal Worship,” in Martin, Lee Roy (eds) *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of Worship* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2016), 49-50.

¹⁹ Martin, “The Book of Psalms and Pentecostal Worship,” 61.

²⁰ See Scott Ellington, *Risking Truth: Reshaping the World through Prayers of Lament* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2008).

²¹ Martin, “The Book of Psalms and Pentecostal Worship,” 59-60.

²² Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: Volume 1* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 1459.

in the Acts narrative, the Holy Spirit also inspires prayer, praise and rejoicing.²³ As Psalm 100 emphasises the goodness and wonders of God, similarly the disciples at Pentecost declared the wonders of God in many tongues and unlearned languages. Pentecostals emphasise this event as the inaugural empowerment of the Holy Spirit given to all followers of Jesus. However, this event also describes a private prayer meeting on the Day of Pentecost that erupted in public worship. (The connections between tongues, prayer and prophecy in corporate worship will be further explored in Section 2). The description of Acts 2 highlights this event as an embodied experience of God's empowering presence. The symbols of wind and fire are sensory data that allude to previous theophanies in the Old Testament (such as Gen. 1 and Sinai in Exo. 19), as well as glossolalia, are external signs of God's presence.²⁴ This worship service at Pentecost overflowed into mission as "a narrative foretaste of the Spirit's equipping the church to reach all nations."²⁵ The narrative describes their worship spilling into the preaching of the Word by Peter and the conversion of many people to Christ (2:41,47). It is also this missional vision of all nations worshipping the Christ that John envisions in the book of Revelation.

In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul addresses what appears to be a key issue for the Corinthian church: problems emerging from the prevalence of uninterpreted tongues in the corporate setting.²⁶ While Paul encourages the gifts of the Spirit in the congregation, his main concern was to correct the apparent abuse of tongues in the assembly. It seems that some or all members of the congregation gifted by the Spirit with the ability to speak in tongues considered this gift as evidence of a superior spirituality.²⁷ A corollary of this scenario was that those not gifted with tongues were considered spiritually inferior. Whether this position was held by all the church or only a segment is contested. However, what is clear, as Menzies suggests, is that "an elitist group was disrupting meetings with outbursts of tongues because they felt this marked them off as part of a super-spiritual group."²⁸ Pentecostals have understood this passage to provide a model for church practice today. Therefore, they seek to see the Spirit move in their corporate worship and encourage the manifestation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit—not for exhibitionism but for the exaltation of Jesus as Lord and the edification of others (1 Cor 12:1-3). However, Paul's emphasis on the personal edification of the one who speaks in tongues has led to a differentiation between the public use of speaking in tongues which requires interpretation, and personal, devotional prayer in tongues. Yet, as we will see

²³ James B. Shelton, *Mighty in Word and Deed: The Role of the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 1991), 169.

²⁴ Gonzalo Haya-Prats, *Empowered Believers: The Holy Spirit in the Book of Acts*, trans. Scott A. Ellington (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011), 116.

²⁵ Keener, *Acts*, 1509.

²⁶ The terminology of "uninterpreted tongues" utilized by Menzies will be adopted in this paper. See Robert P. Menzies, *Speaking in Tongues: Jesus and the Apostolic Church as Models for the Church Today* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2016), 89.

²⁷ Menzies, *Speaking in Tongues*, xx.

²⁸ Menzies, *Speaking in Tongues*, 91.

below, Pentecostals have historically encouraged both expressions of *glossolalia* in their corporate worship.

According to Melissa Archer, “the book of Revelation can be experienced as a narrative about worship – about true worship in the Spirit.”²⁹ Yet, for Archer, the book of Revelation also demonstrates the interconnection between worship and prophecy. It was while “in the Spirit” on the Lord’s Day that this vision occurs (Rev 1:10). Worship transforms ordinary places (like Patmos) into sacred spaces where the prophetic voice of God may be heard and discerned to hear what the Spirit says to the churches (2:1,11,17,29; 3:6,13,22). In Revelation 5:9-14, John sees all creation—every creature in heaven and on earth—surrounding Christ and the throne of God in heaven in worship. Archer describes this vision as a song that celebrates salvation for a global people of God from every tribe and tongue who are (trans)formed as an alternative kingdom and priests of God.³⁰ The circle of worshippers expands throughout the pericope as the whole universe is occupied with universal praise of the One who is worthy, the sacrificed Lamb of God.³¹ The passage invites the hearers to participate in this majestic, eschatological experience of worship. This vision of Christ encourages a spontaneous and bodily response of a “new” song (5:9), and to fall down in worship before the Lamb who is worthy (5:14; 1:17). As Félix-Jäger writes, “The worship of the visible church takes part in the eternal worship of the invisible church.”³² This vision of all creatures worshipping the triune God is also an impetus for Pentecostal mission. Such observations on the use of singing and bodily responses leads us to explore the forms and rituals that are found in Pentecostal worship.

2. Forms of Pentecostal Worship and Prayer

While the Pentecostal community has historically resisted the use of formal liturgy, there have developed some shared attitudes to worship and some common features of their corporate worship services. Albrecht identifies three main over-arching ways that Pentecostals understand the concept of “worship.” That is, worship as a way of Christian life; the entire liturgy of a worship service; and a specific portion within the liturgy (or a section, or rite).³³ These concepts are not mutually exclusive but often overlap in notion and practice, as will be seen throughout the discussion.

2.1 Worship as a Way of Christian Life

²⁹ Melissa L. Archer, “Worship in the Book of Revelation,” in Martin, Lee Roy (eds) *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of Worship* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2016), 116.

³⁰ Melissa L. Archer, *‘I was in the Spirit on the Lord’s Day:’ A Pentecostal Engagement with Worship in the Apocalypse* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2015), 188.

³¹ John Christopher Thomas and Frank D. Macchia, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 153.

³² Félix-Jäger, *Renewal Worship*, 41.

³³ Albrecht, “An Anatomy of Worship,” 70-82.

First, Albrecht identifies Pentecostal worship as a way of Christian living. All of life is worship. God calls all believers into community and relationship with him and other. Therefore, everything a follower of Christ does and says can be an act of worship, or a way of revering God. Pentecostals function with the supposition that God is involved directly in their everyday life and that worship occurs as part of their daily activities. Worship does not just occur in church or on Sundays but in every aspect of the life of a believer, including their work, relationships, and moral decision-making. While this view of worship is generally shared across the many expressions of Christianity, for Pentecostals, this whole-life approach to worship flows from their affective spirituality. Félix-Jäger describes renewal worship using a transformation lens in which believers present their bodies as a living sacrifice (Romans 12:1). He resists interpreting this passage (Romans 12:1-2) as simply a call to rational worship (of renewing our minds) suggesting instead it is the whole person required for true worship, including our bodies and affections. He writes, “Holistic realignment is a constructive consequence of worship. By attributing reverent honor to God, a worshiper’s heart, mind, will, and desires conform to God’s.”³⁴

2.2 *Worship as the Entire Liturgy*

Secondly, Albrecht identifies Pentecostal worship as the entire liturgy. This refers to the entire Pentecostal corporate worship service—from the opening greeting to the singing, the sermon, and to the fellowship time—the whole event is an expression of worship. Although Pentecostals tend to avoid the language of “liturgy,” perhaps due to their resistance to formalising elements observed in the historic church and an emphasis on spontaneity and orality, yet there exist common worship practices that have ironically been borrowed from a number of early traditions (particularly the Wesleyan–Holiness tradition), despite the failure to recognise their practices as ritual.³⁵ In his article, “Pentecostal Worship in Asia,” Wonsuk Ma describes the corporate worship service of the “All Gospel Church” in San Fernando, Philippines to derive a set of common features of a Pentecostal worship service.³⁶ As Ma’s article suggests, there are many elements that are considered common activities and rituals of worship within the global family. Similarly, Albrecht identifies three basic rites that generally provide the basic framework or structure for a Pentecostal liturgy. They are not always all included in every worship service but are commonly present, pointing to the many commonalities of the global movement as well as its significant diversity.

The corporate Pentecostal worship service usually begins with praise and worship. While the songs, sound, and style of music may differ according to the culture and location, corporate singing is usually used to open or initiate the service. As Félix-Jäger argues, “musical worship

³⁴ Félix-Jäger, *Renewal Worship*, 93.

³⁵ Daniel E. Albrecht, “Worshipping and the Spirit: Transmuting Liturgy Pentecostally,” in Berger, T. & Spinks, B.D (eds) *Spirit in Worship—Worship in the Spirit* (Collegeville: Liturgical Press, 2009), 224.

³⁶ Wonsuk Ma, “Pentecostal Worship in Asia: Its Theological Implications and Contributions,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* Vol 10, Issue 1 (2007): 136-152.

plays a pivotal affective role in the human response.”³⁷ Similarly, Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori write, “Whether in a storefront building with bare florescent tubes hanging from the ceiling or in a theater with a sophisticated sound system, the heart of Pentecostalism is the music.”³⁸ Ma describes his experience at the All Gospel Church: “After a short prayer inviting God’s presence among them, a group of musicians and singers lead more than a half-an-hour segment. One can hardly see any clergy as being a part of this section.”³⁹ Usually the singing begins with “praise” songs that incorporate more vibrant and lively music, and lyrics that emphasise praising God. This allows Pentecostals to enter the assembly with joyful songs following the model of the Psalms (such as Psa. 100). Pentecostals are known for their enthusiastic and contemporary praise songs. Often there is clapping, there is usually bodily movement synchronised with the music, such as swaying, dancing, lifting hands and arms. Ma describes “several young girls dance with cymbals in their hands.”⁴⁰ The exuberant “praise” songs are generally followed by the more contemplative “worship” songs. These are identified as the slower, more reflective, songs focused on connecting with and encountering God. Andy Lord writes, “The essence of pentecostal sung worship is engagement with the God who is present, active and relational; it is a seeking of the Spirit who leads the community into such an engagement with God; it is the valuing of ‘worship leaders’ and the contribution of all in this discernment of the Spirit at work.”⁴¹

Following the praise and worship comes the sermon, or what Albrecht refers to as the biblical-pastoral message rite. In many places, this is the most important part of the worship service. Ma describes the singing as preparation for the congregation to hear the sermon. He writes, “After many fast and lively songs, toward the end, a little slower song is introduced to calm the heightened atmosphere, evidently to prepare the audience for reflection and listening to the Word of God.”⁴² The biblical-pastoral message rite refers not just to the preaching but can also refer more generally to the relevant, prophetic message for that group at that time. For Pentecostals, God speaks through Scripture as well as through the prophetic word. A prophetic message might come through the preaching of the Word, or through the exercise of the spiritual gifts, or through the sharing of personal testimony, and must be discerned as such by the community. This is reflected in Ma’s description: “this portion of the service is dedicated to sharing the word of God. And typically, although not on this particular day perhaps due to time constraints, this portion is further divided into two periods: testimonies by several members of the congregation, normally not prearranged, and the proclamation of

³⁷ Félix-Jäger, *Renewal Worship*, 94.

³⁸ Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2007), 23.

³⁹ Ma, “Pentecostal Worship in Asia,” 139.

⁴⁰ Ma, “Pentecostal Worship in Asia,” 139.

⁴¹ Andy Lord, “A Theology of Sung Worship” in M. Cartledge and A.J. Swoboda (eds) *Scripting Pentecost: A study of Pentecostals, Worship and Liturgy* (New York, NT: Taylor and Francis, 2017), 85.

⁴² Ma, “Pentecostal Worship in Asia,” 139.

the word by the preacher."⁴³ James K.A. Smith also highlights the importance of testimony for the Pentecostal community. He writes,

Because of an emphasis on the role of experience, and in contrast to rationalistic evangelical theology (which reduces worship to a didactic sermon, and conceives of our relation to God as primarily intellectual, yielding only "talking head" Christianity), Pentecostal spirituality is rooted in affective, narrative epistemic practice.⁴⁴

Yet, even while the biblical-pastoral message rite is generally given in a speech format of monologue, the congregation still participates through active responses such as shouting "Amen" and other encouragements as well as through bodily expressions such as the nodding of their head in agreement and sometimes clapping their hands.⁴⁵

Finally, following the preaching of the Word is the Altar response rite. Albrecht considers this the climax and the main goal of the worship service. Ma describes this portion of the worship service at the All Gospel Church: "the church has a long 'altar service,' when people are invited to come forward for prayer, often to respond to the message just preached. In addition, people come forward for prayer for healing, baptism in the Spirit, and for various other needs."⁴⁶ Prayer is the heartbeat of the Altar response rite. This is generally the place and time where the congregation most expect to encounter God. Rickie Moore describes the altar in the biblical text as the sacred space of encounter with God.⁴⁷ Often connected to the Altar response rite is a practice that entails "tarrying" or waiting on the Holy Spirit. This activity is characterised by travelling, waiting, and prostrating before the altar (physical or symbolic) of the presence of God. It is an embodied expectancy and desire for the in-breaking presence of the Spirit of God.⁴⁸ As Daniel Castelo writes, "while tarrying on the Lord, one is led by the Spirit to wait actively for the transforming presence of God that makes possible one's faithful existence in the world."⁴⁹ For the Pentecostal community, their desire is to experience the presence of God in their lives.

It is during the time of the Altar response rite that the spiritual gifts are commonly practiced by the worshipping community, particularly in relation to prayer. As believers pray for one another, the use of prophetic messages, praying in tongues, and prayer for healing are offered. These manifestations of spiritual gifts are often considered spontaneous and not a ritual by Pentecostals because they are a gift from the Holy Spirit and it is the Holy Spirit that moves and manifests these gifts; they can't be programmed into the service on-demand. Yet, the fact that they are normally practiced during a set time of the service (during the Altar

⁴³ Ma, "Pentecostal Worship in Asia," 139.

Smith, *Thinking in Tongues*, 43.

⁴⁵ Ma, "Pentecostal Worship in Asia," 139-40.

⁴⁶ Ma, "Pentecostal Worship in Asia," 140.

⁴⁷ Rickie D. Moore, "Altar Hermeneutics: Reflections on Pentecostal Biblical Interpretation," *Pneuma*, Vol 38 (2016): 149.

⁴⁸ Daniel Castelo, "Tarrying on the Lord: Affections, Virtues and Theological Ethics in Pentecostal Perspective," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, Vol 13.1 (2004): 50.

⁴⁹ Castelo, "Tarrying on the Lord," 50-1.

response rite) suggests the practise of the *charismata* is still ritualised. One final aspect of the Altar response rite that has increased in prominence in the last few decades among some groups is the use of the Altar response rite as an invitation for salvation. This often includes a brief summary of the gospel message and an appeal to non-believers to join in a prayer of repentance and acceptance of Jesus as their Lord and Saviour.

Connected to the Altar response rite is the practice of “tarrying.” This practice is taken from Acts 2 when the disciples were instructed to wait, or “tarry” (KJV) for the Holy Spirit. It is a particularly important practice for African American Pentecostal spirituality. Tarrying usually follows the main evening service and can often last for one to two hours, or more. Often, within this practice, a person praying at the altar would repeatedly recite specific phrases, prayers, or songs.⁵⁰ However the focus is for seeking the baptism of the Holy Spirit or a renewing of Pentecostal experience.⁵¹ Interestingly, while tarrying was important in early Pentecostalism and continues as feature in African American Pentecostalism and many churches in the Global South, it is rarely practiced in other contemporary Western contexts. For many of these churches today, worship is viewed as an event. That is, the space of worship (and is not bound by time) found in the practice of tarrying has been replaced by the event of worship (which is bound to a set time frame). Yet, this conceptualisation of worship as an event that can be managed in a set time frame reflects a broader understanding within Pentecostalism that sees the Christian faith as a number of crises, or events, including salvation and Spirit-baptism.

While these three main rites are typical of a Pentecostal service, they are not exhaustive. There are also several other rites or rituals commonly practiced by pentecostals that are regularly integrated into the worship service but not necessarily practiced every week or utilised by all groups within the global Pentecostal family. Some, like sharing in Communion (or the Eucharist) might be common to all Christian worship but they are practiced with a more distinctly Pentecostal theological emphasis, such as emphasising healing in the atonement. These other rites or characteristic practices in the worship service may include: the collection of offerings, prayer, and fellowship time (tea and coffee) where relational connections and friendships are fostered. As Alvarado notes, these forms all facilitate worship and encounter with God. “In Pentecostal worship, the prayers prayed, the words read, the sermon preached, the songs sung are all interactive and engaging acts which connect the worshiping community to each other and to God.”⁵²

2.3 Worship as a Specific Portion or Rite Within the Overall Liturgy

Thirdly, Albrecht identifies Pentecostal worship to be a specific portion (or a section, or rite) within the liturgy. This refers to a unique practice or section within the Pentecostal corporate

⁵⁰ David Daniels III, “‘Until the power of the Lord comes down:’ African American Pentecostal spirituality and tarrying,” in Erricker, Clive & Erricker, Jane (eds) *Contemporary Spiritualities: Social and Religious Contexts* (Continuum, 2001), 175.

⁵¹ My thanks to Marcia Clarke for these insights.

⁵² Alvarado, “Worship in the Spirit,” 143.

worship service.⁵³ Mostly this would refer to the corporate singing called “praise and worship” that occurs usually at the start of each service (as noted above). However, it may also refer to other activities in the corporate service. These specific rites or practices often vary across different cultural and geographic contexts, highlighting the diversity of the global Pentecostal family. Before providing some examples of rites used in global Pentecostalism, we will highlight one specific practice within Pentecostal worship that explicitly incorporates prayer as part of, or sometimes in addition to, the Altar response rite: praying in tongues.

As noted in the discussion on 1 Corinthians 14, glossolalia does not edify others and so is not considered appropriate for monologue in the corporate setting unless followed by an interpretation. Instead, glossolalia edifies the person praying and is often associated with private prayer. Yet, there is a common practise in Pentecostal worship for the congregation to together sing or pray in tongues in one accord during a poignant moment in the service. According to Frank Macchia, tongues symbolise for Pentecostals a “theophanic encounter with God that is spontaneous, free and wondrous.”⁵⁴ Praying in tongues transcends rational, verbal communication. As Rybarczyk describes, “like an artist who paints what cannot easily be put into words, tongues speaking-praying-worshipping helps the believer express to God what words cannot.”⁵⁵ Similarly, Kimberly Alexander explores the historical practice of singing in the Spirit (or “heavenly choir”), seen as an inbreaking of God’s presence into the present to give a new song like that described in Revelation 5:9-14. She describes this practice of tongues singing: “Singing was understood to be a gift resulting from the Pentecostal baptism in the Spirit, where participants were given ‘new voices.’”⁵⁶ It is a communal practice which reinforces the prophethood of all believers, as all people can participate regardless of age, race or gender, as moved by the Spirit.

In addition to these observations of the specific rite of praying in tongues that is practiced in many contexts of corporate worship across the Pentecostal family, there are also many other specific rites that are used in local contexts. Some observations of practices and rites utilised in contemporary worship services within these specific contexts of global pentecostalism include:

- Worship that combines a focus with other activities, such as intercession, spiritual warfare, deliverance, healing. In particular, Opoku Oyinah highlights the practice of deliverance, which “aims at freeing people from the influence or bondage of Satan and his allied evil spirits, who bring about afflictions, sufferings, bad habits, curses and

⁵³ Daniel Albrecht, “Pentecostal Spirituality: Looking Through the Lens of Ritual,” *Pneuma*, Vol 14, No.2 Fall 1992: 108.

⁵⁴ Frank Macchia, “Sighs Too Deep for Words: Toward a Theology of Glossolalia,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, Vol 1, 1992: 49.

⁵⁵ Edmund J. Rybarczyk, “Reframing Tongues: Apophaticism and Postmodernism,” *Pneuma* 27, no. 1 (2005): 102.

⁵⁶ Kimberly Ervin Alexander, “Heavenly Choirs In Earthly Spaces: The Significance of Corporate Spiritual Singing In Early Pentecostal Experience,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, Vol 25, 2016: 257.

failure in life.” Onyinah observed deliverance sessions in prayer camps where liberation and healing can be achieved en masse or in personal consultations;⁵⁷

- In some places, such as Yoido Full Gospel in Seoul, Korea and parts of Latin American, Pentecostal churches sing classic hymns rather than choruses;
- Some Pentecostal churches recite the Apostles' Creed, such as in Korea;⁵⁸
- Flag waving and dancing with flags, usually by individuals at the front or the back during the time of sung worship is practised in some Pentecostal churches in the UK;
- Many Pentecostal churches globally, particularly those that are part of the Church of God (Cleveland, TN) practice footwashing, which is sometimes considered a sacramental activity.

While there are many more rites and practices in Pentecostal corporate worship globally, what many of these have in common is their desire to bodily reflect their praise and glorification of God.

3. Distinctives of Pentecostal Worship

From this description and observations of Pentecostal worship practices, there are four key features of Pentecostal worship that emerge as distinctive features of the global movement. First, it may not come as a surprise that Pentecostals primarily tend to view their worship as an experience in which they express their loving devotion to God while encountering the transforming presence of God. That is, Pentecostal worship is experiential as the community seeks to encounter God. Pentecostals expect to experience the presence of God in their worship and are open to the continuing work of the Spirit. Liturgy and rituals are helpful to facilitate worship, but the Spirit is the true agent of transformation. As Peter Hocken writes, “Pentecostals do not come to a church service so much as to a meeting...with each other and with God and their expectation is that God will come and meet with them.”⁵⁹ Secondly, Pentecostal worship is embodied. There is an emphasis on holistic engagement in worship. Our whole bodies and persons are engaged in the actions of worship. This is also expressed through the manifestation of spiritual gifts among the congregation. Thirdly, Pentecostal worship is narrational as the testimony and worship of the Pentecostal community are seen as a continuation of the biblical narrative of God’s redemptive activities. Fourthly, Pentecostal worship is missional as believers are transformed, enabling them to image God in the world.⁶⁰ While this examination has focused on the corporate worship service, Pentecostals do believe

⁵⁷ Opoku Onyinah, *Pentecostal Exorcism: Witchcraft and Demonology in Ghana* (Dorset, UK: Deo Publishing, 2012). My thanks to Marcia Clarke for these insights

⁵⁸ My thanks to Mel Robeck for this observation.

⁵⁹ Peter Hocken, “A Charismatic View on the Distinctiveness of Pentecostalism,” in Ma, W. & Menzies, R.P., (eds) *Pentecostalism in Context. Essays in Honour of William W. Menzies* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 98.

⁶⁰ Jerome Boone, “Worship and the Torah,” in Martin, L. (eds) *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of Worship* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2016), 5.

that the whole of their lives is an act of worship. So, worship then overflows into the streets – it flows into evangelism and mission. As we experience the love of God then love for one another, and love for the “other” is fostered, which is expressed in mission.

3.1 Experiential

Allan Anderson observes that from its very beginnings, “Pentecostalism in the western world was an ecumenical movement of people claiming a common experience rather than a common doctrine.”⁶¹ What initially and commonly unites Pentecostals are not beliefs, but experience. That is, the experience of God's Spirit and manifestations unite Pentecostals more than mere doctrine, though doctrine is very important. Pentecostals desire a deep, relational experience of the triune God in their worship, which forms the basis of their lived theology and the formal expression of their beliefs. It is an experience of being immersed or overwhelmed by the Spirit. The experience is closely connected to prayer, since God is close and responsive to the cry of the believer.⁶² In this sense, Pentecostal worship can also be understood as a conversation⁶³ or circle in which the grateful worship offered to God as a response by the community to God's self-revelation and grace, that results in a deeper experience of communion with God and response from God to prayer, which further leads to the joyful worship of God by the faith community. Albrecht highlights the pattern: “in worship, the believers minister to God and then God in turn ministers in and through the believers to others.”⁶⁴

Central to the Pentecostal experience of God in worship is the activity of the Holy Spirit. Michael Wilkinson writes, “It is the Holy Spirit who activates and energizes the experience of worship.”⁶⁵ The presence of the Spirit is understood as the facilitator and channel of that encounter. There are several observations about Pentecostal experience noted by Peter Neumann. For Pentecostals, the Spirit being encountered is quite personal, and such encounters are radically transformative, which feeds into the somewhat typical Pentecostal notion that such experiences are more or less direct or immediate. However, as Neumann notes, this experience of the Spirit would not be understood by Pentecostals as simply a generic “religious experience.” Rather, Pentecostal experience of the Spirit is tied to the revelation of Jesus based on the Christian Scriptures.⁶⁶ Therefore the Holy Spirit encountered in Pentecostal worship is understood as the Spirit of Christ. Mark Cartledge further clarifies that an experience or encounter of God “is particular rather than general and cannot be simply equated with common religious experience across time and place. Rather, it is mediated via the particularities of faith commitments, belief systems, and religious

⁶¹ Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 60.

⁶² Peter Neumann, “Spirituality,” in Stewart, Adam (ed) *Handbook of Pentecostal Christianity* (DeKalb, IL: Northern Illinois University Press, 2012), 207-208.

⁶³ Albrecht, “An Anatomy of Worship,” 71.

⁶⁴ Albrecht, “An Anatomy of Worship,” 73.

⁶⁵ Wilkinson, “Worship,” 117.

⁶⁶ Peter D. Neumann, *Pentecostal Experience: An Ecumenical Encounter* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2012), 331-332.

practices.”⁶⁷ This highlights that experience is always interpreted, and it is interpreted through the framework of the community to which we belong. So, our experience of God is mediated through our Pentecostal spirituality (or worldview) that functions like an interpretive grid to give shape and understanding to our experience. While Pentecostals seek to “experience” God in worship in a tangible way, it is also recognised that God’s presence is carried within in each believer, in whom the Holy Spirit dwells.

The experiential nature of Pentecostal worship is often expressed through the affections. Melissa Archer observes, “Worship for Pentecostals is a *felt* experience of being in the presence of God – an experience made possible by the Spirit.”⁶⁸ This emphasis on affective, felt experience can suggest that Pentecostals by-pass the mind and therefore devalue mind as a God-given resource for a developing relationship with God. However, as a counter to this, the emphasis on experience can conversely help to de-centre an over-reliance on cognition and provide a guard against mere cerebral theology. As Warrington writes, “One experience with God can be more life changing than an encyclopaedic knowledge of God.”⁶⁹ However, this emphasis on experience may give a wrong impression that Pentecostal encounter is highly individualistic. While Pentecostal experience is personal it is noted that transformative encounters often do occur in the corporate worship space and that this corporate setting provides the context for and shapes an accepted experience.⁷⁰

The emphasis on experience of the Holy Spirit is reflected in the desired spontaneity of the Pentecostal worship service. Well, that is, it has in the past. This value is decreasing as pentecostal worship services, particularly in Western contexts, become more structured and ordered. In earlier pentecostal meetings, worship services could end up going all night. Now, in many contemporary services, even the announcements are timed to the minute. This has partly been the result of online and live-streamed services influencing the planning and operation of worship service. Yet, spontaneity is still valued, and sometimes expressed in other ways. This includes practices just as the occasional break-out into spontaneous or free worship during congregational singing, or in the preference for preaching to be seen as more spontaneous and Spirit-led. Despite these preferences for spontaneity, Spirit-led does not mean planning and order in worship services is not Spirit-led. Instead, it is about an openness to God moving in new ways consistent with the biblical narrative. Jonathan Alvarado articulates the challenge for the church today to find a balance in worship between order and ardour. He writes, “The thirst for communion with the Spirit that is present both in the larger society and within the church itself will not be satisfied with bland ritual devoid of the

⁶⁷ Mark Cartledge, *The Mediation of the Spirit: Interventions in Practical Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2015), 66-67.

⁶⁸ Archer, “Worship in the Book of Revelation,” 115.

⁶⁹ Keith Warrington, “Experience: The *sina qua non* of Pentecostalism,” Paper Presented to the 36th Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, 2007, 8.

⁷⁰ Neumann, “Spirituality,” 209.

discernible presence of God, nor will it be satiated with a ‘free-for-all’ devoid of coherent, liturgical substrata.”⁷¹

However, there are several challenges and warnings for the Pentecostal community as they prioritise experience. A challenge for Pentecostals is not to seek experience but the God of the experience. Continually seeking experience can lead us to be shallow and superficial. Pentecostals can be in danger of pursuing encounter for its own sake rather than pursuing the God of the encounter. Experiences can be manufactured or misinterpreted.⁷² Pentecostals in their naivety can also allow experience to become the criteria for legitimate spirituality—as though a conviction without the feeling of transcendence is deficient. The quest for encounter and experience can also lead to excess. This is not a new problem for renewalists. Martin Luther accused particular Enthusiasts of his day, who appealed to divine experience, of “devouring the Holy Spirit, feathers and all.”⁷³ Luther’s critique was essentially that the Enthusiasts were “anthropologically naïve.” That is, they greatly underestimated the power of human sin—the power to be self-deceived, and to regard our own desires and experiences uncritically as the activity of the Holy Spirit.⁷⁴ That is, maybe we have been self-deceived into thinking our experience is from God. However, Scripture does not shy away from drawing on experience. It can even be argued that Scripture models using experience as a starting point for theological reflection, such as Acts 2 and 15 exemplify. Rather than reject experience, it highlights the need for discernment as a community as foundational. This is modelled in Acts 15 as the community together discerned the work of the Holy Spirit and sought Scripture together.⁷⁵

3.2 Embodied

Pentecostal worship also emphasises the embodied nature of their experience and spirituality. The embodied nature of their worship flows from their experience of the Spirit. Wilkinson writes, “Not only is experience felt, but the emotion of the embodied experience is also carried among participants beyond the encounter and socializes Pentecostals in such a way that is real and consequential as an element of Pentecostal worship.”⁷⁶

Bodily practices and movements are prevalent in pentecostal worship. Bodily expressions common in Pentecostal worship include raising hands, dance, kneeling, laying on of hands in prayer, prostrate prayer at the altar, and speaking in tongues. This reflects the value that worship engages the whole person and the whole of their life. It also reflects the theological value that salvation (and particularly the atonement) is for the whole person, including their bodies. Therefore, Pentecostals will pray for bodily healing as part of their worship based on

⁷¹ Alvarado, “Worship in the Spirit,” 136

⁷² Nel, “Attempting to develop a Pentecostal theology of worship,” 6.

⁷³ Simeon Zahl, *The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience* (Oxford, UK: OUP, 2020), 20

⁷⁴ Zahl, *The Holy Spirit and Christian Experience*, 20.

⁷⁵ See John Christopher Thomas, “Women, Pentecostalism, and the Bible: An Experiment in Pentecostal Hermeneutics” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 5 (1994): 41–56.

⁷⁶ Wilkinson, “Worship,” 122.

their theological conceptualisation of the five-fold “full gospel” (that Jesus saves, heals, baptises in the Spirit, sanctifies, and is the soon-coming King).

Pentecostals desire not only for their whole physical body to be engaged in worship, but also the whole local expression of the body of Christ. As the description of Wonsuk Ma emphasises, it is not just the ordained minister or the person on stage that is ministering in a local congregation, but everyone all together. Pentecostals encourage the participation of all believers serving one another in the corporate worship service; whether that is through volunteering practical help in the service, using their gifts (natural and spiritual) to serve one another, speaking, or sharing a testimony, praying for one another, or encouraging one another in conversations. All believers are viewed as potential contributors in some way to the worship of the community according to their gifting by the Holy Spirit. This emphasis on the priesthood (or prophethood) of all believers flows from the Pentecostal experience of Spirit Baptism. As the Spirit was poured out on all believers—young and old, male and female—in Acts 2, and individual members of the body of Christ gifted with the *charismata* to build up the church in 1 Corinthians 12, so all believers today are gifted to participate in ministry. This results in a distinct democratisation of liturgy and worship within the Pentecostal community.⁷⁷ As Frank Macchia writes, “Within this diversely-gifted worship, natural human capacities and talents are enhanced and flourish in the Spirit. Extraordinary gifts burst forth and grant the people of God signs of a coming fulfillment that goes way beyond the natural capacities that we creatively bring to expression in various avenues of thanksgiving and praise.”

This emphasis on corporate participation reflects the expectation that the Spirit will move in Pentecostal worship and gatherings, manifest through the *charismata* (the spiritual gifts), such as healing, prophetic words, encouragement, discernment, and tongues. These are gifts referred to in the NT, particularly 1 Corinthians 12:7-11 and Romans 12, as gifts such as prophecy, speaking in tongues, healing, and miracles are encouraged within the Pentecostal community. Therefore, central to the Pentecostal tradition is making time in the worship service to tarry and pray for these gifts, waiting in expectancy for the Holy Spirit.

3.3 Narratival

The experience of the Holy Spirit in Pentecostal worship is anchored in the Scriptures, especially the narrative of Luke-Acts, and the Pentecostal restorationist impulse.⁷⁸ Pentecostals see themselves continuing the tradition of the apostles and saints of the early church, moving in the guidance and empowering of the Holy Spirit. As it was in the book of Acts, so Pentecostals anticipate God to similarly move in healings, miracles, prophecy, and the manifestation of tongues. As the book of Acts tells the stories of the first believers in Christ, so Pentecostals also tell their stories (or testimonies) as part of their worship. The practice of testimony in worship reflects the emphasis on oral culture within Pentecostalism

⁷⁷ Nel, “Attempting to develop a Pentecostal theology of worship,” 2.

⁷⁸ Neumann, “Spirituality,” 208.

as each person shares their story of the Spirit at work in their lives. This opens participation in worship to a wide range of people. It's not just the pastor who can share their story of salvation, or healing, or God's provision.

The narrative of Scripture provides the framework and interpretative lens for Pentecostal worship and experience. As James K.A. Smith observes,

This narrative function of testimony is bound up in the very DNA of Pentecost where, in Acts 2, we see Peter and the disciples making sense of their experience by weaving it into a larger received narrative: to be able to say that "this is that" (Acts 2:16, pointing to Joel 2:28-32) is to frame and make sense of the phenomenon by situating it within a narrative. In testimony, then, pentecostals enact an identity by writing themselves into the larger story of God's redemption.⁷⁹

Scripture provides the models for worship as patterns for singing, dancing, and ministering to one another are mined from the biblical text, both Old and New Testaments. By adhering to a narrational worldview based on the story of Scripture, worship provides the context in which the Pentecostal community longs for the eschatological kingdom of the soon-coming King. As Macchia notes, worship then testifies to an alternative reality. Worship functions counter-culturally as it orientates the worshipping community towards Christ the King in resistance to the culture and gods of this world.⁸⁰ This also provides an impetus for evangelism as the Pentecostal community are empowered and gifted to share the salvation found in Christ with their wider community and become participants in mission. As Wilkinson summarises, "Pentecostal worship is embodied interaction that is ritually practised, emotionally energized, and socially carried by participants into everyday life."⁸¹

3.4 Missional

A consequence of worship is the transformation of the worshipping community, formed into the image of the One they worship. An encounter with God in worship has a purpose beyond religious experience; it results in a deepening of relationship with God and others, and personal transformation. In fact, Pentecostals anticipate transformation through their encounter with the triune God that will radically impact the way their faith is lived out in the world.⁸² Worship forms the community into the image of Christ.⁸³ Worship propels the community of faith to embrace their new identity as a community called out of the world by Christ into a family of the redeemed. It is a family not defined by class, gender or ethnicity, but common faith in Christ the Saviour and Baptiser in the Spirit (Gal 3:28; Acts 2). As Jerome

⁷⁹ Smith, *Thinking in Tongues*, 51.

⁸⁰ Frank Macchia, "Signs of Grace: Towards a Charismatic Theology of Worship," in Martin, L. (eds) *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of Worship* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2016), 154.

⁸¹ Wilkinson, "Worship," 125.

⁸² Neumann, "Spirituality," 209-10.

⁸³ Martin, "The Book of Psalms and Pentecostal Worship," 64.

Boone asserts, “The transformed community of faith is released from the structures of the presumed world in order to create a new world, a world of God’s own design.”⁸⁴

Finally, Pentecostal worship provides the impetus for outreach. While worship finds its subject and object in the triune God, the worshipping community also begins to share in what is loved by God: the world. The evidence of the Spirit is not just spiritual gifts, it is also love. Love of God should lead to love for others. Boone continues, “This transformed life enables the people of God to image their God in this present world.”⁸⁵ Worship and transformation then overflows into concern for and activities of reaching others, particularly evangelism and social justice. While social justice may be a concern emerging *from* the worship of Pentecostals, it is generally not addressed *in* their actual worship time; that focus is reserved for God and the encountering of the Holy One.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be seen that ritual is an important element in the practice of corporate worship of the Pentecostal community. These rituals and rites both reflect and inform Pentecostal spirituality and subsequent beliefs. While there is a basic ritual common to the global Pentecostal family, there have also developed unique practices and rites that reflect the local culture and contexts. This reflects the dynamism and adaptability of Pentecostalism to new situations; singing a “new song” in a new land. Yet, each context prioritises the moving of the Holy Spirit in their corporate worship, providing space for people to both encounter God and minister to one another with their gifts, both natural and spiritual. Pentecostal worship then can be characterized as experiential, embodied, narrational, and missional. Worship, from a Pentecostal perspective, is a holistic encounter with the living God. As Pentecostals encounter God in their worship, they are transformed. Worship then shapes and moulds the worshipper. Participation in Pentecostal worship purposes to produce an affective transformation by the progressive formation of Christ-like character in the believer. It forms the character of the worshipper so that they mirror the character of Christ and work towards the mission of Christ. Pentecostal worship, then, has a telos—an eschatological hope. This hope is for a transformed and renewed community that reflects the love of God in mission to the world.

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⁸⁴ Boone, “Worship and the Torah,” 6.

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