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Aims and Scope
Pentecostal Education (formerly *The Pentecostal Educator*) semiannually e-publishes scholarly and practical articles related to theological education within the Pentecostal tradition to encourage the continuing maturation of Pentecostal theological education. It is intentionally practical, applied, and international.

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Index
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Contents

Advancing Pentecostal Theology and Social Engagement: An Editorial

Welcome to the first issue of the 2026 volume of *Pentecostal Education: A Journal of the World Alliance for Pentecostal Theological Education*, a scholarly and practical journal committed to advancing theological education within the Pentecostal tradition to encourage the continuing maturation of Pentecostal/Charismatic theological education worldwide. Rooted in a vibrant tradition of Spirit-led faith and practice, this journal seeks to serve as a platform for rigorous research, critical reflection, and innovative dialogue that deepens understanding of Pentecostal/Charismatic education and identity in diverse contexts. As Pentecostalism continues to grow globally, so too does the necessity for scholarly engagement that faithfully articulates its educational strategies, theological emphases, and social implications.

This issue contributes to that ongoing conversation by exploring themes of biblical exegesis, pneumatology, gender, and ecclesiology, all through the lens of Pentecostal/Charismatic distinctiveness, each authored by respected scholars and practitioners committed to advancing Pentecostal thought and praxis. The first two articles are based on Old Testament Exegesis. First, Foday Kaba Dumbuya's article, "Ruach on the Move: Exegesis of Isaiah 63:7-14 Toward A Migratory Pneumatology and Its Implications for Contemporary Diaspora Missions," offers a transformative biblical-theological framework that reinterprets the Spirit's role within Israel's migratory history. By exegeting Isaiah 63, Dumbuya reveals the Spirit as an active, guiding, and relational presence in displacement and diaspora, challenging conventional land-based pneumatologies. His work provides a vital foundation for understanding the Spirit's movement as integral to both biblical and contemporary mission, emphasizing that migration is not divine abandonment but Spirit-led formation. Second, Thang San Mung's article, "Original Eden in Genesis: A Pentecostal Reading," employs a devotional hermeneutic to affirm Eden as a literal, sacred space prefiguring divine-human communion. Mung's personal-devotional approach highlights Eden's theological significance as a prototype of divine presence and the believer's heart as the new sanctuary through Spirit-infilling. His insights bridge biblical history and

spiritual experience, reinforcing the Pentecostal emphasis on the Spirit's restorative work from creation to eschaton.

Moving to the New Testament, we turn to Douglas Lowenberg's article, "The Right Song for the Right Setting: An Exegetical Study of 1 Timothy 3:16," which is Part 2 of his previous article published in the Fall 2025 issue of this journal. In this article, Lowenberg dissects the Christ Hymn to reaffirm core Christological doctrines amid doctrinal threats. His detailed exegesis highlights how the hymn encapsulates Jesus' incarnation, resurrection, exaltation, and divine validation, serving as a doctrinal anchor for the church's confession and witness. His work reveals the importance of biblical songs in shaping orthodoxy and spiritual vitality within Pentecostal communities.

On gender, Craig S. Keener's article, "Was Paul for or against Women's Ministry?" and Daniel Lim's incisive response to Keener's "Women in Ministry," engage in a nuanced biblical-theological examination of women's roles within the Christian church. Keener's exegesis demonstrates biblical evidence supporting women's active participation in ministry, emphasizing the contextual nature of certain restrictive texts while affirming the Spirit's egalitarian outpouring at Pentecost. Lim's response further reinforces the historical and global Pentecostal legacy of women's leadership, citing notable examples from the Azusa Street Revival and Asian Pentecostalism, and advocates for the full inclusion of Spirit-gifted women in ministry roles. Collectively, these articles challenge interpretive biases and advocate for a contextual, Spirit-led understanding that affirms women's callings and ministries across diverse cultural contexts.

The next article is Robert McBain's "The Tension between Expectations of Spirit Empowerment and Everyday Life: Pentecostal Experiences of Depression in the United States." He introduces a socio-theological analysis of mental health within Pentecostal contexts. Employing Constructivist Grounded Theory, McBain explores how believers navigate the tension between Spirit-empowered expectations and lived realities of depression. His findings call for a reexamination of Pentecostal pneumatology and advocate for greater theological literacy, mental health awareness, and pastoral sensitivity. This article emphasizes that an authentic Spirit-led life includes vulnerability and struggle, thereby enriching Pentecostal theology's pastoral relevance. Following McBain's tension is Paulson Pulikottil's article, "Beyond Otherworldliness: Pentecostal Potential for Integral Transformation in India." This article recognizes another tension between an eschatological mindset and social action. The author challenges the stereotype of

Pentecostalism as solely otherworldly and demonstrates how Pentecostal communities catalyze social justice, gender equality, and community empowerment. Through ethnographic case studies from Rajasthan and Chennai, Pulikottil's work introduces the concept of "integral transformation," positioning Pentecostalism as a dynamic force for holistic socio-economic change rooted in biblical principles of love, dignity, and mutual aid.

The final article in this issue, "The Role of the Supervisor and the Importance of Quality Communication in Supervision: A Storied Approach to Doctoral Supervision," authored by Kenneth J. Archer, offers a pedagogical reflection rooted in narrative methodology. Archer advocates for a storied approach to doctoral supervision, emphasizing communication, relationship-building, and the pastoral dimension of mentoring. His insights serve as a valuable resource for Pentecostal higher education institutions committed to nurturing spiritually and academically competent scholars.

Together, these articles exemplify the breadth and depth of contemporary Pentecostal scholarship. They affirm that Pentecostalism, grounded in a vibrant pneumatology, biblical fidelity, and contextual engagement, possesses a profound capacity for theological renewal, social transformation, and educational excellence. As scholars and practitioners in Pentecostal education, we are called to cultivate a theology that is both biblically rooted and socially relevant, embracing the Spirit's movement in biblical, cultural, and personal dimensions. This issue invites readers to reflect critically on the Spirit's role in migration, biblical interpretation, mental health, pedagogical relationships, and social activism. It challenges Pentecostal institutions to foster a theology of holistic transformation that addresses the spiritual, social, and psychological needs of communities. May this collection inspire renewed commitment to rigorous scholarship, compassionate pastoral care, and innovative missional practice, empowered by the Spirit and committed to the holistic flourishing of God's people worldwide.

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Executive Editor

Ruach on the Move: Exegesis of Isaiah 63:7-14 Toward A Migratory Pneumatology and Its Implications for Contemporary Diaspora Missions

Foday Kaba Dumbuya

Abstract

Migration is central to both the biblical narrative and contemporary global realities, yet the role of the Holy Spirit within Old Testament migration remains insufficiently examined. This study addresses that gap through an exegetical and theological analysis of Isaiah 63:7-14, a text that uniquely associates the Spirit with Israel's migratory history, particularly the Exodus. Situated within the post-exilic context of Isaiah 56-66, the passage rereads Israel's foundational journey through a pneumatological lens amid communal dislocation and theological crisis. This study argues that Isaiah portrays the Spirit as the dynamic presence of God who accompanies a people in movement, thereby reframing migration not as divine absence but as an arena of Spirit-led formation and vocation. The article proposes that Isaiah 63:7-14 offers the Old Testament's clearest articulation of the *"ruach on the move"* – a migratory pneumatology providing a framework for interpreting contemporary diaspora experience within the *missio Dei*.

Keywords: migratory pneumatology, Isaiah 63, diaspora mission, *missio Dei*, *ruach*

Introduction and Methodology

Migration is one of the most pervasive realities in both the biblical narrative and contemporary global life. The Old Testament is saturated with movement, chronicling Abraham's journey from Ur, Jacob's migrations, Israel's descent into and departure from Egypt, the wilderness wanderings, exilic dispersions, and post-exilic returns. These movements are not random episodes but divinely orchestrated moments in Israel's theological self-understanding. While in transit, God's people receive divine promises, forge covenant identity, and envision restoration as a renewed movement under Yahweh's guidance. Scripture,

therefore, presents mobility not as arbitrary wanderings but as a normative mode of divine action, revealing the Spirit (*ruach*) on the move within Israel's migratory history.

Yet, despite the centrality of migration in Israel's history, Old Testament pneumatology has seldom examined the Spirit's role within these movements. Scholarly treatments have typically focused on the role of the Spirit in creation, prophecy, wisdom, and charismatic leadership,[1] but the pneumatological dimension of migration remains largely underdeveloped. At the same time, migration studies frequently emphasize themes such as Exodus, exile, hospitality, and diaspora motifs.[2] Rarely, however, has scholarship examined the Spirit as the engine of Old Testament migration or explored how *ruach*-language reframes displacement as an arena of divine presence, guidance, and formation. As a result, the relationship between migration and the Spirit remains underdeveloped in the Old Testament witness.

This gap carries important theological and missional implications. Contemporary diaspora mission theology often relies almost exclusively on the New Testament, especially Acts and Pauline mission, to interpret migration as a vehicle of evangelization, without rooting these claims in the Old Testament's migratory patterns. The result is a partial biblical foundation in which migration is affirmed as missional in practice but insufficiently anchored in the full canonical witness to God's presence and action in displacement. This omission persists despite the demographic reality that more than 281 million people live outside their country of birth,[3] many of whom now serve as "missionaries"[4] in diaspora churches that play a central role in global mission.

Scholars such as Jehu J. Hanciles have demonstrated that migration has been a pivotal factor shaping the historical expansion of Christianity

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[1] Wonsuk Ma, *Until the Spirit Comes: The Spirit of God in the Book of Isaiah* (Sheffield, UK: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 13-16; David G. Firth and Paul D. Wegner, eds., *Presence, Power and Promise: The Role of the Spirit of God in the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011).

[2] Peter C. Phan, ed., *Christian Theology in the Age of Migration: Implications for World Christianity* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022).

[3] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs. *Statistical Yearbook 2023 Edition, Sixty-sixth Issue*. (New York, NY: UN Headquarters Statistics, 2023), 56. https://unstats.un.org/UNSDWebsite/Publications/StatisticalYearbook/syb66.pdf.

[4] Jehu Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom: Globalization, African Migration, and the Transformation of the West* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2008), 6.

and that global migration is transforming Christian mission.[5] In a complementary manner, Enoch Wan argues that diaspora missiology must be understood as a multi-directional movement encompassing missions to, through and beyond the diaspora, thereby underscoring the centrality of migration to the growth of global Christianity.[6] These insights highlight the need for a deeper biblical-theological foundation that accounts for the role of the Spirit within the Old Testament's migratory experience.

It is precisely at this intersection that Isaiah 63:7-14 becomes critically significant. Located within Isaiah 56-66, a post-exilic corpus wrestling with restoration, identity, and eschatological hope, this passage offers a theological recollection of Yahweh's salvific work "in the days of old," especially the Exodus. Uniquely, it presents the Spirit as actively involved in Israel's journey – placed in their midst, grieved by their rebellion, and guiding them through the depths toward rest (Isa 63:10-14). Here, the memory of the Exodus is reread through a pneumatological lens, revealing the role of the Holy Spirit in the migration of God's people.

This study, therefore, undertakes an exegetical and theological analysis of Isaiah 63:7-14 to construct a migratory pneumatology. It argues that the Spirit functions as the dynamic and relational presence that accompanies, sustains, guides, and disciplines a people in transit. The *ruach* on the move emerges as the agent of redemptive mobility, shaping communal identity and directing the people of God toward purposeful rest and public witness. In doing so, this passage provides a crucial Old Testament framework for interpreting contemporary diaspora experience as participation in the *missio Dei*.

Exegesis of Isaiah 63:7–14

The book of Isaiah is commonly divided into three major sections. Chapters 1-39 reflect the pre-exilic period, exposing Judah's covenant collapse which eventually led to the Babylonian crisis (Isa 39:6-7). Chapters 40-55 address the exilic context, announcing comfort and liberation, including Cyrus's role (Isa 40:1-2; 45:1) and the Servant's mission that restores Zion's vocation for the nations (Isa 42; 49; 52-53). Chapters 56-66 represent the post-exilic period, addressing the

[5] Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom*, 1-10.
[6] Enoch Wan, *Diaspora Missiology: Theory, Methodology, and Practice* (Portland, OR: Institute of Diaspora Studies, 2014), 21-22.

complexities of return and reorientation, culminating in the vision of a new creation (Isa 65:17; 66:22).[7]

Within the post-exilic corpus, Isaiah 63:7-14 offers a concise yet theologically dense rereading of Israel's migratory past, especially the Exodus, as a resource for interpreting present distress. Most scholars view the passage as the opening of a communal lament (63:7-64:12), where recalling Yahweh's "deeds of old" serves as a strategy for hope and petition.[8] Westermann notably suggests that this rehearsal of salvation history nearly functions like an independent historical psalm.[9] In a context where the community holds past deliverance alongside present crisis, the memory of Exodus becomes an interpretive framework that renews hope, appeals to divine compassion, and grounds eschatological expectation.

Verse 7 – Praise Rooted in Memory

Verse 7 opens with a deliberate act of remembrance signaled by the cohortative אַזְכִּיר ("I will recount/remember"), in which the community summons its collective memory to interpret the present crisis through Yahweh's enduring faithfulness.[10] Such remembrance is not merely a recollection of the past, but a canonical practice whereby Israel's past salvation becomes the hermeneutical lens for present suffering.[11] The clustering of covenant terms – חֶסֶד (steadfast love), טוּב (goodness), and רַחֲמִים (compassions) – frames Israel's migratory history as sustained by Yahweh's loyal generosity rather than human merit (Exod. 34:6-7).[12] The repetition of גָּמַל ("to deal bountifully")[13] underscores that movement and displacement do not negate divine faithfulness; rather, migration becomes the context in which covenant loyalty is repeatedly enacted.

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[7] John N. Oswalt, *Isaiah: The NIV Application Commentary Series* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), xiv.

[8] John D. W. Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, rev. ed, Word Biblical Commentary 25 (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2005), 898.

[9] Claus Westermann, *Isaiah 40–66: A Commentary*, trans. David M. G. Stalker (Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1969), 386.

[10] Watts, *Isaiah 34-66*, 900-901.

[11] David M. Carr, *The Formation of the Hebrew Bible: A New Reconstruction* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2011), 225-251.

[12] Brevard S. Childs, *Isaiah*, Old Testament Library (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2001), 522.

[13] Ludwig Koehler, Walter Baumgartner, and Johann Jakob Stamm, *The Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (HALOT), rev. ed., 5 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 1994-2000), s.v. "גָּמַל."

Verse 8 – Israel as Yahweh's Children

This verse grounds Israel's migratory journey in divine election and filial identity. The declaration אַךְ עַמִּי הֵמָּה ("Surely they are my people") reaffirms covenant belonging at a moment when external circumstances threaten that identity. Also, the designation בָּנִים ("children/sons") evokes Israel's foundational identity as Yahweh's "firstborn son" in Exodus 4:22-23, where filial election is declared in the context of liberation and release for service.

The clause לֹא יְשַׁקֵּרוּ ("who will not lie") expresses Israel's vocation to covenant fidelity (Deut 5:20),[14] though verse 10 will expose the frailty of that ideal. Finally, the statement וַיְהִי לָהֶם לְמוֹשִׁיעַ ("and He became their Savior") casts Yahweh as the sole initiator of redemption, recalling the Exodus deliverance (Exod 14:30) and emphasizing that Israel's identity on the move is sustained by divine, not human, initiative.[15]

Verse 9 – The Angel of His Face and Divine Empathy

Verse 9 presents a mobile and empathetic divine presence, a God who not only delivers but carries Israel through the hardships of migration. The textual variant in the phrase "in all their affliction" (בְּכָל־צָרָתָם) remains debated, whether reading לֹא ("there was no affliction") or לוֹ ("there was affliction to Him"). Most interpreters favor the latter, since it coheres with Yahweh's character as one who identifies with His people and shares their distress.[16]

The LXX complicates the picture further, replacing affliction (צָר) with messenger (צִיר) and linking the clause to v.8, yielding the sense: "not by a messenger or an angel, but His Face/Presence saved them." This introduces וּמַלְאַךְ פָּנָיו ("the angel of His face"), an expression that evokes the Exodus traditions of Yahweh's accompanying presence (Exod 23:20; 33:14) and likely functions as a manifestation of Yahweh Himself rather than an independent intermediary.[17]

The transport imagery – "He lifted them" (וַיְנַטְּלֵם) and "He carried them" (וַיְנַשְּׂאֵם) – echoes the parental metaphors of Deut 1:31 and 32:11, portraying God as the one who physically bears His people across

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[14] Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 1990), 87, 173-174.

[15] J. Alec Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah: An Introduction and Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1993), 513.

[16] Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 513.

[17] John Goldingay, *Isaiah 56-66 (ICC): A Critical and Exegetical Commentary* (London, UK: T&T Clark, 2014), 393.

inhospitable terrain. Together, the verbs *saved*, *redeemed*, *lifted*, and *carried* depict a God intimately involved in migration, not observing from a distance. In this light, displacement does not signal divine absence, but becomes the very sphere in which God shoulders the weight of His people's journey.

Verse 10 – Israel's Rebellion and the Grieving of the Spirit

At this point, the narrative pivots. Isaiah 63:10 introduces a rare and sobering claim: Israel's rebellion alters the Spirit's posture from guiding presence to opposing agent. The verb מָרוּ ("they rebelled") marks explicit covenant violation,[18] while the striking phrase וְעִצְּבוּ אֶת־רוּחַ קָדְשׁוֹ ("they grieved His Holy Spirit") employs עָצַב ("to pain, to wound") to portray the Spirit as a relationally invested agent, not an impersonal power.[19]

This grief reverses the Exodus pattern of accompaniment – וַיֶּהְפָּךְ לָהֶם לְאוֹיֵב ("He turned to be their enemy") and הוּא נִלְחַם בָּם ("He fought against them") – revealing that the God who carried Israel can also oppose them when covenant loyalty collapses. Thus, migration becomes a morally charged vocation in which the integrity of diaspora witness depends on a community that does not grieve the Spirit who leads it.

Verse 11 – Remembering Moses and the Spirit Within

Isaiah 63:11 shifts the locus of divine presence from an individual leader to the entire community, revealing that in Israel's migrations, the Spirit is not restricted to heroic figures but shared among the displaced people themselves. As the community reflects on the consequences of its rebellion, it recalls the Exodus through a series of rhetorical questions: אַיֵּה הַמַּעֲלֵם מִיָּם ("Where is He who brought them up from the sea?") and, most significantly, אַיֵּה הַשָּׂם בְּקִרְבּוֹ אֶת־רוּחַ קָדְשׁוֹ ("Where is He who put within them His Holy Spirit?").

This latter question is decisive for migratory pneumatology, for בְּקִרְבּוֹ ("within it," i.e., the flock) depicts the Spirit as dwelling among the people as a whole, not only on select leaders.[20] The Exodus community thus becomes a mobile sanctuary, guided collectively by the indwelling Spirit, and this corporate presence, not geography, defines Israel's true home and renews its missional identity after exile.

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[18] Joseph Blenkinsopp, *Isaiah 56–66*, Anchor Yale Bible 19B (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2003), 261.
[19] Motyer, *The Prophecy of Isaiah*, 514.
[20] John Skinner, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah: Chapters XL - LXVI* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1898), 201-202.

Verse 12 – Yahweh's Glorious Arm and the Spirit's Leadership

Isaiah 63:12 depicts divine power working through Moses in such a way that Israel's migration becomes a public demonstration of Yahweh's identity. The participle מוֹלִיךְ ("who caused to go/led") continues the motif of divine locomotion, as Yahweh guides Moses with His "glorious arm" (זְרוֹעַ תִּפְאַרְתּוֹ), an anthropomorphic image recalling the "rod of God" in Exodus 17:9. The act of "splitting the waters" (בּוֹקֵעַ מַיִם) evokes both the Red Sea crossing (Exod 14:21) and creation motifs in which Yahweh divides chaotic waters (Ps 74:15),[21] signaling cosmic authority exercised on behalf of migrants.

This leadership is implicitly pneumatological, since the previous verse attributes the guidance of the community to the Spirit. The purpose clause לַעֲשׂוֹת לוֹ שֵׁם עוֹלָם ("to make for Himself an everlasting name") frames migration not only as redemptive, but also as a process of divine self-revelation to the nations.[22] When God leads by His Spirit, migration itself becomes the arena in which His Name is made known. This language echoes the Exodus refrain in which Yahweh acts "that My name may be declared in all the earth" (Exod 9:16), indicating that Israel's deliverance and movement were always oriented toward public revelation rather than private restoration.

Verse 13 – Through the Deep Without Stumbling

Isaiah 63:13 portrays the Spirit as the One who choreographs Israel's safe passage through environments that are inherently perilous. To be led בַּתְּהֹמוֹת ("through the depths") evokes imagery of chaos and danger, recalling both the Red Sea and the primordial waters, yet God renders this hostile terrain navigable. The simile of a horse moving securely in the wilderness emphasizes the paradox of Yahweh, who divides threatening waters, also granting surefooted stability in desolate spaces.[23]

The assurance לֹא יִכָּשֵׁלוּ ("they do not stumble") underscores that divine guidance transforms liminal, life-threatening conditions into a path of ordered movement. Migration thus becomes a manifestation of holy stability amid disorder, secured by the Spirit's active leading.

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[21] Goldingay, *Isaiah 56-66 (ICC),* 400.

[22] Childs, *Isaiah*, 574-575.

[23] Gary V. Smith, *Isaiah 40–66*, New American Commentary, vol. 15 (Nashville, TN: B&H Publishing, 2009), 686.

Verse 14 – The Spirit as Shepherd-Leader

Isaiah 63:14 discloses that the eschatological goal of Spirit-led migration is rest. The Spirit not only initiates movement but brings it to completion, transforming displacement into emplacement and liminality into belonging. The phrase רוּחַ יְהוָה תְּנִיחֶנּוּ ("the Spirit of Yahweh causes … rest") intentionally echoes Exodus 33:14 ("My presence will give you rest"), indicating that the Spirit now performs what Yahweh's personal presence once promised.[24] By leading the community into the place of rest anticipated in Deuteronomy 12:9 and Joshua 1:13, the Spirit functions as the embodiment of divine presence.

The verb הִנְהַגְתָּ ("you led") reiterates the Exodus motif of God shepherding His people through vulnerable terrain (cf. Ps 77:20), reinforcing migration as a Spirit-directed journey rather than aimless wandering. The concluding purpose clause, לַעֲשׂוֹת לְךָ שֵׁם תִּפְאָרֶת ("to make for Yourself a glorious name"), mirrors v. 12 and confirms that Israel's movement, their departure, transit, and settling, ultimately serves God's self-revelation among the nations.

The exegesis of Isaiah 63:10-14 demonstrates that the Spirit functions as an active divine agent within Israel's migratory experience. The Spirit indwells and accompanies the people (v. 11), is grieved by their rebellion (v. 10), leads them through the waters and wilderness as the mediating presence of Yahweh (vv. 11-14), and grants restorative rest (v. 14). In this passage, the Exodus memory is reframed through a pneumatological lens, locating divine agency not only in God's redemptive acts but specifically in the Spirit's dynamic involvement. Thus, migration becomes the locus of divine self-revelation, where Yahweh's character and glory are made known through the Spirit's guidance, discipline, and sustaining presence. These exegetical insights form the theological foundation for developing a robust migratory pneumatology.

Key Hebrew Terms and Motifs

A close reading of Isaiah 63:7-14 depends on four interlocking Hebrew terms that structure its migratory pneumatology: רוּחַ (Spirit), גָּאַל (redeem), נָהַג (lead/guide), and עָצַב (grieve). Each term contributes uniquely to the theological portrait of Yahweh's Spirit as the agent of Israel's redemptive movement.

[24] Skinner, *The Book of the Prophet Isaiah:* 202.

רוּחַ – *"Spirit"*

Lexically, רוּחַ spans a wide semantic range – 1) *air in motion* (wind, breeze), 2) *breath/life-breath*, 3) the *inner spirit* or disposition of a person, and 4) the *Spirit of God* as a dynamic, personal agent. HALOT notes that, with reference to God, רוּחַ designates both Yahweh's life-giving power and his efficacious, active presence in the world ("the Spirit of Yahweh," "Spirit of God," and "Holy Spirit").[25] In Isaiah 63:7-14, all three occurrences clearly belong to this theological/pneumatological range, not the "wind" or "breath" sense: v. 10 – ("his Holy Spirit"), v. 11 – ("his Holy Spirit"), and v. 14 – ("the Spirit of Yahweh").

The designation **רוּחַ קָדְשׁוֹ** (vv. 10, 11) is exceptionally rare in the Hebrew Bible, emphasizing the Spirit's distinct personal agency and moral sensitivity. It denotes Yahweh's consecrated, personal presence that 1) can be *grieved* by rebellion (v. 10), 2) is *placed in the midst* of the covenant community as a guiding, indwelling power (v. 11), and 3) *gives rest* to the people at the end of their migratory journey (v. 14; Hifil of נוח, "cause to rest").

Within this pericope, then, **רוּחַ** is the mobile, covenantal presence of God – the Spirit who accompanies, bears, leads, and finally settles the displaced people, turning migration itself into a Spirit-governed process of guidance and rest.

גָּאַל – *"to redeem/deliver"*

Lexically, גָּאַל in the Qal stem means "to act as kinsman," "to reclaim/lay legal claim," and thus "to redeem." The term extends from family law (buying back property, freeing a relative from debt bondage, marrying a childless widow, or avenging blood) to a theological metaphor where Yahweh claims Israel as His own and liberates them from bondage.[26]

In Isaiah, this legal-kinship term is repeatedly applied to Yahweh as **גֹּאֵל** ("Redeemer") who "reclaims" Israel from exile and oppression (e.g., Isa 41:14; 43:1; 44:6, 22–24; 47:4; 48:17; 54:5; 60:16). In Isaiah 63:9, the phrase **הוּא גְאָלָם** ("he redeemed them"), evokes this kinsman-redeemer relationship. Yahweh is the covenant relative who personally intervenes in history, specifically in the Exodus-migration, to rescue, reclaim, and re-own Israel as his family.

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[25] Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *HALOT*, 1197-1201, s.v. "רוּחַ."

[26] Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *HALOT*, 169, s.v. "גאל."

The verb, therefore, carries more than generic "deliverance." It signals legal, relational, and covenantal restoration, framing the Exodus and wilderness journey as the moment when Yahweh, as kinsman-redeemer, takes responsibility for his migrant people and secures their future.

נָהַג – *"to lead/guide"*

HALOT establishes נָהַג in Qal and Piel as language of driving or leading, often with herding imagery – driving flocks, guiding animals, transporting people, or leading troops. Metaphorically, נָהַג conveys directed movement toward a goal, especially under authoritative care. When applied in the Piel stem, as in Isaiah 63:14 (נִהַגְתָּ "you led"), the verb takes on the nuance of active, intentional guidance, often in contexts of deliverance and protection (cf. Ps 78:52; Isa 49:10).[27]

In Isaiah 63:14, נָהַג is explicitly attributed to God – ("So you led your people…"). The surrounding imagery of cattle descending into a peaceful valley signals pastoral care that moves a vulnerable community toward rest and security, not exploitation or aimless wandering. The Spirit is depicted as both initiator and navigator of the movement, ensuring mobility is not chaos but purposeful pilgrimage from oppression toward vocation.

חֶסֶד – *Lovingkindness/steadfast love*

HALOT defines חֶסֶד fundamentally as covenant loyalty expressed through concrete acts of faithful love, rooted in obligations between kin, allies, or covenant partners. In human relationships, this includes solidarity, protection, and mutual commitment. In the divine-human relationship, it refers to Yahweh's abounding covenant faithfulness, mercy, and steadfast commitment to His people.[28]

In Isaiah 63:7, the plural חַסְדֵי יְהוָה emphasizes the many individual acts of God's covenant loyalty, framed by רַחֲמָיו ("His compassions") and טוּב ("His goodness"), presenting redemption history as a series of concrete demonstrations of Yahweh's steadfast solidarity in motion. These "acts of ***ḥ****esed*" shape Israel's migrant identity. God's loyal love did not abandon them in movement but carried, claimed, and restored them throughout their displacement.

In summary, these terms articulate a relational pneumatology in which migration becomes the arena of divine action. The Spirit redeems

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[27] Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *HALOT*, 675, s.v. "נהג."

[28] Koehler, Baumgartner, and Stamm, *HALOT*, 336–37, s.v. "חֶסֶד."

displaced people as kin, leads them with intentional care, sustains them through covenant love, and brings their journey toward rest. Isaiah 63:7-14 thus presents migration not as a breakdown of belonging, but as a Spirit-governed process of formation, fidelity, and divine self-disclosure.

Exodus as the Template of Old Testament Migratory Pneumatology

Within Old Testament theology, the Exodus functions as Israel's foundational narrative of migration.[29] Contemporary scholarship increasingly recognizes the Exodus not as a past historical event but as a formative memory repeatedly invoked to interpret later experiences of displacement, exile, and restoration.[30] Through this remembered deliverance, Israel asserts that the God who once delivered His people continues to accompany and transform their movements in subsequent crises.[31]

Isaiah 63:7-14 reactivates this memory with pneumatological emphasis, identifying the Spirit as the one who led, sustained, and finally granted rest to Israel during its formative journey. The passage thus insists that Spirit-led mobility is not incidental but integral to Israel's vocation among the nations, even while the promise of settled rest remains central to Israel's covenant hope. Read canonically, therefore, the Exodus suggests that covenant vocation emerges through divinely guided movement before it is expressed in settled stability. At first glance, this claim may appear to conflict with Old Testament land theology, which locates covenant fulfillment and witness within settled rest in the Land (Gen 12:7, 15:18; Deut 12:1-11; 2 Sam 7:10-11; 1 Kings 8:41-43; Isa 2:2-4). While many interpreters emphasize the passage primarily as a retrospective confession of covenant failure and divine discipline, the text simultaneously foregrounds the Spirit's guiding presence within Israel's migratory history. In these texts, Israel's

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[29] David Daube, *The Exodus Pattern in the Bible* (London: Faber & Faber, 1963), 11–13.

[30] Hendrik L. Bosman, "The Exodus as Memories about Migration: Examples from the Hebrew Bible and the Deuterocanonical Books," in *Christian Theology in the Age of Migration: Implications for World Christianity*, ed. Peter C. Phan (New York, NY: Bloomsbury, 2022), 45–48.

[31] Daniel L. Smith-Christopher, "Exile: History, Interpretation, and Theology," in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, ed. David Noel Freedman (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 297–302.

vocation to the nations appears closely tied to stability, temple presence, and ordered life under Yahweh's kingship.

However, Isaiah 63 does not negate the theology of rest, but rather reframes it as the culmination of Spirit-led movement. The memory of Exodus and wilderness guidance demonstrates that Israel's identity and vocation were forged in transit before being expressed in settlement. Mobility precedes emplacement, and emplacement remains dependent upon the Spirit who first led through displacement. Israel's witness to the nations thus emerges not only from territorial settlement but also from the redemptive movement that established that settlement. This pattern reflects a broader canonical logic in which dispersion and movement precede stable settlement. The Creation and post-flood mandate to "fill the earth" (Gen 1:28, 9:1) presupposes geographic expansion, the scattering at Babel (Gen 11:1-9) restores humanity to this original creational trajectory when centralized settlement resists it, and the call of Abraham (Gen 12:1-3) inaugurates Israel's covenant vocation through commanded departure.

Formation in Transit: Identity Before Settlement

Israel's transition from slavery to covenant fellowship demonstrates that identity is first forged through divinely guided movement before it is expressed in settled stability in the Land. The promise "I will take you as my people" (Exod 6:6-7) is enacted en route to Sinai, where covenant relationship is formalized in the wilderness (Exod 19:4-6). The wilderness precedes the Land, and covenant identity is formed in transit through dependence, testing, and divine guidance, before it is embodied in territorial settlement.

The wilderness therefore functions as a theological classroom. In this liminal space, Israel learns trust amid disorientation, provision amid scarcity, and fidelity amid uncertainty. Walter Brueggemann describes this as a divinely purposed dislocation that re-educates the community, teaching that divine presence and identity are encountered first in movement before concretizing in settled security.[32] Though settlement stabilizes vocation, it does not originate it.

The Mobile God: Presence in Movement

The Exodus tradition portrays Yahweh as a mobile God whose presence relocates with His people, in contrast to territorially restricted ancient Near Eastern deities. Guidance by cloud and fire (Exod 13:21-22) and

[32] Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith*, 2nd ed. (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 2002), 27-42.

the promise of the Angel of His Face (Exod 23:20-23; 33:14-15) signal divine accompaniment through space to sustain a displaced community.[33] Isaiah 63:9 reinterprets this history pneumatologically, highlighting God's own presence accompanying migrants so that movement itself becomes a site of divine self-revelation.

Although the Exodus narrative itself rarely names the Spirit clearly, divine agency is expressed through acts later associated with the Spirit, such as the parting of the sea (Exod 14:21; 15:8) and the empowerment of leadership (Num 11:17). Isaiah 63:10-14 offers the most explicit Old Testament rereading of the Exodus tradition in pneumatological terms, linking Israel's rebellion, guidance, and rest directly to the Holy Spirit.[34] When canonically considered, the Exodus emerges as a migration narrative marked by personal divine accompaniment.

Movement as Mission: Public Revelation and Canonical Pattern

The Exodus is repeatedly framed as a revelation to the nations, encapsulated in the declaration that God's name be proclaimed throughout the earth (Exod 9:16). Wright observes that the Exodus puts Yahweh on display, establishing a public theology in motion that confronts imperial powers with divine justice and mercy.[35] Migration becomes the platform for God's global proclamation.

This pattern is consistent across Scripture. Patriarchal sojourning, beginning with the call of Abraham (Gen 12:1-3) embodies promise-in-motion, the Babylonian exile is framed as a "new Exodus" (Isa 40-55), and Acts extends the same trajectory "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).[36] Thus, Estelle demonstrates that the Exodus motif becomes a recurring template for later redemptive movements. Scripture, therefore, presents mobility not as an anomaly but as the normative posture of God's people, with rest as the promised outcome of guided movement, not an alternative to it.

In summary, the Exodus establishes a canonical truth central to migratory pneumatology: God becomes visible in movement. Isaiah 63:7-14 invokes this tradition to show that the Spirit guides and sustains displaced communities, forms covenant identity in transit, and brings movement toward purposeful rest, while the liberation that initiates this

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[33] Childs, *Isaiah*, Old Testament Library, 570-576.
[34] Jan L. Koole, *Isaiah III: Volume 3*, HCOT (Leuven: Peeters, 2001), 358-368.
[35] Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 67-94.
[36] Bryan D. Estelle, *Echoes of Exodus: Tracing a Biblical Motif* (Downer's Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2018), 12-17, 149-181, 236-261.

movement is explored more fully in the following section. Exodus, therefore, provides the theological blueprint through which both Israel and the church discern the Spirit's mission in contexts of migration and diaspora.

Developing a Migratory Pneumatology

The preceding analysis of Isaiah 63:7-14 in light of the Exodus tradition provides the foundation for constructing an Old Testament migratory pneumatology. While Old Testament studies often associate the Spirit primarily with prophetic inspiration, charismatic empowerment, and leadership, Isaiah's recollection of Israel's wilderness journey portrays the Spirit as actively accompanying a community in movement. Within this passage, the Spirit guides, sustains, confronts rebellion, and leads the people toward rest.

These dynamics indicate that migration in Israel's history functions as a theological context in which the Spirit forms and directs the covenant community. Isaiah's pneumatological rereading of the Exodus memory, therefore, reveals several interrelated functions of the Spirit that together form the contours of a migratory pneumatology. These contours progress from divine liberation that initiates movement, to the formation and preservation of covenant community, and finally to the guidance and missional significance of Spirit-directed mobility.

The Spirit as the Agent of Redemptive Mobility

The Exodus narrative reveals that what begins as Israel's redemption from slavery in Egypt morphs into a divinely guided journey. The language of "bringing out," "carrying," and "leading" (Exod 3:8; 19:4) depicts that redemption is inherently kinetic: meaning that Yahweh does not merely remove Israel from bondage, but calls them into a transformational journey in which vocation emerges through walking behind the divine presence.[37]

In this sense, liberation is not an endpoint but the beginning of a divinely directed migration. Israel is delivered from Pharaoh's domination in order to become a covenant people under Yahweh's rule (Exod 6:6-7). Liberation, therefore, initiates mobility. The journey from Egypt toward Sinai represents the transition from servitude under Pharaoh to covenant belonging under Yahweh's rule. Redemption inaugurates a migratory process that draws the community into its vocation as the people of God.

[37] Wright, *Mission of God*, 67-94.

Isaiah 63 rereads this redemptive movement through a pneumatological lens. The Spirit thus appears as the divine presence who accompanies the community as it moves from oppression toward covenant life. Brueggemann observes that divine liberation from Pharaoh's system moves Israel's community from economic anxiety to neighborliness, creating new social possibilities beyond imperial control.[38]

At the same time, the biblical tradition recognizes that not all migration arises from liberation. Whereas the Exodus represents a redemptive displacement initiated by divine liberation, later migrations, particularly the Babylonian exile, result from covenant discipline (2 Kgs 17:7-23; Jer 25:8-11). The prophetic tradition repeatedly reframes Israel's scattering as a stage within a broader redemptive horizon. As Ezekiel declares, Israel's dispersion ultimately serves the vindication of Yahweh's name among the nations (Ezek 36:22-23). Migration, therefore, appears in Scripture both as the result of redemption and as a context through which redemption continues to unfold.

The Spirit as the Architect of Communal Identity

In Isaiah 63:11, the Spirit is described as placed "within their midst," expanding the scope of pneumatological activity from individual leaders to the entire covenant community. As in the wilderness traditions (Num 11:16-17), the Spirit forms communal identity through shared dependence upon divine guidance. Migration becomes a context in which communal identity is formed.

Throughout Israel's wilderness experience, covenant memory functions as a central mechanism for preserving identity amid displacement. Narratives of divine deliverance are rehearsed so that successive generations may understand their belonging to Yahweh (Deut 6:20-25). Psalms of remembrance likewise recall God's mighty acts in order to sustain faith during crisis (Ps 105:5-11; Ps. 137:1-6). In this way, migration becomes a context in which the community continually reaffirms its covenant identity.

Terence Fretheim observes that the wilderness narratives portray Israel learning to rely upon God's sustaining provision amid hardship and vulnerability.[39] The Spirit's presence within the community, therefore, functions as the theological center of Israel's identity during

[38] Walter Brueggemann, *Journey to the Common Good,* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010), 1-35.
[39] Terence E. Fretheim, *Exodus*, Interpretation (Louisville, KY: John Knox Press, 1991), 187-191.

its migratory existence. Migration thus becomes a formative environment in which the covenant people learn who they are. Their communal identity emerges from the Spirit's presence among them.

The Spirit as the Sustaining Presence in Liminal Space

Isaiah 63:9 depicts Yahweh "lifting" and "carrying" Israel, an imagery echoing parental imagery where God bears Israel "on eagles' wings" (Exod. 19:4) and carries the people as a father carries a child (Deut. 1:31). Isaiah rereads this motif pneumatologically as the same God who carried Israel does so now through the Spirit, who remains present within and among a displaced community (Isa 63:11, 14).

Divine accompaniment includes protection from danger (Ps 78:52-53), provision amid scarcity (Neh 9:19-21), and resilience in trauma. Brueggemann emphasizes that the wilderness is a place where Israel experiences God's attentive care precisely because settlement assurances are absent, and God is present in the risk of the journey rather than merely at the settled endpoint.[40]

In such liminal spaces, the Spirit becomes the One who shields migrants from the terrors of precarity (Ps 78:52-53), ensuring that displacement does not devolve into destruction. Thus, mobility becomes the place where God bears His people physically and spiritually, transforming migratory hardship into Spirit-borne perseverance.

The Spirit as Guardian of Covenant Holiness

Isaiah 63:10 introduces the most striking rupture in which Israel "rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit." The verb עָצַב ("to grieve") communicates relational wounding, portraying the Spirit as personally invested, rather than functioning as an impersonal force. The Spirit's presence, therefore, demands covenant accountability.

Because the Spirit accompanies Israel throughout its migratory experience, rebellion disrupts that relationship. The text declares that God "turned to be their enemy" and fought against them. This reversal reveals that divine accompaniment does not eliminate the ethical demands of covenant life. Migration with God thus becomes an ethical terrain. The Spirit who guides also disciplines; holiness determines whether movement becomes salvation or judgment.

As Oswalt notes, holiness in Isaiah is always relational and covenantal, expressing God's moral character and demanding Israel's

[40] Brueggemann, *Journey to the Common Good*, 12-23.

fidelity.[41] The Spirit's grief, therefore, underscores that mobility alone does not constitute divine mission. Faithful participation in God's purposes requires relational holiness within the covenant community.

The Spirit as Guiding Presence Toward Rest

Isaiah 63:14 climaxes the passage: "the Spirit of Yahweh gave them rest." Rest (מְנוּחָה) recalls Exod 33:14, where divine presence grants Sabbath-like emplacement. Isaiah's reinterpretation identifies the Spirit as the agent through whom this promise is fulfilled.

The verb נָהַג ("to lead") (63:14) reaffirms the shepherd-leadership pattern seen in Ps. 77:20 and the Exodus narratives. As a shepherd directs a flock through difficult terrain, so God leads His people through wilderness and danger toward security and flourishing. Migration is thus depicted as a purposeful direction toward shalom-filled dwelling, rather than endless liminality. The goal of this Spirit-led journey is rest.

In the broader Old Testament context, rest signifies the fulfillment of covenant promise and the establishment of a stable life under Yahweh's rule (Deut 12:9-10; Josh. 1:13). The Spirit thus functions as the guide who directs the community through displacement toward the realization of God's promises. The Spirit's guidance reframes movement as obedience, displacement becomes direction, and motion becomes mission.

The Spirit as the Missional Catalyst of Diaspora Witness

Isaiah twice affirms that the purpose of Spirit-accompanied migration is for God "to make for himself an everlasting name" (Isa 63:12, 14). Israel's movement, therefore, serves not only a redemptive purpose but also a revelatory one. Through the Exodus event, Yahweh's identity and power become publicly known.

This theme appears throughout the Exodus narrative. God repeatedly states that His acts of deliverance are intended to demonstrate His sovereignty before the nations (Exod 9:16). Christopher Wright argues that the Exodus thus becomes a foundational moment in which God's character is revealed to the world through historical acts of liberation.[42]

Isaiah's pneumatological interpretation of the Exodus indicates that the Spirit plays a central role in this revelatory process. By guiding and sustaining Israel through its migratory experience, the Spirit transforms

[41] John N. Oswalt, *The Book of Isaiah: Chapters 40–66*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 605-608.
[42] Wright, *Mission of God*, 67-94.

the journey itself into a testimony of divine presence and power. This frames migration as mission, and Israel's mobility becomes the stage on which Yahweh's identity is revealed to the nations.

Brueggemann notes that the wilderness community lives by Yahweh's fidelity in full public view, becoming an embodied testimony that challenges imperial narratives and displays an alternative social order grounded in divine provision.[43] Within this framework, Israel's mobility becomes a stage upon which Yahweh's character is revealed.

Thus, diaspora existence is not a pause in mission but a theological vocation by which God intentionally leads His people into visibility, so that Spirit-guided mobility expands the sphere in which God's Name is known. Taken together, these contours demonstrate that the Spirit's activity in Israel's migratory history is not incidental but constitutive, revealing the ruach on the move as the dynamic presence who forms, guides, and deploys the covenant community within God's redemptive mission.

From Text to Praxis: Implications for Diaspora Missions

The migratory pneumatology developed in the preceding sections provides a theological framework for interpreting contemporary migration within the *missio Dei*. Isaiah 63:7-14 portrays the Spirit accompanying a displaced community, forming its identity, sustaining its life, and revealing God's name through its journey. Read canonically through the Exodus tradition, this portrayal suggests that migration can function as an arena of Spirit-directed formation and witness. Consequently, diaspora communities may be understood not merely as recipients of pastoral care but as Spirit-sent witnesses who embody God's presence in motion.

Migration as a Catalyst for Evangelistic Expansion

Migration in Scripture repeatedly catalyzes mission. For instance, Joseph's displacement leads to the preservation of nations during famine (Gen 50:20), Daniel bears witness to Yahweh in Babylon (Dan 2; 6), Esther mediates deliverance in diaspora (Esth 4), and early Christians spread the gospel due to dispersion (Acts 8:1-4; 11:19-21). The Spirit who led Israel through waters and wilderness now continues to guide believers across cultural and national boundaries. This dynamic is visible today in the growing role of diaspora churches in global mission.

[43] Brueggemann, *Journey to the Common Good*, 18-20.

Jehu Hanciles observes that migration has become one of the most significant forces reshaping the geography of Christianity. As believers from Africa, Asia, and Latin America migrate to Europe and North America, they bring vibrant expressions of Christian faith into societies that were once the primary senders of missionaries.[44] In this sense, migration contributes to the shifting "center of gravity" of global Christianity from the historic Western centers toward the Majority World. A migratory pneumatology, therefore, encourages the church to view diaspora communities as Spirit-sent agents of evangelistic witness.

Intercultural Community as Spirit-Formed Identity

Migration places believers within intercultural environments where ethnic, linguistic, and cultural boundaries intersect, creating communities in which the Spirit forms multiethnic worship and shared identity. The New Testament reflects a similar development in the early church, where the Spirit gathers diverse peoples into one body (Acts 11:19-26; Eph 2:11-22).

Notwithstanding the challenges, diaspora churches may become laboratories of reconciliation, where migrants and hosts embody God's eschatological vision of nations united in worship (Isa 2:2-4). Intercultural ministry is, therefore, a practical necessity and a theological expression of the Spirit's work in forming a transnational people of God.

Ecclesiology of Pilgrim Witness

The migratory experience of Israel suggests that God's people often live as communities in transit rather than as culturally dominant institutions. The prophet Jeremiah instructs the exiles to seek the welfare of the cities where they live (Jer 29:4-7), demonstrating that displacement can become a context for faithful witness within foreign societies.

Diaspora churches today often function in a similar way. Many migrant congregations gather in global urban centers where they live as minority communities within larger cultural contexts. Yet these churches frequently serve as dynamic hubs of evangelism, social support, and spiritual renewal. A migratory pneumatology, therefore, encourages the church to embrace a "pilgrim ecclesiology" in which Christian identity is not tied primarily to geography but to faithful witness within diverse cultural environments.

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[44] Hanciles, *Beyond Christendom,* 286.

Leadership Formation in Liminal Contexts

Isaiah's memory of Moses, empowered by God's Spirit (Isa 63:11-12), suggests that leadership is often formed in liminal spaces. Leadership emerges within the very contexts of instability and uncertainty that characterize the wilderness journey.

Diaspora ministry, therefore, requires contextually competent leaders who can navigate multilingual environments, trauma-informed discipleship, and intercultural theological formation. Migrant pastors often minister across linguistic and cultural boundaries, developing forms of leadership suited to intercultural contexts.

A migratory pneumatology, therefore, highlights the importance of leadership formation within contexts of mobility. The Spirit who guided Israel's leaders in the wilderness continues to equip leaders capable of serving within globalized and intercultural mission fields.

Covenant Fidelity in Diaspora Communities

Isaiah 63:10 introduces a sobering warning within the migratory narrative: Israel "rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit," resulting in a reversal of divine accompaniment. The Spirit who had guided and sustained the community during its migration became the one who opposed them. This moment demonstrates that migration, though accompanied by divine presence, does not automatically guarantee participation in God's mission. The relationship between the Spirit and the migrating community remains covenantal and therefore morally accountable.

The wilderness narratives show how displacement can become a testing ground for covenant fidelity. Despite experiencing divine deliverance, Israel frequently responded to hardship with distrust and rebellion. They complained about God's provision in the wilderness (Exod 16:2-3), and questioned Yahweh's presence at Massah (Exod 17:7). The golden calf episode represents the most dramatic rejection of covenant loyalty (Exod 32:1-6). Isaiah interprets this history theologically by describing Israel's rebellion as grieving the Holy Spirit who had been guiding them (Isa 63:10-11).

A migratory pneumatology thus emphasizes that the Spirit who accompanies displaced believers also warns them against rebellion. Migration becomes a vocation of faithful obedience in which they meet the pressures of displacement with trust and perseverance. When diaspora communities remain responsive to the Spirit's guidance, their life together becomes a testimony of God's sustaining presence rather than a repetition of Israel's wilderness rebellion.

Liturgical Memory and Migrant Identity

The Old Testament repeatedly demonstrates that Israel's identity as the people of God was sustained through acts of liturgical remembrance. Central among these memories was the Exodus, the paradigmatic migration through which Israel experienced divine deliverance and missional calling. Israel's worship therefore rehearsed this narrative so that each generation would remember that its existence as a people was inseparable from God's saving action in history.

This dynamic appears most clearly in Israel's liturgical confession associated with the offering of first fruits. In Deuteronomy 26:5-9, the worshiper declares, "A wandering Aramean was my father," recounting Israel's descent into Egypt, divine deliverance, and eventual settlement in the land. Significantly, the confession begins not with land possession but with migratory origins. Even after Israel was firmly established in the promised land, the liturgy required the community to remember that its identity began with displacement and divine guidance. Scholars have long recognized this passage as Israel's "historical credo," a confessional summary of its origins that anchors covenant identity in the memory of divine deliverance.[45]

The Psalms likewise preserve this migratory memory within Israel's worship. Psalm 78 and Psalm 105 rehearse the Exodus and wilderness traditions so that subsequent generations might remember Yahweh's saving acts and place their trust in Him (Ps 78:5-7). Through such recitation, Israel interpreted its present circumstances through the memory of divine deliverance, sustaining covenant identity across generations.[46]

This liturgical remembering also bears an important pneumatological dimension. Nehemiah 9:20 recalls that God "gave [His] good Spirit to instruct them" during the wilderness period, indicating that the Spirit was not only active in guiding Israel's movement but also in sustaining the community's covenant knowledge. Within this framework, remembrance of God's past acts becomes inseparable from the Spirit's ongoing work of preserving Israel as a covenant people.

Isaiah 63:7-14 itself participates in this tradition of liturgical recollection. The prophet begins by declaring, "I will recount the

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[45] Gerhard von Rad, "The Form-Critical Problem of the Hexateuch," in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (New York, NY: McGraw-Hill, 1966), 1-78.

[46] Walter Brueggemann, *Theology of the Old Testament: Testimony, Dispute, Advocacy* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1997), 117-120.

steadfast love of the LORD" (Isa 63:7), before narrating Yahweh's past deliverance and the Spirit's guidance of Israel through the wilderness. In the midst of the post-exilic crisis, the community is invited to reinterpret its present displacement through the remembered story of divine accompaniment. Isaiah's retelling of the Exodus interprets the community's present suffering in light of God's past acts of redemption.

Seen in this light, liturgical remembrance functions as a means by which the Spirit preserves migrant identity. By continually rehearsing the story of God's deliverance and guidance, Israel interprets its experience of movement and displacement within the larger narrative of divine redemption. Migratory pneumatology therefore recognizes that the Spirit not only guides the people of God in their movements but also sustains their identity through the communal practices of remembering God's saving acts.

Conclusion

Isaiah 63:7–14 provides a compelling biblical foundation for an Old Testament migratory pneumatology by portraying the Holy Spirit as the divine agent who accompanies, redeems, and guides God's people through geographic and political displacement. Through Isaiah's recollection of the Exodus, migration emerges not as a disruption of God's purposes but as the arena in which God forms a people for witness. The Spirit is not confined to temple or land but moves with the displaced community, sustaining covenant identity and directing Israel's vocation among the nations.

At the same time, the passage underscores the covenantal dimension of the Spirit's presence. Isaiah warns that Israel "rebelled and grieved his Holy Spirit" (Isa 63:10), revealing that divine accompaniment is inseparable from covenant fidelity. Migration, therefore, becomes both a context of divine guidance and a testing ground for obedience, where the community's response to the Spirit determines whether displacement leads to renewal or discipline.

This study argues that contemporary diaspora Christianity stands within this same theological narrative. As the Spirit led Israel through waters and wilderness toward covenant vocation, so the Spirit continues to lead migrant believers into new cultural spaces as agents of witness. A migratory pneumatology thus reframes global population movements as opportunities within the *missio Dei*, calling the global church to recognize diaspora communities as participants in God's redemptive work across borders. In these movements of peoples, the ruach remains "on the

move," forming a transnational community whose identity and mission are shaped by participation in the dynamic mission of God.

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Original Eden in Genesis: A Pentecostal Reading[1]

Thang San Mung

Abstract:

This paper explores the theological significance of the Garden of Eden in the Genesis account through a personal-devotional reading rooted in Pentecostal spirituality. While engaging with recent and influential scholarship—particularly the symbolic and functional interpretations associated with John H. Walton—this paper affirms a bipolar hermeneutic that upholds both the literal historicity and spiritual significance of Eden. The study contends that Eden was a real, sacred space that prefigured divine-human communion, moral vocation, and eschatological hope. Five major themes are identified: God's language of goodness, Sabbath rest, human identity, the test of obedience, and the redemptive promise embedded in the fall. These themes are examined through a personal-devotional reading that is further articulated through biblical-theological analysis, supported by intertextual connections and selective lexical observations. The paper concludes by proposing that the Pentecostal experience of Spirit-infilling represents a foretaste of Eden restored, positioning the believer's heart as the new sanctuary of divine presence. This theological vision situates Eden not only as a lost paradise but also as a living paradigm for Christian life, worship, and eschatological expectations.

Keywords: Garden of Eden, Pentecostal hermeneutics, biblical theology, sacred space, Holy Spirit

Introduction: A Personal-Devotional Reading of Garden Story

The Genesis account of Eden, located in the opening chapters of the Hebrew Bible, has long been a subject of theological exploration and

[1] The first draft of this paper was written as a course requirement for a PhD program at ORU, Tulsa, OK, in 2020. While its general structure and major tenets remain the same, its rhetorical flow is much revised.

debate.[2] In *The Lost World of Adam and Eve*, John H. Walton calls readers to engage the text beyond surface-level interpretation, emphasizing the significance of its ancient Near Eastern context for understanding its message. Walton aims to uncover points of convergence between traditional interpretations and modern archaeological and scientific findings, reflecting broader ongoing discussions concerning the relationship between context and theological interpretation.[3]

While Walton explicitly denies conforming Scripture to its cultural milieu or modern science, his interpretive conclusions still tend toward a largely symbolic and functional reading of the Genesis garden narrative, informed by modern archaeological findings and comparative ancient Near Eastern scholarship.[4] He proposes, for example, drawing on such comparative material, that "the garden, the trees, and the serpent are symbols."[5] Although his emphasis on ancient Near Eastern literature provides valuable contextual insight, his method places significant weight on archaeological and comparative reconstructions.[6] Yet Walton himself acknowledges that archaeological conclusions remain tentative, sometimes contradictory, and open to revision as discoveries emerge.[7] Such methodological reliance invites reflection on the stability of interpretations grounded in reconstructions that remain historically provisional.

In contrast, this study proposes a bipolar, personal-devotional reading rooted in Pentecostal spirituality. This interpretive method views the Genesis account as a literal historical narrative and a theological

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[2] Herman Bavinck once presented how modern findings of human origin and Eden are compelling on the one hand and also very tricky sometimes on the other hand. The later findings sometimes even contradict the former. Therefore, referring to such tricky findings, he confesses that "there is not a single fact which compels us to abandon the stipulation of the Holy Scripture concerning Eden." See Herman Bavinck, *In the Beginning: Foundations of Christian Theology*, trans. John Vriend (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 155–57.
[3] John H. Walton, *The Lost World of Adam and Eve: Genesis 2–3 and the Human Origins Debate* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2015), 11–14.
[4] Walton, *Lost World of Adam*, 14.
[5] Walton, *Lost World of Adam*, 116.
[6] See Walton's discussion of Propositions 4 and 9, where he develops his cultural-functional reading in dialogue with comparative ancient Near Eastern material (Walton, *Lost World of Adam*, 49-52, 83–91).
[7] Walton, *Lost World of Adam*, 12–13.

witness imbued with spiritual truths for contemporary readers.[8] The bipolar nature of the approach involves engaging the text devotionally—as it is a sacred narrative—while also treating it as an account of actual past events. However, it does so with careful recognition of the distinction between the pre-fall and post-fall worlds. The disjunction between these stages of creation reflects a fundamental theological point that is often minimized in Walton's reading. For instance, he hesitates to affirm the perfection of the pre-fall world, a hallmark of traditional readings.[9]

This study insists on the seriousness of the fall and its profound effects. In doing so, it diverges from Walton's symbolic-historical orientation by affirming the theological and existential significance of Eden's literal nature and loss.[10] The personal-devotional reading employed here aligns with classical approaches to plenary verbal inspiration and views the Genesis account as historically grounded and eternally instructive.[11] Rooted in broader Pentecostal hermeneutics, this approach emphasizes the spiritual authority of Scripture, the transformative power of its message, and the Spirit's vital role in guiding interpretation.[12]

This study, therefore, employs what may be described as a personal-devotional reading articulated through biblical-theological analysis. The devotional dimension does not replace critical inquiry but serves as a hermeneutical posture that approaches the text as sacred Scripture intended for spiritual formation. This reading is then developed through a biblical-theological framework that traces thematic coherence across the canon, drawing on intertextual connections and selective lexical observations to support its claims. In this way, the study integrates devotional engagement with disciplined theological reflection.

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[8] T S Mung, "Personal-Devotional Search of the Lost Paradise in a Global Christian Context," a paper submitted for GTHE 931 Spirit Hermeneutics, Oral Roberts University, Fall 2020.

[9] Walton, *Lost World of Adam*, 116–17.

[10] Walton, *Lost World of Adam*, 116–17.

[11] Bill T. Arnold and Bryan E. Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament: A Christian Survey* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1999), 25–26.

[12] See Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2006), 29–70; and Chris E. W. Green, *Sanctifying Interpretation: Vocation, Holiness, and Scripture*, 2nd ed. (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2020), 125–214.

An Actual Primeval Garden: A Literal Event with Spiritual Significance

The narrative placement and terminology of "Eden" in Genesis suggest that the garden was understood as a historical location rather than merely a symbolic construct. John H. Sailhamer emphasizes the textual evidence supporting the view that Eden was presented as an actual place within the narrative framework of Genesis.[13] Similarly, Gordon Wenham acknowledges symbolic elements but concludes that references to rivers and geographic boundaries in Genesis 2 indicate that the narrator—and possibly the final redactor—conceived of Eden as a real place.[14] If the narrative originates with or is preserved by individuals who had access to this region, the memory of Eden might still be vivid and spatially identifiable.[15]

Bavinck also defends the historicity of Eden against the fluctuating claims of modern natural science. He argues that no compelling evidence exists to depart from the biblical account of Eden's reality.[16] While some scholars, like Sailhamer and Bavinck, attempt to locate the geographic site of Eden, this paper does not focus on such efforts. Instead, it affirms the traditional claim of Eden's actual, historical existence while allowing for mystery and reverence regarding its precise geographic coordinates in the current world map.[17]

From a devotional standpoint, the Garden's theological importance lies less in its physical location and more in its role as a sacred space reflecting God's presence. Scholars such as Walton and Wenham recognize this concept of Eden as a "sacred space" or "temple" motif, in which the garden represents divine abundance and relational proximity

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[13] John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative: A Biblical-Theological Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), 98–100; "Genesis," in *Expositor's Bible Commentary With the New International Version*, edited by Frank E. Gaebelein et al. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1995), 2–59.

[14] Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1–15* (Word Biblical Commentary 1; Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1987), 61–62.

[15] John H. Sailhamer, The Meaning of the Pentateuch: Revelation, Composition, and Interpretation (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2009), 193.

[16] Bavinck, *In the Beginning*, 157.

[17] Mung, "Literal-Physical Search of the Lost Paradise in a Global Christian Context." Paper submitted for GTHE 951 History of Christian Doctrine, Oral Roberts University, Fall 2019.

to God.[18] Despite Walton's symbolic leanings, he, too, acknowledges this sanctuary-like function of Eden.[19] Thus, the garden functions not only as the origin of creation but also as a theological microcosm—a physical manifestation of God's spiritual truths.

This bipolar interpretive framework allows the garden narrative to be understood simultaneously as a literal historical event and as a bearer of spiritual meaning. This approach is consistent with other theological readings that integrate the biblical story's past reality with its present and eternal significance.[20] The pre-fall world depicted in Genesis 1–2 is understood as qualitatively distinct from the post-fall world. Therefore, any interpretive effort that fails to account for this radical change—such as Walton's functional redefinition of the term "good" to refute traditional pristine reading—risks flattening the theological narrative.[21]

The personal-devotional reading proposed here sees the garden as a historical place of divine-human encounter and spiritual formation. It was a literal space where God's goodness was tangibly experienced. As such, Eden is best interpreted through a dual lens: affirming its factual past existence while drawing spiritual nourishment from its theological richness for contemporary Christian life.

Major Themes of the Garden Story: Opening Chapter of God's Redemptive History

The opening chapters of Genesis (1–3) offer more than a cosmogony—they serve as the foundational framework for the rest of Scripture's redemptive narrative. These chapters not only portray the origin of

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[18] Porter and Stovell, eds., *Biblical Hermeneutics: Five Views*, 201–210; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 61.

[19] Walton, *Lost World of Adam*, 116–127; Walton, "Eden, Garden of," in *Dictionary of the Old Testament: Pentateuch*, 202–207.

[20] For instance, some contemporary theologians and scholars are interested in such a reflective reading with a devotional purpose in focus. For example, knowing the nature of his reflective reading, Chris Green, in his exposition of the biblical theme of "holiness," admits that his simple purpose is primarily not the "what" but the "how" in guiding one's Scriptural reading instead, in Green, *Sanctifying Interpretation*, 162. Wright also displays a similar motif in his missional reading of the Bible, cf., Wright, *Mission of God*, 51. Such devotional motif in one's reflective reading of the Bible indicates how much personal commitment the reader has to the authority of the Bible. Therefore, such reflective reading goes beyond the common educational practice of academic pursuit and critical exercise. However, it is the very nature of Pentecostal reading of the Scriptures.

[21] Walton, *Lost World of Adam*, 53–58.

creation but also provide profound theological insights into the divine-human relationship, moral order, and eschatological hope. Within this theological tapestry, the Garden of Eden emerges as a central motif, rich in meaning and resonance for subsequent biblical theology.

From a personal-devotional reading perspective, Eden functions not merely as a historical setting but as a typological symbol of divine purpose, human identity, and the trajectory of redemption. This section identifies five major themes embedded in the garden narrative, each illustrating a theological truth that transcends the immediate context and remains relevant to readers' ongoing spiritual life over time.

God's Language of Good—Garden Lifestyle

A series of divine verbal acts punctuates the creation account in Genesis 1. God speaks, calls, and blesses—divine actions demonstrating that creation came into being through divine speech.[22] The repeated formula "God said" underscores the centrality of God's word as the source of order, structure, and life. Notably, the first spoken command of God, "Let there be light," inaugurates this rhythm of creative speech (Gen. 1:3).[23]

These divine utterances can be categorized into three major types: speech that creates and names (e.g., "Let there be…"),[24] speech that

[22] See T. S. Mung, "God's Language in the Beginning," a paper presented to the Bible Interest Group, Society for Pentecostal Studies, Costa Mesa, CA, 2020 (postponed to 2021). In detail, there are at least fifteen times of direct reference to "God speaking" in three different words (i.e., "to say אמר," "to call קרא," and "to bless ברך ") and another seven more times by implication, clearly recounted. For a general overview, the three divine verbal expressions are "God said (9 times + 1 in conjuncture with blessing)," "God called (4 times)," and "God blessed (2 times)." Moreover, even though not a direct reference, by implication, one can still guess the 'God speaking or saying' in his several comments on some creation works as the Bible repeatedly says that "God saw that it was good." This comment seemed more likely a divine verbal remark (notes) on what was done on the day. The word "good" is mentioned seven times in this single chapter as a divine comment (cf., Lange also noted this as a verbal speech saying, "At the seventh time it is said not merely good, but very good...," see commentary notes on Genesis 1:31 in John Peter Lange and others, *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures: Critical, Doctrinal, and Homiletical: Genesis*, vol. 1 [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1884], 172-175).

[23] Genesis 1:3; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 17–18.

[24] Regarding the first category of the 'God speaking' phrases, Genesis 1 mentions that God likely used word or any verbal expression of any kind to

blesses (e.g., God's blessing of sea creatures and humanity),[25] and speech that evaluates (e.g., "God saw that it was good").[26] The third evaluative word, "good," repeated seven times throughout the creation week,[27] signals the quality of God's workmanship and the moral and aesthetic order embedded within creation.[28] The culmination of this language of goodness is found in Genesis 1:31 when God declares the totality of creation "very good" upon the creation of humanity.[29]

This divine language of "good" is not only evaluative here but also performative; it sets the tone for human existence. The first human beings awakened to a world saturated with divine goodness, hearing

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create (cf., see similar comments of Poythress in Vern Sheridan Poythress, *In the Beginning Was the Word: Language—a God-centered Approach* [Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2009], 23; and also refer to notes of Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 17-19). Further, at the same time, as the Creator of all, he invented names for some creations that he undoubtedly called verbally by those names [Notes: Poythress supposed that this is how Adam reflected God in his later naming activity of all animals according to its kind as mentioned in 2:19, in Poythress, *In the Beginning,* 30. Wenham further notes this naming as a part of sovereignty over it somehow, cf., Wenham, *Genesis 1–15,* 19]. It is the very first language ever spoken on the face of the earth. God spoke first and foremost, and all he said was to create and name each kind.

[25] Regarding the second type of 'God speaking' phrase, Genesis 1 says God said something to bless what he created. On the other hand, this type of 'God speaking' indicates that all the blessings and good things originated in God the Creator himself (cf., James 3:17).

[26] The third category of 'God speaking' is, by implication, what God might have said, commenting on and complimenting all the works done each day [cf., Knowles defines this as more than a comment but even a "verdict," cf., Andrew Knowles, *The Bible Guide* (1st Augsburg books ed.; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 2001)], 23.

[27] For a side note: every day of the creation did not merit divine good, however. For instance, it is missing from the second day (Genesis 1:6-8) and the seventh day (2:1-3). However, good was repeated on the third day (1:10, 13), and then on the sixth day, had a superlative good in addition (vv. 25, 31). Therefore, on average, it is conclusive to say that it is still 'good' for each day of the creation week.

[28] Lange, *Genesis*, 172–75.

[29] Accordingly, Helm and Dennis call this "the pinnacle of God's creative activity" in David R. Helm & Jon M. Dennis, *The Genesis Factor: Probing Life's Big Questions* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2001), 33-35. Wenham also comments on this by saying it is the "focal point of Genesis 1, the climax of the six days' work" cf., Wenham, *Genesis 1–15,* 37.

from God a language that creates, blesses, and affirms.[30] This original speech of God—creative, benevolent, and sovereign—becomes the prototype of human language. As image-bearers, Adam and Eve's first linguistic experience was shaped by a divine vocabulary that reflected God's nature and intention.

The theological implications of this are significant. God's language is not neutral—it is formative. It establishes the Edenic linguistic culture of life, blessing, and affirmation.[31] Thus, the Garden becomes the original "good" speech environment in which human beings were formed physically, relationally, and spiritually. As Vern Poythress noted, human language is inherently vocational, participatory, and moral in reflecting this divine "good" language.[32]

Therefore, from a devotional standpoint, God's language of good formed and sustained the Edenic lifestyle. Human language, at its origin, was intended to reflect this same goodness—used to name, bless, and care for creation in imitation of the Creator.[33] As recounted in Genesis 3, the fall introduces a rupture in this divine-human linguistic harmony. However, the pattern set in Eden remains the standard by which redemptive speech—such as prophecy, praise, and gospel proclamation—finds its theological anchor.

Day of Completion and Rest—Life-Setting in the Garden

Following the divine declarations of "good" in Genesis 1, the narrative culminates with God resting on the seventh day (Gen. 2:1–3). This theme of divine rest signifies not merely cessation from labor but the perfection and completion of God's creative work. As Wenham observes, the grammar of the Hebrew text hints at the theological weight of the sixth and seventh days. Unlike the previous days, the sixth and seventh are marked with the definite article ("the sixth," "the seventh"), emphasizing their climactic significance.[34]

Scholarly interpretations of the Sabbath motif vary. Some regard the Sabbath as a creation ordinance with implications for all humanity,

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[30] Poythress, *In the Beginning*, 29; Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis* (Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching; Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2010, paperback ed.), 24–28.

[31] Green, Sanctifying Interpretation, 162; Wright, Mission of God, 51.

[32] Poythress, *In the Beginning*, 23–28.

[33] Genesis 2:19–20; Brueggemann, *Genesis*, 46–47.

[34] Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 34, also see explanation section in 86-88.

rooted in the imago Dei and divine pattern.[35] Others see it as a covenantal sign unique to Israel's religious identity, especially given its formalization in the Decalogue.[36] In either case, the seventh day in Genesis represents more than a liturgical regulation—it signifies a state of divine repose, the inauguration of a sacred rhythm wherein the world operates according to God's sovereign design.

Helm and Dennis underscore the uniqueness of these days, describing them as "God's days"—not bound to ordinary 24-hour periods but belonging to a divine order in eternity past.[37] Indeed, the creation of the sun and moon on the fourth day (Gen. 1:14–19) further underscores the definition of "day" in the creation week, which is not strictly astronomical but theological.[38] The Sabbath is less about chronology and more about divine intent and order that present astronomical time has copied. Accordingly, Lange noted that "God's sabbath is reflected in the sabbath of the world" instead.[39]

Further, Genesis 2:1–3 utilizes the Hebrew verb כלה *kalah* ("to complete") to describe God's cessation of work. The text suggests that creation was not left in process but brought to fullness.[40] In contrast, Israel's weekly Sabbath, though modeled on God's rest, does not imply the finality of labor. Instead, it signifies a temporary pause and remembrance (cf. Exod. 20:11; Lev. 23:3).[41] In Eden, however, the

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[35] G. F. Hasel, "Sabbath," in *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, ed. D. N. Freedman (vol. 5; New York: Doubleday, 1992), 849–56; Umberto Cassuto, *A Commentary on the Book of Genesis*, vol. 1 (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1961), 61–62; Claus Westermann, *Genesis 1–11: A Commentary* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1984), 170.

[36] Paul A. Barker, "Sabbath, Sabbatical Year, Jubilee," in *DOTP* (IVP, 2003), 695–706; Andrew T. Lincoln, "From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical and Theological Perspective," in D. A. Carson, ed., *From Sabbath to Lord's Day: A Biblical, Historical, and Theological Investigation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1982), 348–58; A. Andreasen, *Rest and Redemption: A Study of the Biblical Sabbath* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, 1978), 71–81.

[37] David R. Helm and Jon M. Dennis, *The Genesis Factor: Probing Life's Big Questions* (Wheaton, IK: Crossway Books, 2001), 43–45; cf. Lange, *Genesis*, 167.

[38] Wolf, *Genesis*, 85.

[39] Lange, *Genesis*, 189, 196-198.

[40] Van Gemeren, *The Progress of Redemption: From Creation to the New Jerusalem* (Carlisle, England: Paternoster Press, 1988), 46–48; Fausset Jamieson, R., and others, *Commentary Critical and Explanatory on the Whole Bible*, vol. 1 (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc, 1997), 18.

[41] Pipa, *The Lord's Day*, 25–41.

seventh day marked the beginning of life in a complete world. There was no cycle of toil and rest as in post-fall life. Adam entered a finished creation designed not for burdensome labor but for worshipful stewardship.[42]

This stewardship is reflected in Genesis 2:15, where Adam is placed in the garden "to work it and to keep it." While the verb "work" (עבד *abd*) is often associated with agricultural labor, in this context, it likely connotes service and worship, echoing priestly functions in later temple worship.[43] Similarly, "keep" (*Shamar)* conveys the idea of guarding or preserving, further aligning Adam's vocation with the sacred responsibility of observing God's rule and regulation rather than mere subsistence.[44]

Adam's "work" in the garden thus reflects the joy of serving within God's completed creation. He is not laboring to survive but participating in the divine order through obedience and communion. This Sabbath motif anticipates the eschatological rest promised in the New Testament, particularly in the redemptive work of Christ (cf. Matt. 11:28; Heb. 4:9–11). The Edenic Sabbath is a theological paradigm of harmony, wholeness, and divine fellowship—lost in the fall but promised again in Christ.

Creation of Perfect Human Life—The Identity of Garden-Life

The creation of humanity stands as the climax of Genesis 1 and the focal point of Genesis 2. While chapter one presents humanity as the apex of creation—made in the image of God (1:26–27)—chapter two offers a more intimate and detailed portrait, portraying the human as the centerpiece of Edenic life.[45] In Genesis 3, humanity becomes the central actor in the drama of disobedience and redemption. The narrative progression across these chapters moves from divine initiative to human responsibility, from creation to fall.

From Genesis 2:7 onward, the narrative centers on Adam as the bearer of God's image and the recipient of divine breath. Unlike other creatures formed by divine fiat, humanity is shaped by God's hands and

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[42] Reading Genesis 2:4-25 in light of the "finish" concept of Genesis 1:3-26 was also done by House, saying, "When 'Adam' receives life he awakes to an earth already prepared to sustain him, just as Genesis 1:3-26 has indicated," in Paul. R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 1998), 62.

[43] Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages*; BDB, 712.

[44] Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 67; BDB, 1036.

[45] Lange, *Genesis*, 211; Arnold & Beyer, *Encountering the Old Testament*, 81.

animated by His breath—a detail that reflects the uniqueness of human dignity and vocation.[46] This narrative structure reinforces the distinct identity of humanity in the order of creation: Adam is both creature and covenant partner, earth-formed yet divinely inspired. His existence indicates the "harmony and unity of the earthly and heavenly nature" in its original creation form.[47]

While some scholars debate the relationship between the two creation accounts—seeing chapter two as supplementary or independent—this paper affirms the traditional view that Genesis 2 complements Genesis 1.[48] This harmonized reading underscores humanity's dual identity: biologically of the earth, yet spiritually of God. As the only being made in God's image, humanity is called not merely to exist but to reflect the divine character, participate in divine rule, and enjoy divine fellowship.

John Walton describes the imago Dei with four dimensions: functional representation, essential identity, divine substitution, and relational nature.[49] While these categories are helpful, Herman Bavinck offers a more holistic view. He insists that humanity does not merely bear the image of God but is the image of God—an identity encompassing the whole person.[50] In this theological anthropology, every aspect of the human person—physical, moral, spiritual, and relational—reflects divine design.

Ronald T. Habermas, in his in-depth study of Christian discipleship in view of the original creation design, further expands this understanding by identifying three core aspects of God's image in humanity.[51] They are moral likeness (Godlike character),[52] professional

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[46] Lange, *Genesis*, 204.

[47] Lange, *Genesis*, 223; Wonsuk Ma, "The Spirit of God in Creation: Three Aspects," lecture handouts, Ph.D. Seminar, Oral Roberts University, Tulsa, OK, Fall 2020: 5–6.

[48] Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1996), 47–48; Hess, "Adam," in *DOTP*, 18–21.

[49] Walton, *Lost World of Adam*, 194–97.

[50] Bavinck, *In the Beginning*, 186–87.

[51] Ronald T. Habermas, *The Complete Disciple: A Model for Cultivating God's Image in Us* (Colorado Springs, CO: Nexgen, 2003), 49–74.

[52] Habermas, *Complete Disciple*, 55–59 [Godlike character means that man in God's image is Godlike physique, Passionate thinker, and sensory learner]. Habermas believes that the human condition in the pre-fall era might have a somewhat physical distinction in reflecting God's image.

partnership (vocational calling),[53] and social affinity (God-centered relationship/ community).[54] These dimensions affirm that being human is not limited to individual capacity but includes ethical formation, communal life, and participation in God's purposes.

Based on these insights, this paper proposes that humanity, as the crown of creation, shares three essential qualities with the Creator: the divine image, breath, and benefit. The divine image marks humanity's identity; the divine breath signifies spiritual vitality; and the divine benefit refers to the rights or privileges and pertaining responsibilities of life in the garden. Genesis 2:7 declares that God "breathed into his nostrils the breath of life," indicating a life force derived directly from God and unshared with other creatures.[55]

Furthermore, Adam's placement in Eden demonstrates not only privilege but purpose. He is granted access to divine abundance (2:9, 16), but he is also given moral responsibility (2:17). This mutual relationship reflects a covenantal structure: God entrusts life to Adam, and Adam is called to respond with faithful obedience.[56] When Adam lives under God's rule, he experiences the fullness of life; when he breaks that rule, he loses access to the divine presence and benefits.

In theological terms, Adam's original condition prefigures the redeemed humanity that Christ restores. Just as Adam was called to live in harmony with God's will in a completed creation, believers are now invited to enter Christ's finished work (cf. Matt. 11:28; Heb. 4:9–11). The Edenic identity of humanity—created, commissioned, and communing with God—serves as both an origin and a destiny. It is the pattern lost in the fall and regained in redemption.

Test of Faith—A Future Promise for Garden-Life

The moral and covenantal test placed before Adam and Eve is pivotal to the Eden narrative. Though Adam is formed from dust (Gen. 2:7), his

[53] Habermas, *Complete Disciple*, 59–61 [God's vocational calling means that man in his original stage is a kind ruler, worshipful worker, and artist-scientist resembling God].
[54] Habermas, *Complete Disciple*, 61–68 [God-centered community means that man in God's image builds intimate family life, becomes a good neighbor, and also a responsible citizen].
[55] Genesis 2:7; Lange, *Genesis,* 204.
[56] Helm & Dennis, *Genesis Factor*, 52–59.

purpose surpasses basic survival.[57] God's command to be fruitful, fill the earth, and subdue it (Gen. 1:28) signals a royal vocation—a mandate to participate in God's rule over creation. However, this high calling was not without conditions. The command in Genesis 2:17, that is to abstain from the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, functions as a test of faith, trust, and obedience.[58]

The Edenic test reflects God's desire for a covenantal relationship, not merely passive obedience. Adam was not created to be a moral automaton but a moral agent capable of choosing fidelity over rebellion. The simplicity of the test—abstaining from one tree while enjoying abundance—exposes the gravity of the ethical decision. As Paul House notes, the command was clear, and the consequences were transparent; the issue was not comprehension but trust.[59]

In Eden, human life represented a harmonious balance of sacred vocation and divine presence. The human being was called to worship God while tending the garden, to love his partner while honoring the divine command. These were not dualistic obligations but a unified way of life.[60] This integrated existence—at once physical, spiritual, communal, and moral—was a foretaste of the eternal life God intended for humanity. In this way, the Eden narrative is not only a historical record but also a theological promise of what human life could be.

However, the tragedy of the fall disrupts this vision. Adam's failure is not only a moral lapse but a cosmic rupture. The temptation narrative in Genesis 3 reveals a more serious conflict: faith in the Creator versus trust in a deceiver. The serpent's strategy is to undermine God's credibility and instill doubt—a reversal of faith that leads to disobedience.[61] The fall, therefore, is not merely an isolated event but the archetype of human rebellion throughout history.

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[57] While Genesis 1 is silent on the detail of how man or *adam* was created, though said in God's image, Genesis 2 provides more complete information that says that "...the LORD God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and man became a living being" (NASB). For more on Genesis's usage of the word *adam* meaning man, please, see "Adam" by Hess (IVP 2003): 18-21; "Adam (Person)" by Stephen Taylor, in *Baker Encyclopedia of the Bible*, vol. 1 (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1988), 26-28; "Adam" by Nick Bott, in J. D. Barry and others, eds., *The Lexham Bible Dictionary* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2016); and others.

[58] Genesis 2:17; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 27–33.

[59] House, *Old Testament Theology*, 64–65.

[60] Lange, *Genesis*, 199–211.

[61] Helm & Dennis, *Genesis Factor*, 64–65.

Nevertheless, the Genesis narrative does not end in despair. Immediately following the judgment, God offers a redemptive promise: the "seed of the woman" will crush the serpent's head (Gen. 3:15). This *protoevangelium* serves as the first gospel—a glimmer of eschatological hope embedded in the very moment of failure.[62] It anticipates a future Redeemer who will reverse the curse and restore what was lost in Eden.

From a personal devotional standpoint, this theme invites believers to see their journey in light of Adam's test. Faith, obedience, and trust remain the foundational principles of spiritual life. However, in contrast to Adam's failure, the believer now follows the Second Adam—Jesus Christ—who passed the test of obedience (cf. Rom. 5:12–21; Heb. 4:15). In Him, the original purpose of Eden is not only remembered but also redeemed.

God of the Second Chance—Garden-Life Guarantee

The fall of Adam and Eve marks a decisive turning point in the biblical narrative, introducing sin, alienation, and death into human existence. However, even amid judgment, the Genesis text reveals a redemptive trajectory.[63] God's response to the fall is not final destruction but gracious pursuit. The garden story becomes the scene of humanity's failure and the first chapter in God's unfolding redemptive plan all at once.

Genesis 3:15 stands as a theological linchpin within this narrative. Often referred to as the *protoevangelium*, or "first gospel," it introduces the promise of a coming redeemer—the "seed of the woman" who will ultimately crush the serpent's head.[64] This declaration signals God's commitment to justice and restoration. It also reveals that the serpent, the agent of deception, will not go unpunished. His defeat is inevitable, though his activity continues temporarily.

Two key exegetical observations in Genesis 3 support this redemptive reading. First, the curse upon the serpent in verse 14— "on your belly you will go, and dust you will eat"—indicates both humiliation and defeat. Wenham notes the linguistic parallel with

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[62] Genesis 3:15; Lange, *Genesis*, 247.

[63] See "Fall, The," by Herman Bavinck, in J. Orr, J. L. Nuelsen, E. Y. Mullins, & M. O. Evans, eds., *The International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*, vol. 1-5 (Chicago: The Howard-Severance Company, 1915), 1092–1094. The article partially portrays how this opening section of Genesis and its messages, like the fall of man, become a running theme throughout the Bible.

[64] Genesis 3:15; Lange, *Genesis,* 247 ["the first judgment, and, at the same time, the first promise of Salvation"].

Leviticus 11:42, where crawling creatures are categorized as unclean, reinforcing the symbolic degradation of the serpent.[65] The phrase "dust you will eat" suggests perpetual disgrace, a reversal of the serpent's earlier exaltation as "crafty" (Gen. 3:1).

Second, the language in verse 15 distinguishes between temporary wounding and ultimate victory. While the serpent may bruise the heel of the woman's seed, his head will be crushed. This asymmetry underscores the seed's triumph.[66] Scholars across traditions have viewed this as the inception of messianic hope, a promise that threads its way through the patriarchs and prophets and ultimately into the New Testament witness of Christ.

This redemptive motif is further reinforced in the genealogical narrative that follows. Genesis 5 recounts the line of Seth, contrasting the godly heritage of Adam's third son with the corruption of Cain's line.[67] Lamech's naming of Noah (Gen. 5:29) suggests a sustained hope that one would arise to bring "rest" and reverse the curse. Abraham Park has argued that the messianic expectation was carefully transmitted across generations through naming traditions and covenantal awareness.[68]

In theological terms, the garden becomes the backdrop, not only of human ruin but also of divine mercy. God's provision of garments for Adam and Eve (Gen. 3:21) and the guarded entrance to Eden (v. 24) reflect judgment and grace—preserving life while denying access to the tree of life in a fallen state. In this act, God demonstrates that redemption will come, but not without transformation.

This theme of divine mercy and second chances is central to the personal-devotional reading advocated in this study. In Pentecostal

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[65] Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 79.

[66] Walton, "Serpent," in *DOTP*, 736–739; Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 80; Sailhamer, "Genesis," *Expositor's Bible Commentary*.

[67] Genesis 5:28–32.

[68] Abraham Park, *The Genesis Genealogies: God's Administration in the History of Redemption*, vol. 1 (Singapore: Periplus Editions, 2009), 87–134. The central theme that Abraham Park has extensively dealt with in his book is the messianic hope handed down from Adam to the next generation. All the internal evidence that he pointed to are such as the naming of their offspring, i.e., Adam in his naming to his three children, Cain, Abel, and Seth, and down to the naming of Noah by Lamech, who saw Adam in person if the age spans mentioned in Genesis 5 is taken literally. Further, the rise of the godly line of Seth against the wicked line of Cain is likely another evidence of the godly legacy, for Adam was the only one to be credited.

spirituality, the God who filled the garden with life and purpose is the same God who fills believers with His Spirit, offering restoration and hope. Eden, though lost, is not forgotten; its promise is reawakened in Christ, the second Adam, who restores humanity to its original purpose (cf. 1 Cor. 15:45).

Theology of the Garden: Spiritual Meaning

The Garden of Eden, as presented in Genesis 2–3, carries profound theological meaning beyond its historical and geographical context. While much attention has been given to its physical features—its rivers, trees, and boundaries—theologically, Eden functions as a sacred space that reflects God's presence, provision, and purpose for humanity. From a Pentecostal personal-devotional standpoint, Eden is not merely the birthplace of humanity but a template for divine-human fellowship, worship, and wholeness.

A growing scholarly consensus recognizes Eden as a prototype sanctuary—a sacred dwelling place where God walked with humanity in unbroken fellowship.[69] The language in Genesis 2 evokes temple imagery later found in Israel's Tabernacle and temple traditions.[70] The verbs used to describe God's actions—planting the garden (וַיִּטַּע *wayyiṭṭa'*) and placing the man within it (וַיָּשֶׂם *wayyāśem* of verse 8 and וַיַּנִּחֵהוּ *wayyanniḥêhū* of verse 15—suggest not only divine hospitality but also divine intention to establish a covenantal presence.[71] The word *wayyiṭṭa'* can signify more than simple planting; it also carries connotations of establishing a dwelling, akin to pitching a tent or founding a settlement.[72]

In this sense, Eden is not merely a garden but a spatial and theological symbol of God's desire to dwell among His people. This divine intent is echoed in later covenantal languages, such as Leviticus 26:11-12 and 2 Corinthians 6:16: "I will dwell in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be My people." Eden, then,

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[69] Wenham, *Genesis 1–15*, 61–62 [stresses more on symbolical reading]; Walton, "Eden, Garden of," in *DOTP*, 204–205; also see notes on "Gen. 2:4-25," in Custis et al., *Genesis 1–11* (Bellingham, WA: Lexham Press, 2012).
[70] Wright, *Mission of God*, 29–70.
[71] Genesis 2:8, 15; BDB, 642, 963.
[72] Holladay and Köhler, *Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon*, 236; Arnold & Beyer, *Encountering Old Testament*, 81 ["the creation of the Garden...as the ideal home for humanity"].

anticipates the Tabernacle, the temple, and ultimately the New Jerusalem as foretastes of full divine communion.

The verb שׂוּם *śîm* ("to place" or "to set") in Genesis 2:8 further enriches this theological interpretation. It implies a deliberate act of entrusting, commissioning, or assigning responsibility.[73] Adam was not merely deposited into the garden but entrusted with sacred duties—to cultivate (ʿ*abad*) and to keep (*shamar*) it (v. 15).[74] These verbs, frequently used in priestly contexts, suggest that Adam's role in Eden mirrored priestly service: guarding sacred space and maintaining covenantal obedience.[75]

This Edenic theology has implications for both anthropology and eschatology. Humans are not autonomous creatures but covenant partners called to live under divine rule. Life in the garden was not about survival or economic productivity but communion, worship, and obedience. When Adam lived within the boundaries of God's command, he experienced the fullness of life. When he transgressed, that life was forfeited.

However, the story does not end with exile. Genesis 3:15 offers the promise of a redeemer—the seed of the woman—who will defeat the serpent and restore what was lost.[76] From a theological standpoint, this restoration is not merely the recovery of a physical garden but the renewal of a sacred space where God once again dwells with His people.[77] The entire redemptive arc of Scripture—from Eden to the Tabernacle, from Christ to the indwelling Spirit, and from the church to the New Jerusalem—reflects this consistent divine purpose.

In Pentecostal spirituality, the garden's sacred presence is echoed in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. As discussed in previous sections, the Spirit is the "deposit" or "guarantee" of the fullness to come (Eph. 1:13–14; 2 Cor. 1:21–22).[78] Thus, the believer's present experience of the

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[73] Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages*; Strong, *Concise Dictionary*, vol. 2, 113.
[74] BDB, 712, 1036.
[75] Walton, Sailhamer, Wenham, and others emphasize this priestly aspect.
[76] See "Myth and Reality in the Bible," in D. G. Bloesch, *Jesus Christ: Savior & Lord* (Westmont, IL: IVP Academic, 1997), 120–131.
[77] Lange, *Genesis*, 234–236, 247; Sailhamer, *Meaning of the Pentateuch*, 29–34.
[78] To the best of the knowledge of the present researcher, to see a connection between the Garden of Eden and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit as the down payment of heavenly glory is never done before till the first draft of this paper was written as a doctoral course requirement in 2020. However, to observe the Garden as the foretaste of heavenly glory and representation of God's presence

Spirit is a foretaste of Eden restored. In contrast to the external garden guarded by cherubim (Gen. 3:24), the Spirit now dwells internally, making the believer's heart the new sacred space.[79]

In this way, the theology of Eden finds its fulfillment not merely in eschatological hope but in pneumatic reality. The garden is both memory and anticipation, a sacred past and a Spirit-filled present. It remains a theological anchor for understanding God's intention to dwell with, transform, and restore His people.

Conclusion: Pentecostal Infilling as New Eden

The question of Eden's relevance today remains deeply theological, whether as a physical location, a spiritual metaphor, or an eschatological promise. The Promised Land has long been viewed as a restored Paradise for the Jewish people. Similarly, early European explorers envisioned the New World as a potential rediscovery of Eden. However, from a biblical-theological perspective, Eden cannot be recovered through physical exploration or social engineering. In its original form, Eden was a sacred space uniquely created by God and rendered inaccessible after the fall (Gen. 3:24).[80]

The Edenic narrative, however, does not end with exclusion. Within Pentecostal spirituality, Eden finds a renewed expression—not in geography but in pneumatology. The infilling of the Holy Spirit becomes the new Edenic experience, where divine presence, communion, and purpose are restored. This personal-devotional interpretation aligns with the theological understanding of the Holy Spirit as a deposit or foretaste of the eschatological fulfillment (cf. Eph 1:13–14; 2 Cor 1:21–22).[81] Just as the Garden was once the external space of divine indwelling; the Spirit now serves as the internal habitation of God within the believer.

This transformation from an external to an internal Eden signifies a radical shift in how Paradise is experienced. For Adam, Eden was a tangible garden filled with beauty and abundance; for the believer under the new covenant, the Spirit-filled life is the inner sanctuary of peace,

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is a common interest, as already discussed in this paper. Moreover, to say the Holy Spirit is the down payment of heavenly goodness and present experience of the upcoming glory is a precise biblical terminology, as seen in Ephesians 1:13–14 and 2 Corinthians 1:21–22.

[79] Galatians 3:1–7; John 6:28–29.

[80] Mung, "Literal-Physical Search of the Lost Paradise."

[81] Ephesians 1:13–14; 2 Corinthians 1:21–22; cf. Mung, "New Eden Under the New Covenant."

justice, and holiness.[82] The Spirit serves as both the presence of God and the power by which believers participate in the divine nature, echoing the original vocation of Adam as steward and worshiper.

While some may attempt to recreate Eden through socio-political or environmental means, such efforts, though noble, cannot replicate the fullness of Edenic life apart from spiritual transformation.[83] The personal-devotional reading advocated here calls for an inward renewal by the Spirit rather than an outward reconstruction of Paradise. This approach is particularly resonant for communities like the Zomi Christians, whose longing for identity, peace, and restoration finds its most profound answer not in territorial claims but in spiritual renewal.

Ultimately, the Pentecostal infilling of the Holy Spirit may be understood as a profound expression of Eden's restoration in the present age. As the primeval Garden once housed the presence of God, the Spirit now dwells within each believer, creating a new Eden in the heart. Such an internalized Paradise does not replace but anticipates the eschatological Eden—the New Jerusalem—where God will once again dwell fully with His people (Rev 22:1–5). Until then, the Spirit remains the guarantee of that promise, the first fruit of life to come.

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[82] Galatians 3:1–7; John 6:28–29.

[83] Mung, "Social, Political, and Environmental Search."

The Right Song for the Right Setting: An Exegetical Study of 1 Timothy 3:16 (Part 2)

Douglas P. Lowenberg

Abstract

This article constitutes Part 2 of the theological and contextual analysis of the significance of the Christ Hymn in 1 Timothy 3:16. It emphasizes the hymn's critical role in affirming central Christological doctrines concerning the incarnation, ministry, and exaltation of Jesus Christ. Through an examination of its poetic structure and key theological phrases, the study demonstrates how the Apostle Paul employs this hymn as a doctrinal countermeasure against heterodox teachings that undermine Christ's mediatorial office and promote legalistic or pagan idolatrous practices. The hymn depicts Christ as the divine mediator, revealed in flesh, justified by the Spirit, visibly manifested to angels, proclaimed among the nations, believed on in the world, and ultimately exalted in glory. Each phrase emphasizes facets of Christ's earthly sojourn, divine validation, and exalted victory, illustrating how Christ's life of divine righteousness serves as a paradigm for believers. The analysis concludes that Paul's use of this hymn was strategically intended to strengthen the faith of the early church, reaffirm Christ's unique mediatorial role, and motivate believers to uphold orthodoxy and holiness amid opposition, thereby capturing the profound mystery and eschatological hope inherent in Christian soteriology.

Keywords: Christ hymn, theological exegesis, Christology, incarnation, false teachings

Introduction

Part 2 of this article explores the profound meaning and theological implications of the Christ Hymn in 1 Timothy 3:16. By examining its poetic structure, key phrases, and historical context, it reveals how Paul used this hymn to affirm core Christian doctrines about Jesus' incarnation, ministry, and exaltation. The hymn reflects Jesus as the divine mediator who exemplified godliness and provided believers with

the spiritual power to live in holiness. It also counters false teachings by emphasizing Christ's unique mediatorial role and universal salvation. Ultimately, the hymn serves as a powerful declaration of Christ's mystery, glory, and the hope of eternal life for believers.

The Song

We now turn to the words, meaning, and structure of the song itself,[1] which Paul employed to explain the mystery of godliness.[2]

Who appeared in a body, was vindicated by the Spirit, was seen by angels, was preached among the nations, was believed on in the world, was taken up in glory. (Towner)	Ὃς ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί, ἐδικαιώθη ἐν πνεύματι, ὤφθη ἀγγέλοις, ἐκηρύχθη ἐν ἔθνεσιν, ἐπιστεύθη ἐν κόσμῳ, ἀνελήμφθη ἐν δόξῃ.

The song is introduced with a masculine relative pronoun (ὅς, who),[3] and the song itself functions as a relative clause, adding and clarifying

[1] Marshall labels the hymn as a "cryptic description of Christ . . . a remarkable revelation of God." Marshall, "1 Timothy," 802.

[2] Andria observes that a mystery cannot be known without the intervention of God who, in this hymn, reveals the Person and work of Jesus Christ. Andria, "1 Timothy," 1473. Keener simply refers to the content of the hymn as "the standard of faith," without referencing the mystery of godliness. Keener, *Bible Background*, 608. Mysteries were truths that exceeded people's ability to understand unless God provided some revelation. In Paul's other epistles, he described the "mystery." In Colossians 1:27, he gave a definition of "this mystery, which is Christ in you, the hope of glory." In this same epistle, he said that God "has qualified you to share in the inheritance of the saints in the kingdom of light. For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins" (Colossians 1:12–14). The mystery of godliness was the divine revelation that sinners who had lived under the dominion of Satan could be transformed to be like Christ, receive adoption into his household of faith, and be given the spiritual ability to live godly, holy, lovingly, and boldly for Christ and the truth.

[3] Later manuscripts changed the relative pronoun, who (ὅς, *hos*), to the noun, God (θεὸς). For further examination of the textual critical issues, see Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 95; Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 214; and Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 278.

information to the clause it modifies.[4] Grammatically, the gender of the relative pronoun is confusing because the previous statement contains no masculine nouns to serve as the antecedent of the relative pronoun. The two nouns in the introductory clause, mystery (μυστήριον) and godliness (εὐσέβεια) are neuter and feminine, respectively. Wallace resolves the issue: "One of the standard features of Greek poetry is the introductory use of the relative pronoun. Sometimes, however, the relative pronoun has no antecedent because the hymnic fragment is introduced without syntactic connection."[5]

The mystery that makes godliness possible is a person—the Lord Jesus. The song reveals how he exemplified godliness and made godliness possible for his followers. The emphasis on Jesus is significant not only because he is the heart of Paul's gospel, but Christ is also the divine-human mediator and ransom for humankind's sin. It was Jesus whom the false teachers marginalized by replacing him with other mediators, and rather than depending on Christ's provision of salvation, they put their confidence in adherence to a contrived code of ethics to make them acceptable to God. And while the pagans in Ephesus looked to Artemis as their savior and protector against evil spirits and magic, Paul declared that Jesus was the only source of salvation and godliness.

Before looking at the six phrases of the song, one should note that scholars approach the hymn with many theological presuppositions based on their views of the essential steps Christ took to provide salvation. As Fee rightly observes regarding the song, "There has been considerable debate, with nothing like consensus."[6] Some view the hymn as a Christological creed that describes the truth that was to be proclaimed and safeguarded by the church.[7] However, few report a close connection between the words and ideas of the song with the issues being faced in the Ephesian context. It seems one's hermeneutic should assume Paul used this hymn because of its relevance to the topic he had just introduced, the mystery that produces godliness, and the realities being faced by Timothy and the church, caused by the false teachers.

Interpretation of the song is affected by the poetic nature of the song, its structure, and the meaning of the words as intended by Paul for this context. Each of the six phrases in the song begins with an aorist

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[4] David L. Mathewson and Elodie B. Emig, *Intermediate Greek Grammar* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2016), 432.

[5] Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 341.

[6] Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy*, *Titus*, 93.

[7] Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 91, 95.

passive verb (with a -θη ending creating a common assonance) where the subject, Jesus, the antecedent of the relative pronoun, is the recipient of the ensuing actions. Each of the lines except the third has the preposition ἐν, which means in, by, or among, and requires the noun it governs to be in the dative case.[8] And each of the six nouns following the preposition is anarthrous.

Regarding the structure of the song, there are three major approaches to interpreting the order and relationship between the lines. Some scholars view the song as six independent stanzas; some emphasize two stanzas with three lines each; and some observe three stanzas with two lines each. The structure is determined by the interpreters based on their understanding of the meaning of each line.

Some observe a chronological progression in the life of Jesus described by the six lines moving from incarnation to ascension.[9] Those who advocate two stanzas with three lines each interpret the first three lines as chronologically describing Jesus' earthly, salvific ministry (incarnation, resurrection, ascension); and the second stanza recounts the ministry of the church after Pentecost: preaching Christ and seeing the nations respond in faith.[10] However, this group struggles with the logical placement of line 6 and claims this is a description of the ultimate glorification of Jesus "in glory," not referring to a location in the heavenlies but the manner of his exaltation—He has been glorified. Those who view the song as three stanzas with two lines each stress the antithetical parallelism of the phrases based on the meanings of the final nouns (for example, flesh/spirit; angels/nations; world/glory).[11] The first stanza describes his earthly existence in Palestine from incarnation to death and ascension. The second stanza records the extent of those who witnessed his earthly ministry—angels in the heavenlies and nations

[8] If one follows the 8-case system, the noun following ἐν could be in the dative, locative, or instrumental case.

[9] Stott, *The Message*, 106-107, comments that the chronological interpretation views each line as a "fresh, consecutive event or stage in the career of Jesus, taking us from the first coming to the second." For Stott, the hymn is a liturgical, doctrinal statement; he makes no connection between the hymn and the immediate context of the church in Ephesus.

[10] Stott, *The Message*, 107, mentions that the second stanza alludes to the "life of the exalted Lord" who was preached, believed on, and glorified. The two-stanza view is the one held by Gordon D. Fee, *Pauline Christology* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2007), 431.

[11] Some further note the chiastic nature of the song with the pattern of ab/ba/ab. See Fee, *1 and 2 Timothy, Titus*, 96.

on the earth.[12] The third stanza records the welcome he received on earth and in heaven—accepted on earth by those who believed in him and in heaven by the angelic hosts who welcomed him on his return to glory. Rather than Christ's reception, Guthrie asserts that the third stanza portrays the places of Christ's triumph: on earth and in heaven.[13] One should note that most scholars interpret the song Christologically, extracted from the historical and spiritual context of Ephesus, and do not interpret the song as the explanation of the mystery that makes godliness possible.

Considering that the purpose of the song is to reveal the mystery that makes godliness possible for God's people, one may observe that the lyrics to the song demonstrate how Jesus lived a life of godliness and that his godliness makes it possible for those who place their faith in him to do likewise. What does this 6-line song reveal about the way in which Jesus provided godliness for believers in the context of Ephesus?

Line 1: Who was manifest (revealed) in flesh / Ὃς ἐφανερώθη ἐν σαρκί

The opening line of the song asserts Christ's incarnation as a historical person, taking on flesh with all of its incumbent weaknesses.[14] Given the context of the opponents who minimalized the role of the "man" Christ Jesus and viewed flesh as evil, this line captures what Paul claimed about Jesus (1 Tim 2:5): he "came into the world" (1:15), appeared before people (2 Tim 1:10), and identified with humanity as a fellow human being; yet as God, he served as the mediator between God and humankind (2:5). The incarnation served as a fundamental Christian truth without which salvation was not possible.[15] His becoming fully human undermined the false teachers' emphasis on asceticism and dualism that disdained flesh and praised the spirit. The historical reality of God entering the world of creation as a human stood in stark contrast to the mythical beliefs of Artemis and her "image that fell from heaven" (Acts 19:35). Paul's lyrics affirmed the reality of Christ's

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[12] Stott, *The Message*, 107-108.

[13] Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 102.

[14] According to Wallace's paradigms, *Greek Grammar*, 153, this phrase could be labeled a dative of sphere. "The dative substantive indicates the sphere or realm in which the word to which it is related takes place or exists." Jesus was manifest in the realm of creaturely flesh existing in the realm of humanity. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 765, considers this phrase a dative of sphere meaning in the "sphere of humanity."

[15] Andria, "1 Timothy," 1473.

incarnation and implied his preexistence.[16] The eternal God became flesh and made his dwelling among humankind (John 1:14).

Regarding the anarthrous "flesh," Mathewson and Emig note, "Articles are often absent before definite nouns in prepositional phrases."[17] The key determinate whether one should add a definite article or not is the context. Should the text read he appeared in flesh or in the flesh? The anarthrous phrase emphasizes quality—he was truly flesh, living in the sphere of creatureliness.[18] Given Paul's message that Jesus was the mystery who made godliness possible and served as the example of godliness while fully human, his emphasis on the humanity of Christ is clear. God invaded human history as a man to provide salvation. The divine human served as the appropriate mediator between God and fallen humanity. The fact that Christ was fully flesh and yet set an example of godliness encouraged believers that they too could be godly while creaturely; they could value their bodies, originating from the dirt, as made in the image of God.

Line 2: was vindicated (justified) by (the) Spirit / ἐδικαιώθη ἐν πνεύματι

The verb to justify or vindicate (*dikaioo*) is a highly charged theological term.[19] A. E. McGrath claims that Paul's use of vocabulary related to justification is grounded in the OT where the meaning is more in alignment with rightness than righteousness. "Justification results from an action of God whereby an individual is set in a right relationship with God, vindicated or declared to be in the right."[20] The one *dikaio*-ed is in "a right and faithful relation" to God. Clearly, God is righteous and does what is upright morally, ethically, and spiritually. All people are sinners,

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[16] Marshall, "1 Timothy," 802.

[17] Mathewson and Emig, *Intermediate Greek Grammar*, 151, 171-172.

[18] Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 243-244, reports that qualitative, abstract nouns stress quality, nature, essence, and class traits and are anarthrous. The song could be stressing the human, creaturely nature into which Jesus was incarnated. This very nature would have been viewed as evil by the ascetic opponents of Paul.

[19] Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 227, writes, "The second line is one of the more difficult lines in the hymn to interpret." Those with a Reformational perspective stress the utter sinfulness and helplessness of people. For sinful humans to be accepted by God, God must do all the work of transformation while the sinner receives God's grace passively. The change is viewed as forensic stressing that God makes the declaration of "uprightness" even though the person is still a sinner but saved by grace.

[20] A. E. McGrath, "Justification" in *DPAHL*, 518.

unrighteous before God. Some scholars assert that God forensically declares the unrighteous righteous when they repent and come to him in faith. Sinners are still sinners, but God, as Judge, declares them righteous. The word, justify, can also mean to be made righteous, shown to be righteous, and become innocent.[21] Here, the concept includes a change of heart and character, the uprighting of a person's inner being before a holy God. God transforms and imparts righteousness into one's being.

How would Paul apply this idea to Christ, who came into the world as a human being and yet was faultless? The apostle did not question Christ's perfection and sinless character. His personhood did not need to be vindicated. Many scholars read line 2 as God vindicating Christ through the resurrection, which followed his humiliation and death on the cross.[22] Keener depicts Christ's resurrection as God's acquittal of him after his condemnation by Pilate and the Jews, which led to his death.[23] Those who hold this view presume that Christ's death and resurrection are cardinal Christological doctrines for the apostles and must be implied in line 2. Even though the song does not speak directly of Jesus' death,[24] they believe Paul must have viewed vindication as the expression of Christ's resurrection. In 1 Timothy 2:5, Paul spoke of Christ's death. But here, was he referring to Christ's death and resurrection? It is interesting to note that the apostle John compressed the description of Christ being born (incarnation) and immediately caught up to his throne (ascension and enthronement) without any mention of his death (Rev 12:5). Could there be another way of reading Paul's statement in light of the Ephesian crisis?

Returning to a chronological consideration of the song, line 2 could refer to the next great event in salvation history following Christ's

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[21] Perkins, *Pastoral Letters*, 73.

[22] Those who apply this perspective to line 2 would then assert that line 3 reveals Christ's exaltation and praise by the angelic hosts after the resurrection and ascension to his divine seat at the righthand of God. Mounce, *Pastoral Epistles*, 227, asserts that the phrase "most probably refers to the resurrection." Fee, *God's Empowering Presence*, 766, claims that based on Christ's resurrection, he entered the sphere of the supernatural, the spiritual, the realm of the Holy Spirit.

[23] Keener, *Bible Background*, 608.

[24] Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 102, makes the important observation: "It is noticeable that nowhere in the hymn is the death or resurrection of Christ mentioned." He explains that Paul only used selected parts of the hymn for specific purposes.

incarnation. At Jesus' baptism in the Jordan, the Holy Spirit descended upon him in visible, bodily form, and God publicly announced, "You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased" (Luke 3:22). This event served as a public vindication, a declaration of Christ's identity and innocence through the voice of God from heaven coupled with the visible coming of the Spirit to rest upon him. Despite his scandalous birth and simple upbringing, the baptismal event affirmed that Jesus was God's Son, God's Messiah, his unique Servant.[25] Even though human and living in the sphere of "flesh," Christ was in right and faithful relation with God and fully upright before him. The coming of the Holy Spirit upon the "man" Christ Jesus initiated his public, messianic ministry and empowered him to fulfill his mission.

While Jesus was fully flesh, the Spirit vindicated him.[26] The Spirit affirmed his identity and empowered his mission. Paul's lyrics countered the dualistic and ascetic teachings of the false prophets who viewed the flesh as evil and incapable of good. The Spirit coming upon the man, Christ Jesus, did not change his creaturely nature but showed the presence of the Spirit at work in his life to accomplish God's purposes. As flesh filled with the Spirit, Jesus exhibited godliness in word and deed. His followers, including Paul the worst of sinners, were vindicated while creaturely by the coming of the Spirit and empowered to live in godliness. Line 2 supports Paul's view that salvation and Spirit anointing were holistic. The whole being of Christ was anointed by the Spirit. Likewise, Christ's followers received the Spirit and were empowered to live godly in their words, deeds, faith, attitudes, and adherence to

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[25] The events related to Jesus' water baptism, the coming of the Spirit, and the voice of God have clear intertextual connects with Isaiah's identification of God's special servant: "Here is my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen one in whom I delight; I will put my Spirit on him, and he will bring justice to the nations" (Isa 42:1).

[26] Spirit, in the dative case, is used as a dative of agency or agent, the one performing the action. "Vindication happened through the agency of the Holy Spirit." Perkins, *Pastoral Letters*, 73. See Guthrie, *The Pastoral Epistles*, 101. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 163, explains, "The dative substantive is used to indicate the personal agent by whom the action of the verb is accomplished." The Spirit is the Person who vindicated the incarnate Jesus who humbled himself to become "man" in order to serve as the effective mediator between God and humankind. It should also be noted that Spirit is anarthrous. But as a proper name and "one-of-a-kind" noun, the definite article is unnecessary. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 245, 248.

doctrinal truth. Through the abiding Spirit, they could overcome the powers of evil spirits and magic and work miracles for Christ.

The antithetical parallelism of the last two words of lines 1 and 2, flesh and Spirit, could be viewed as highlighting the holistic nature of Christ. He was completely flesh but filled with the Spirit at his conception, which occurred by the Spirit (Luke 1:35). Living in this realm of "flesh," where he embraced the limitations of humanness, he was anointed and empowered by the Spirit (Luke 3:22), led by the Spirit (Luke 4:1), and filled with the Spirit throughout his life on earth (Luke 4:1; 10:21; Matt 27:50-53). Those who followed Christ were of a similar nature as fully human but made alive by the Spirit, guided by the Spirit, and empowered by the Spirit to live in all godliness.

Line 3: Was seen (viewed) by angels / ὤφθη ἀγγέλοις

Line 3 is the exception to the grammatical pattern of the song. There is no preposition (ἐν), but the noun, angels, is in the dative, a dative of respect or dative of recipient[27]—Jesus was seen or observed with respect to or by angels. Wallace describes this dative as emphasizing the passivity of the recipients, those represented by the noun in the dative. The recipients did not act or initiate the act of seeing. They simply observed the actions of the subject (inferred noun) of the phrase, Jesus Christ.[28] This emphasis through the grammatical constructions seems to be supported by Reid, who states that Paul "could also employ angels as foils for the surpassing glory of the gospel of Christ."[29] When did angels see him?

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[27] Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 165, 148. Wallace explains, "in no instance can it be said that the person(s) in the dative case initiate(s) the act. In other words, volition rests wholly with the subject, while the dative noun is merely recipient." One might label this phrase as a dative of recipient. The noun is anarthrous and could be understood as a generic noun referring to the myriads of angels, God's created heavenly hosts, who watched the Son of God enter the realm of humanity to provide salvation for God's human creatures. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 253. Perkins, *Pastor Letters*, 74, labels the phrase a dative of reference which refers to the person or party to whom God decides to make himself visible.

[28] Stott, *The Message*, 107, reports that the angels "watched the whole unfolding drama of salvation."

[29] Reid, "Angels," 22. However, it should be noted that Reid, in examining this song, notes a correspondence between lines 2, 3, and 6 and claims, "Christ's appearance before angels refers to his exaltation in the presence of angels of

Marshall, holding to the two-stanza structure of the song, claims that Jesus was seen by angels in heaven after his resurrection and ascension. Thus, this statement provides further evidence of his vindication at the resurrection.[30] Bromiley, on the other hand, describes the presence of angels during Jesus' ministry on earth: "They are naturally present when this [ministry] begins with the nativity (Matt 1; Luke 1-3) and ends with the resurrection (Matt 28:2) and the ascension (Acts 1:10ff) . . . on his way to the cross, in his temptation (Mark 1:12), and then before the crucifixion (Luke 22:43) . . . They will come with Christ when he returns in glory (Matt 24:31)."[31] Andria contends that the vindication by the Spirit and seen by angels both occurred at Jesus' baptism in the Jordan River.[32]

Recalling the historical context of Ephesus, the false teachers minimized the importance of Jesus as the one and only mediator between God and human beings. They believed the mediatorial role was filled by angels and the giver of the Law, Moses. Followers of Artemis believed she was the supreme ruler over the realm of spirits, angels, and demons. To clarify the participation of angels in the ministry of Christ and in the lives of those who followed him, Paul employed line 3 to emphasize the minimal role of angels in the saving work provided by Christ. Angels, both good and evil, witnessed the One who took on flesh, overcame the temptations of the devil, ministered selflessly, was crucified, conquered death, and ascended to heaven. This lyric minimized the importance of angels, which may be the reason why Paul altered the grammatical form of the statement, omitting the preposition, to focus attention on Jesus and not on angels who merely observed. In the epistle, Paul mentions that angels are observers of the actions of Christ's followers (1 Tim 5:21), God's messengers, and assist his people, but Jesus alone is mediator, Savior, and the provider of godliness.

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glory who acclaimed honor and praise to the exalted Lord, perhaps in triumphal procession" (21). Based on the grammar of line 3 and the historical context of Ephesus, his view of the song seems amiss.

[30] Marshall, "1 Timothy," 802.

[31] Bromiley, "Angel," 46.

[32] Andria, "1 Timothy," 1473.

Line 4: Was preached among the nations / ἐκηρύχθη ἐν ἔθνεσιν

The person and ministry of Jesus was publicly proclaimed in the sphere or realm of the nations.[33] Scholars who believe that the first three lines form one stanza claim that its content deals with Jesus' ministry on earth: he was incarnated, resurrected, and exalted into heaven, where he was seen by the angelic hosts. This new stanza, according to them, describes the work of the church. "Back on earth," in contrast with what occurred in heaven at Jesus' exaltation, Jesus was preached among the nations.[34]

Part of the logic for interpreting line 4 as the work of the church following Christ's ascension is the presupposition that Jesus' earthly ministry was almost exclusively limited to Jews in Israel. On the day of Pentecost and thereafter, global evangelization and discipleship of the diverse ethnic peoples of the world became the agenda of the church.[35] Keener states, "The Gentile mission was at most peripheral to Jesus' earthly ministry: he did not actively seek out Gentiles for ministry (Matt 10:5) . . . The Gentile mission became central to the early church."[36] It is true that the church began to slowly move centrifugally from Jerusalem to evangelize people beyond the Jews in Israel. However, this perspective ignores the ministry of Jesus to Gentile people groups while he walked the earth augmented by their further propagation to others

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[33] Examining Wallace's categories, *Greek Grammar*, 148, 153, 142, the phrase could be viewed as a dative of recipient, the nations being the ones to whom Jesus was preached; a dative of sphere—in the realm or sphere of the Gentile nations, emphasizing that the gospel was proclaimed beyond the Jews and the borders of Israel; or it could be viewed as a dative of advantage—Jesus was preached for the benefit of the nations. Anarthrous "nations" could emphasis this particular class or quality of peoples who stood outside or distinct from the nation of Israel, the target audience of the opponents. Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 244.

[34] Marshall, "1 Timothy," 802.

[35] Stott, *The Message*, 107, reports that this phrase is "a clear reference to the church's worldwide mission in obedience to the great commission of the risen Lord."

[36] Craig S. Keener, *The Gospel of Matthew: A Socio-Rhetorical Commentary* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 263. He also comments, "Jesus historically limited his own mission primarily or exclusively to Israel" (315). For a similar view, see Jeannine K. Brown and Kyle Roberts, *Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2018), 146, 100, who comment, "Jesus has defined the boundaries of his mission . . . to focus (exclusively) on Israel rather than on Samaritans or gentiles (10:5-6)."

about him. As an example, the apostle Matthew, considered to be writing his Gospel to a Jewish audience, highlights Jesus' witness to Gentiles who spread the good news. Jesus was preached among the nations by magi from the east (2:2-3). Those healed witnessed to the people of Syria (4:24). Gentile inhabitants in Galilee saw the great light manifest in Jesus (4:15-16). The Gentile members of the Roman centurion's household experienced the healing of his servant (8:10, 13). Syrophoenicia witnessed the deliverance of a demonized daughter (15:22, 28). Roman guards at his crucifixion and resurrection declared, "Surely he was the Son of God!" (27:54; 28:4). And then there is Samaria who heard one of their own testify, "He told me everything I ever did" (John 4:39-42). During his life on earth, the gospel of Jesus was preached among many ethnic groups (*ethnê*)[37] both by himself and by others.[38]

Unlike the false teachers of Ephesus who showed racial exclusivism and partiality in their witness, the church had to be faithful to the one who "wants all men to be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth" (1 Tim 2:4).[39] Jesus came to earth to fulfill the promise given to Abraham that his seed would be a blessing to all nations. He intentionally crossed political and cultural borders to bring the good news to other nations. Those who heard, believed, and were healed, expanded the proclamation of the gospel.

The mystery of godliness came to offer salvation to all, and the ability to live in all godliness was also available to all, no matter one's ethnic or religious background. Unlike the restricted and exclusive message of the opponents, Timothy and the Ephesian church were to continue to spread the gospel in the city and beyond to all who would hear.

The antithetical parallelism of the final words of lines 3 and 4, angels and nations, could represent two audiences who witnessed Christ's

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[37] *Ethnê,* the nations, as distinct from Israel. G. Abbott-Smith, *A Manual Greek Lexicon of the New Testament* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1922), 129.

[38] Jesus fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah recorded 700 years before his coming, "It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth" (Isaiah 49:6).

[39] Perkins, *Pastoral Letters*, 74-75, seems to overlook the exclusive nature of the preaching of the false teachers. While he acknowledges that for the term ethne "the usual reference in the NT is to non-Jews," he proposes that nations, in this case, "probably includes both Jews and non-Jews."

gospel. Angels observed but did not participate in the work of salvation nor receive its benefits. The nations experienced the gospel and were commissioned to continue the disciple-making process as an expression of their godliness.

Line 5: Was believed on in the world / ἐπιστεύθη ἐν κόσμῳ

The false teachers appear to emphasize obedience to the law and living Jewishly in terms of customs and culture. They ignored the importance of an exclusive faith in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior. They replaced faith in him with observance of the Law and legalistic restrictions. Others put their faith in Artemis, spiritual powers, and magic.For Paul, faith in Christ was the essential step needed to be approved by God. Jesus modeled the life of faith as he bore witness to God and entrusted himself to his heavenly Father. The life of godliness commenced with faith for anyone living in this created world (*kosmos*)[40] and moved forward from faith to faith.

Line 6: Was taken up in glory / ἀνελήμφθη ἐν δόξῃ

The term for "taken up" (ἀναλαμβάνω) is found in Mark 16:19; Acts 1:2, 11, 22. In each of these cases, the authors described the physical ascension of Jesus into heaven. Perkins reports that taken up (ἀνελήμφθη) "always refers to the ascension . . . the relocation of a person to another place."[41] Marshall notes, "He was taken up to be with God in glory; although this clause comes after the mention of the worldwide mission, it can only refer to the ascension."[42] Andria claims the phrase, "taken up in glory," refers to Christ's resurrection.[43] If one recognizes the earthly mission of Jesus included the proclamation of

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[40] Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 153, dative of sphere, in the realm of created matter which God had created. The *kosmos* represented the "all" whom God wanted to be saved and to benefit from the saving work of Christ. The anarthrous "world" or "created order" would represent a quality or nature of this generic noun. There was one way alone for all humankind to experience God's grace and have the possibility of becoming godly, and that was through faith—no other way. See Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 244.

[41] Perkins, *Pastoral Letters*, 75.

[42] Marshall, "1 Timothy," 802. Stott, *The Message*, 107, notes, "The final statement . . . sounds like another reference to the ascension," considering the vindication by the Spirit to be the first reference to the resurrection and ascension. To maintain a chronological sequence, he claims that line 6 refers to the parousia "foreshadowing the final epiphany in power and great glory."

[43] Andria, "1 Timothy," 1473.

good news to the nations and that faith in him was the entry point into his kingdom, line 6 is the appropriate description of the chronological end of his earthly ministry—he ascended into heaven and to his throne.[44]

There are alternate views about the meaning of line 6. Keener states that this phrase refers to "Jesus' return (cf. Dan 7:13-14) rather than to his ascension."[45] Towner believes the emphasis is not on his ascension from earth, but the status of glorification conferred on him through his exaltation.[46]

The dative, in glory (ἐν δόξῃ),[47] could be a dative of manner[48] or a dative of location: the manner in which he ascended was one that was glorious as "he was taken up before their very eyes, and a cloud hid him from their sight" (Acts 1:9). The emphasis of the dative could be on the location, the highest heavens, when God "raised him from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every title that can be given" (Eph 1:20-23). The one who lived in all godliness ascended and was exalted. The godly one was taken into heaven bodily, where both his flesh and Spirit were exalted. Those who put their faith in him had the promise that, "in the coming age" (1 Tim 6:19), they also would be resurrected and join him in the heavenlies. If his people would be faithful in their godliness and testimony, they lived with this blessed hope. In contrast, false teachers claimed, "The resurrection has already taken place" (2 Tim 2:18). Their present "angelic" existence on earth was all there was.

In summary, viewing the song as a chronological description of the life of Jesus seems to provide an explanation for the mystery that makes godliness possible and provides a clarifying truth which counters the false teaching of Paul's opponents. While the false teachers gave their attention to navigating a dualistic existence between flesh and spirit,

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[44] On the other hand, King, *A Leader Led*, 67, indicates that line 6 is out of order because the ascension had to precede the preaching to the nations.

[45] Keener, *Bible Background*, 608.

[46] Towner, *The Letters to Timothy and Titus*, 284.

[47] Glory (*doxa*) could be understood as an abstract noun, thus anarthrous, or a one-of-a-kind location, the glorious realm of God. See Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 244, 248-249.

[48] According to Wallace, *Greek Grammar*, 161, 147, the dative of manner denotes the manner in which the action of the verb is accomplished. It could also represent a dative of destination, Christ's transfer from one place to another—from the realm of the created order (κόσμος) to the realm of the glorious heavens, the place of glory (δόξα).

stressing adherence to the law to avoid living unrighteously, Paul's song concluded with the exaltation of Christ and the hope laid up for those who lived for him.

The final words of lines 5 and 6 make another interesting comparison between the world (*kosmos*) where Christ provided salvation for all humankind and people believed in him, and the eternal location (*doxa*) where Christ and his people would be united and spend eternity together, the blessed hope (1 Tim 1:1). Godliness was to be the distinguishing mark of his people while they lived on this earth, and it was the key characteristic of those who would be caught up to meet him in the air (1 Thess 4:17).

Conclusion

Songs are an amazing means of communication in that they convey a message that far exceeds the limitations of their words. Songs inspire the imagination and faith while speaking explicitly to the existential conditions one faces. Paul used the Christ hymn of 1 Timothy 3:16 because it expressly addressed the *ad hoc* conditions being faced by the church in Ephesus. The song countered the opponents to his gospel and exalted Christ, who not only lived a life of godliness as a human being on earth, but also provided the spiritual ability to his followers to live and grow in godliness. God's household would truly proclaim and safeguard the truth of the gospel as they committed themselves to honoring Christ, lived in the presence of the Spirit, exhibited moral purity and holiness, loved the members of the church of the living God, and boldly declared the gospel to the nations. Choose your songs wisely.

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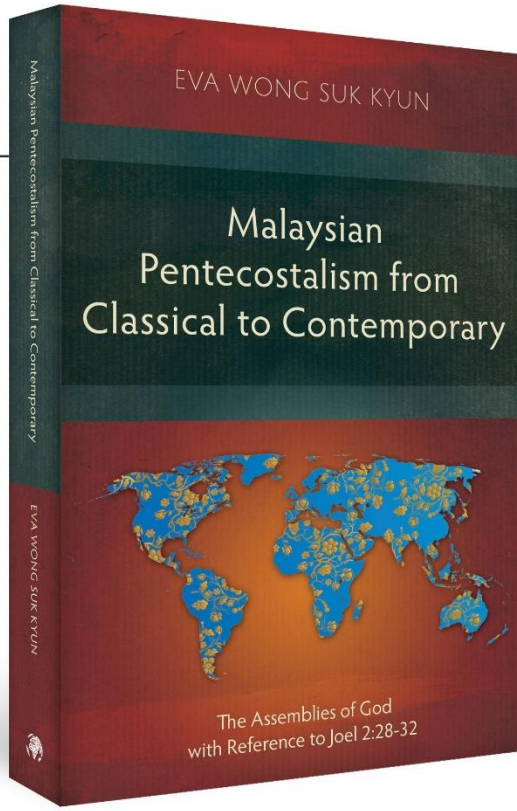

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Was Paul for or against Women's Ministry?[1]

Craig S. Keener

Abstract

This article explores the biblical perspective on women's ministry, addressing a vital debate within modern Christianity. It highlights the importance of interpreting Scripture within its cultural and historical contexts, noting that the Bible depicts women in leadership roles, such as prophets, judges, and apostles, including Phoebe and Junia. The author contends that Paul's writings, often used to restrict women's roles, should be understood within their specific cultural contexts, such as the Corinthian head-covering practice and the false teaching issues in Ephesus. Key passages such as 1 Corinthians 14:34-36 and 1 Timothy 2:11-15, that seem restrictive, may, in fact, address particular issues rather than universal principles. The article points out that Paul's affirmations of women's ministry, combined with his contextual restrictions, reveal a nuanced perspective that supports women's active participation in church leadership and prophecy. It challenges the idea that biblical texts universally prohibit women from teaching or exercising authority, asserting that cultural circumstances shaped Paul's directives. Ultimately, the article advocates an inclusive approach, affirming all who are called by God for ministry regardless of gender, and emphasizes the importance of contextual biblical interpretation for today's church practice.

Keywords: women's ministry, biblical interpretation, Pauline theology, cultural context, church leadership, gender roles.

[1] In this article, I have modified my "Was Paul for or against Women's Ministry?" originally published in the Assemblies of God's *Enrichment* 6 (2, Spring 2001): 82-86. The present version was presented at the Asian Pentecostal Summit, Singapore, Oct 2025. Published with the permission of the Global Pentecostal Voices.

Introduction

A Pressing Issue

The question of women's ministry is a pressing concern for today's church. It is paramount first because we need the gifts of all members God has called to serve the church; now the concern, however, has extended beyond the church itself. Increasingly secular thinkers today attack Christianity as "against women" and thus irrelevant to the modern world.

Yet the Assemblies of God and most other denominations birthed in the Holiness and Pentecostal revivals affirmed women's ministry long before the role of women became a secular or liberal agenda.[2] Likewise, in the historic missionary expansion of the nineteenth century, two-thirds of all missionaries were women. The nineteenth-century women's movement that fought for women's right to vote originally grew from the same revival movement led by Charles Finney and others that advocated the abolition of slavery. By contrast, those who identified everything in the Bible's *culture* with the Bible's *message* were obligated to both accept slavery and reject women's ministry.[3]

For Bible-believing Christians, however, mere precedent from church history cannot settle a question; we must establish our case from Scripture. Because the current debate focuses especially around the teaching of Paul, I focus on his writing after I briefly summarize some other biblical teachings on the subject.

Women's Ministry in the Rest of the Bible

The ancient West Asian world of which Israel was a part was definitely a "man's world." But because God spoke to Israel in a particular culture does not suggest that the culture itself was holy; the culture included polygamy, divorce, slavery, and a variety of other practices we now recognize as less than ideal.

Despite the prominence of men in ancient Israelite society, however, God still sometimes called women as leaders. When Josiah needed to hear the word of the Lord, he sent to the most prominent prophetic figure of his day, namely Huldah (2 Kgs 22:12-20). Deborah was not

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[2] See e.g., Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal Movement in the United States* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971), 188-89.

[3] See Stanley Grenz and Denise Muir Kjesbo, *Women in the Church* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1995), 42-62; Nancy Hardesty, *Women Called to Witness* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1984); Glenn Usry and Craig Keener, *Black Man's Religion* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1996), 90-94, 98-109.

only a prophetess but a judge (Judges 4:4)—that is, she held the place of greatest authority in Israel in her day. She is the only prophetic judge in the Book of Judges and one of the few judges of whom the Bible reports no failures (Judges 4—5).

Although first-century Jewish women rarely if ever studied with teachers of the law the way male disciples did,[4] Jesus allowed women to join his ranks (Mark 15:40-41; Luke 8:1-3)—something the culture could regard as scandalous.[5] As if this were not scandalous enough, he allowed a woman who wished to hear his teaching "sit at his feet" (Luke 10:39)—taking a posture normally reserved for disciples (Acts 22:3). Disciples were potentially teachers in training![6] To send women out on the preaching missions (e.g., Mark 6:7-13) might have proved too scandalous to be practical, but the Gospels nevertheless unanimously report that God chose women as the first witnesses of the resurrection, even though first-century Jewish men often dismissed the testimony of women.[7]

Joel explicitly emphasized that when God poured out his Spirit, women as well as men would prophesy (Joel 2:28-29). Pentecost meant that all God's people qualified for gifts of God's Spirit (Acts 2:17-18), just as salvation meant that male or female would have the same relationship with God (Gal 3:28). Outpourings of the Spirit in recent centuries have often led to the same effect.

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[4] Leonard Swidler, *Women in Judaism* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow, 1976), 97-111; Craig Keener, *Paul, Women & Wives* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1992), 83-84. The one exception apart from Jesus' disciples is Beruriah (second century), who confronted prejudice from most male rabbis.

[5] See Graham Stanton, *The Gospels and Jesus* (Oxford: Oxford, 1989), 202; John Stambaugh and David Balch, *The New Testament in Its Social Environment* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1986), 104; Walter Liefeld, "The Wandering Preacher as a Social Figure in the Roman Empire" (PhD dissertation, Columbia University, 1967), 240. Critics often maligned movements supported by women (E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* [New York: Penguin, 1993], 109).

[6] To "sit before" a teacher's feet was to take the posture of a disciple (m. Ab. 1:4; Ab. R. Nat. 6, 38 A; 11, §28 B; b. Pes. 3b; y. Sanh. 10:1, §8). On women in Jesus's ministry, see especially Ben Witherington, III, *Women in the Ministry of Jesus*, SNTSM 51 (Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1984).

[7] See Josephus *Ant.* 4.219; m. Yeb. 15:1, 8-10; 16:7; Ketub. 1:6-9; t. Yeb. 14:10; Sipra VDDeho. pq. 7.45.1.1; cf. Luke 24:11. In Roman law see similarly Jane Gardner, *Women in Roman Law & Society* (Bloomington: Indiana University, 1986), 165.

Paul's Teachings about Women in Ministry

Ancient Mediterranean prejudices[8]

Some of Paul's contemporaries argued that women had less intelligence or were more easily deceived than men.[9] Juvenal ridiculed women who sought advanced education (*Sat.* 6.434-56). The Greek moralist Plutarch considered himself exceptional for advocating a husband's care for his wife's learning; he believed this training would protect her from following nonsense and immorality (*Bride* 48, *Mor.* 145C). Yet even Plutarch adds that, if left only to themselves, women produced only unhealthy passions and foolishness.[10] Judeans raised boys but not girls to recite Torah.[11] Conservative tradition disapproved women's public speech[12] and mistrusted their counsel.[13] With only a handful of exceptions throughout antiquity, mostly in select philosophic schools, women barely ever taught men.[14]

Passages where Paul Affirms Women's Ministry

Paul often affirms the ministry of women despite the gender prejudices of his culture. With a few exceptions in some philosophic sects, advanced education was a male domain. Because most people in Mediterranean antiquity were functionally illiterate, those who assumed teaching roles were generally those who could read and speak well, and

[8] See, much more fully, Craig S. Keener, "Women's Education and Public Speech in Antiquity," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 50 (4, Dec. 2007): 747-59.

[9] On their cognitive limitations, see e.g., Valerius Maximus 9.1.3; Plutarch *Bride* 48, *Mor.* 145CD; *T. Job* 26:6/26:7-8. For "old wives' tales" (cf. 1 Tim 4:7), see Cicero *De Nat. Deor.* 1.20.55; Seneca *Ep. Lucil.* 94.2; Philostratus *Vit. apoll.* 5.14; *Vit. soph.* 1.25.541; Iamblichus *Vit. Pyth.* 32.227; *Jos. Asen.* 4:10/14.

[10] Plutarch, *Bride* 48 *Mor.* 145DE; cf. Publilius Syrus 365, 376.

[11] E.g., *m. Ab.* 5:21 (cf. Jos. *Life* 9-12; *Ant.* 20.264-65); S. Safrai, "Education," *The Jewish People in the First Century* (ed. S. Safrai and M. Stern; 2 vols.; Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974-76), 955.

[12] Soph. *Ajax* 293; Valerius Maximus 3.8.6; Plutarch *Bride* 32, *Mor.* 142D; Heliodorus *Eth.* 1.21; Sir 9:9; *Ps.-Phoc.* 215-16.

[13] Babrius *Fable* 16.10; Avianus *Fables* 15-16; Phaedrus 4.15; Fronto *Ep. Graec.* 2.3; Josephus *Ant.* 18.252-255.

[14] See also Bruce W. Winter, *Roman Wives, Roman Widows: The Appearance of New Women and the Pauline Communities* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003), 115-16.

with rare exceptions, these were men.[15] In the first centuries of our era, most Jewish men, such as Philo, Josephus, and many later rabbis, reflected the prejudice of much of the broader Greco-Roman culture.[16]

Women's roles varied from one region to another, but Paul's writings clearly rank him among the more women-affirming, not the more restrictive writers of his day. Many of Paul's co-laborers in the gospel were women.

Thus, Paul commends the ministry of a woman who brought his letter to the Roman Christians (Rom 16:1-2). Phoebe was a "servant" of the church at Cenchrea. "Servant" may refer to a "deacon," a term sometimes designating administrative responsibility in the early Church (1 Tim 3:8, 12). In his epistles, however, Paul most frequently applies the term to any minister of God's word, including himself (e.g., 1 Cor 3:5; 2 Cor 3:6; 6:4; Eph 3:7; 6:21). He also calls Phoebe a "benefactor" or "helper" of many (16:2); this term technically designates her as the church's "patron" or sponsor, most likely the owner of the home in which the church at Cenchrea was meeting. This was an honored position in ancient associations, including synagogues and churches.[17]

Nor is she the only influential woman in the church. Whereas Paul greets about twice as many men as women in Romans 16, he commends the ministries of about twice as many women as men in that list. (Some use the predominance of male ministers in the Bible against women's ministry, but that argument could work against *men's* ministry in this passage!) These commendations may indicate his sensitivity to the opposition women undoubtedly frequently faced for their ministry and are remarkable given the prejudice against women's public speaking that existed in Paul's culture.

If Paul followed ancient custom when he praises Prisca, he would mention her before her husband Aquila because of her higher status (Rom. 16:3-4). Elsewhere, we learn that she and her husband taught Scripture to another minister (Acts 18:26). Paul also lists two fellow-

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[15] Although inscriptions demonstrate that women filled a prominent role in some synagogues (see Bernadette J. Brooten, *Women Leaders in the Ancient Synagogue: Inscriptional Evidence and Background Issues* [Chico, CA: Scholars, 1982]), they also reveal that this practice was the exception rather than the norm.
[16] E.g., Philo *Prob.* 117; see further Safrai, "Education," 955; Richard Baer, *Philo's Use of the Categories Male and Female* (AZLGHJ 3; Leiden: Brill, 1970).
[17] See further Keener, *Women*, 237-40.

apostles,[18] Andronicus and Junia. Although "Junia" is clearly a feminine name, writers opposed to the possibility that Paul could have referred to a female apostle have sometimes suggested that "Junia" is a contraction for the masculine "Junianus." Yet Junia is *always* a woman's name in ancient inscriptions; the suggestion that Junia is male rests not on the text itself but entirely on the presupposition that a woman could not be an apostle.

Elsewhere, Paul refers to the ministry of two women in Philippi who, like his many male fellow-ministers, shared in his work for the gospel there (Phil. 4:2-3). Because women typically achieved more prominent religious roles in Macedonia than in most parts of the Roman world,[19] Paul's women colleagues in this region may have moved more quickly into prominent offices in the church (cf. also Acts 16:14-15). Is it a coincidence that Paul commends women in ministry especially in two cities in the Roman empire—Rome and Philippi—where women had more freedoms to speak than in some other locations? What might that mean for us today in societies where women may be educated and speak in public?

Although Paul ranks prophets second only to apostles (1 Cor. 12:28), he acknowledges the ministry of prophetesses (1 Cor. 11:5), following the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Exod. 15:20; Judg. 4:4; 2 Kings 22:13-14) and early Christian practice (Acts 2:17-18, 21:9). Clearly, women do speak God's message. In Scripture as a whole, prophets are the most common agents of God's message. Thus, those who complain that Paul does not specifically mention "women pastors" by name miss the point. Paul never mentions any "men pastors" by name either. He most often simply mentions his traveling companions in ministry, who were naturally men. His two most common titles for such fellow ministers are *diakonos* (minister, servant) and *sunergos* (fellow worker)—both of which terms he also applies to women (Rom 16:1, 3; Phil 4:3). Given the culture that Paul addressed, it was natural that fewer women could exercise the social independence necessary to achieve positions of ministry. Where they did so, however, Paul commends them, and includes commendations to women apostles and prophets, the offices of the highest authority in the church!

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[18] Because Paul nowhere else appeals to commendations from "the apostles," a majority of scholars recognize that "notable apostles" remains the most natural way to construe this phrase.

[19] See Valerie Ann Abrahamsen, "The Rock Reliefs and the Cult of Diana at Philippi" (ThD dissertation, Harvard Divinity School, 1986).

While passages such as these establish Paul among the more women-affirming writers of his era, the primary controversy today rages around other passages in which Paul seems to oppose women's ministry. Before turning there, we should examine one passage where nearly everyone today acknowledges that Paul addresses a local cultural situation.

Paul on Head Coverings

Although Paul often advocated the mutuality of gender roles,[20] He also worked within the boundaries of his culture, where necessary, for the sake of the gospel. We begin with his teaching on head coverings because, although it is not directly related to women's ministry, it will help one understand how he contextualized universal principles for cultural situations. Most Christians today agree that women do not need to cover their heads in church in all cultures, but many do not recognize that Paul used the same kinds of arguments for women covering their heads as for women refraining from congregational speech. In both cases, Paul uses some general principles but addresses a specific cultural situation.

When Paul urged women in the Corinthian churches to cover their heads (the only place where the Bible teaches about a woman's "covering"), he follows a custom prominent in the Eastern Mediterranean milieu of his day.[21] Although women and men alike covered their heads for various reasons,[22] married women specifically covered their heads to prevent men other than their husbands from

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[20] See, e.g., comments in Craig Keener, "Man and Woman," pp. 583-92 in *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1993), 584-85.

[21] Among Jewish people, see e.g., Sus 32; m. B. Qam. 8:6; Sipre Num. 11.2.2; Ab. R. Nat. 3, 17A; 3 Macc 4:6. Elsewhere in the East, cf. e.g., Ramsay MacMullen, "Women in Public in the Roman Empire," *Historia* 29 (1980): 209-10; more widely, Lloyd Llewellyn-Jones, *Aphrodite's Tortoise: The Veiled Woman of Ancient Greece* (Swansea: Classical Press of Wales, 2003).

[22] Sometimes men (Plutarch *R.Q.* 14, *Mor.* 267A; Chariton *Chaer.* 3.3.14) and women (Plutarch *R.Q.* 26, *Mor.* 270D; Chariton *Chaer.* 1.11.2; 8.1.7; Ab. R. Nat. 1A) covered their heads for mourning. Similarly, both men (m. Sot. 9:15; Epictetus *Disc.* 1.11.27) and women (Ab. R. Nat. 9, §25B) covered their heads for shame. Roman women normally covered their heads for worship (e.g., Varro 5.29.130; Plutarch *R.Q.* 10, *Mor.* 266C), in contrast to Greek women who uncovered their heads (*SIG* 3d ed., 3.999). But in contrast to the custom Paul addresses, none of these specific practices differentiates men from women.

lusting after their hair.[23] A married woman who went out with her head uncovered was considered promiscuous and could be divorced as an adulteress.[24] Because of what head coverings symbolized in that culture, Paul asked the less-restricted women to cover their heads so as not to scandalize others. Among his arguments for head coverings was the fact that God created Adam first; in the particular culture he addressed, this argument would make sense as an argument for women wearing head coverings.[25]

Passages where Paul may Restrict Women's Ministry

Because Paul, in other cases, advocated women's ministry, we cannot read his restrictions on women's ministry as universal prohibitions. Rather, as in the case of head coverings in Corinth above, Paul was addressing a specific cultural situation. This is not to say that Paul here or anywhere else wrote Scripture that was not for all time. It is merely to say that he did not write it for all *circumstances*, and that we must take into account the circumstances he addressed so we can understand how he would have applied his principles in very different situations.

Let Women Keep Silent (1 Cor 14:34-36)

Two passages in Paul's writings at first seem to contradict those that affirm women's ministry. We should keep in mind that these are the only two passages in the Bible that could remotely be construed as contradicting Paul's endorsement of women's ministry elsewhere. Beyond merely addressing ministry, they mandate *silence* (1 Cor 14:34; 1

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[23] Hair was the primary object of male desire (Apuleius *Metam.* 2.8-9; Chariton *Chaer.* 1.13.11; 1.14.1; Ab. R. Nat. 14, §35B; Sipre Num. 11.2.1; y. Sanh. 6:4, §1). This was why many peoples required married women to cover their hair, but allowed unmarried girls to go uncovered (e.g., Charillus 2 in Plutarch *Sayings of Spartans*, *Mor.* 232C; Philo *Spec. Leg.* 3.56).

[24] E.g., m. Ket. 7:6; b. Sot. 9a; R. Meir in Num. Rab. 9:12. For a similar custom and reasoning today in traditional Islamic societies, see Carol Delaney, "Seeds of Honor, Fields of Shame," pp. 35-48 in *Honor and Shame and the Unity of the Mediterranean* (ed. David Gilmore; AAA 22; Washington, D.C.: American Anthropological Association, 1987), 42, 67; cf. Dale F. Eickelman, *The Middle East: An Anthropological Approach*, 2d ed. (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1989), 165.

[25] On Paul's various arguments here, see more fully Keener, *Women*, 31-46; or more briefly, in "Man and Woman," 585-86. For a similar background for 1 Tim 2:9-10, see David Scholer, "Women's Adornment: Some Historical and Hermeneutical Observations on the New Testament Passages," *Daughters of Sarah* 6 (1980): 3-6; Keener, *Women*, 103-7.

Tim 2:11-12). Since almost no churches anywhere today take that literally, if they allow women to sing in church, all churches should welcome exploring what these passages really *did* mean in their contexts.

First, Paul instructed women to be silent and save their questions about the service for their husbands at home (1 Cor 14:34-36). Yet Paul cannot mean silence under all circumstances, because earlier in the same letter, he acknowledged that women could pray and prophesy in church (1 Cor 11:5), and he ranked prophecy even higher than teaching (12:28).

Knowing ancient Mediterranean culture helps one understand the passage better. Scholars have proposed various explanations many of which other scholars have found dissatisfying. Some hold that a later scribe accidentally inserted these lines into Paul's writings,[26] but many consider the textual evidence for this proposal too slender. Others think that churches, like synagogues, were segregated by gender, making women's talk disruptive. This view falters on two counts: first, scholars debate when gender segregation began in synagogues, and second, the Corinthian Christians met in homes, whose architecture would have rendered such segregation impossible. Some also suggest that Paul addresses women abusing the gifts of the Spirit, or a problem with judging prophecies. But while the context addresses these issues, Paul explicitly allows women to pray and prophesy (11:5). Ancient writers commonly used digressions, and the theme of church order is sufficient to unite this digression for this context.

I find another explanation more likely. Paul elsewhere *affirms* women's role in prayer and prophecy (11:5), and the only kind of speech he directly addresses in 14:34-36 is wives asking questions.[27] In ancient Greek and Jewish lecture settings, advanced students or educated people frequently interrupted public speakers with reasonable questions. Yet the culture had deprived most women of education and considered it rude for uneducated persons to slow down lectures with questions that betrayed their lack of training.[28] Raising the question of women's education in antiquity is not reading into the text. There is a reason why women *learning* is an issue in *both* 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 *and* 1 Timothy

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[26] E.g., Gordon Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (NICNT; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 699-705.

[27] E.g., Kevin Giles, Created Woman: A Fresh Study of the Biblical Teaching (Canberra: Acorn, 1985), 56.

[28] See e.g., Plutarch *on Lectures* 4, 11, 13, 18, *Mor.* 39CD, 43BC, 45D, 48AB; compare t. Sanh. 7:10.

2:11-12; meanwhile, learning *quietly* was considered the appropriate way for *all* new learners to learn.

So, Paul provides a short-range solution: don't interrupt with questions; and a long-range solution: husbands should take a personal interest in their wives' learning and catch them up privately. As noted, most ancient husbands doubted their wives' intellectual potential, but Paul here supports their learning. By ancient standards, far from repressing these women, Paul was supporting them![29]

This text cannot prohibit women announcing the word of the Lord (1 Cor. 11:4-5), and *nothing* in the context here suggests that Paul specifically prohibits women from Bible teaching. The *only* passage in the entire Bible that one could directly cite against women teaching the Bible is 1 Tim. 2:11-15.

In Quietness and Submission (1 Tim 2:11-15)

In this passage Paul might forbid women to teach and exercise authority (or teach in such a way as to exercise authority) over men. Most supporters of women's ministry think that the latter expression means "usurp authority,"[30] something Paul would not want men to do any more than women, but the matter is disputed.[31] Yet even if the passage forbids women to "teach" or "exercise authority," it is the *only* passage in the Bible that does so (contrast Deborah as prophet-judge). And if this is Paul's universal practice, why does not Timothy, who has long ministered with Paul, already know about it?

More importantly, if this were a universal prohibition, it would make Paul look hypocritical—since he endorses the ministries of a number of his women friends elsewhere (Rom 16:1-7; Phil 4:2-3). Thus, he presumably addresses the specific situation in this community; because both Paul and his readers knew their situation and could take it for granted, the situation which elicited Paul's response is thus assumed in his intended meaning.

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[29] For more detailed documentation, see Keener, *Women*, 70-100; similarly, Ben Witherington, III, *Women in the Earliest Churches* (SNTSM 59; Cambridge: Cambridge University, 1988), 90-104.

[30] See further discussion in Linda Belleville, "Lexical Fallacies in Rendering αὐθεντεῖν in 1 Timothy 2:12: BDAG in Light of Greek Literary and Nonliterary Usage," *BBR* 29 (3, 2019): 317-41.

[31] For recent and noteworthy arguments in favor of "exercise authority," see the articles by Baldwin, Köstenberger, and Schreiner in *Women in the Church: A Fresh Analysis of 1 Timothy 2:9-15* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995).

Paul's letters to Timothy in Ephesus provide a glimpse of the situation: false teachers (1 Tim 1:6-7, 19-20; 6:3-5; 2 Tim. 2:17) were misleading the women (1 Tim 5:13;[32] 2 Tim 3:6-7), presumably the most susceptible to false teaching because they had been granted the least education. Misled women speaking was bound to bring reproach on the church from a hostile society already convinced that Christians subverted the traditional roles of women and slaves.[33] *Is it just a coincidence that the one passage in the Bible that might exclude women from teaching the Bible appears in the one set of letters where false teachers were explicitly targeting women?* So again, Paul provides a short-range solution: "Do not teach" (under the present circumstances); and a long-range solution: "Let them learn" (1 Tim 2:11).

Today, we read "learn in silence" and think the emphasis lies on "silence." That these women are to learn "quietly and submissively" may reflect their witness within society (these were characteristics normally expected of women). But ancient culture expected all beginning students (unlike advanced students) to learn silently; for that matter, the same word for "silence" here is applied to all Christians in the context (2:2). Paul specifically addresses this matter to women for the same reason he addresses the admonition to stop disputing to the men (2:8): they are the groups involved in these problems in Ephesus. Again, it appears that Paul's long-range plan is to enable, not subordinate, women's ministry. The issue is not gender but learning God's Word.

What particularly causes some otherwise sympathetic scholars to question this otherwise logical case is Paul's following argument, where he bases his case on the roles of Adam and Eve (1 Tim. 2:13-14). Paul's argument from the creation order here, however, is one of the very arguments he earlier used to contend that women should wear head coverings (1 Cor 11:7-9). In other words, Paul sometimes cited Scripture to make an *ad hoc* case for particular circumstances that he would not apply to all circumstances. His argument from Eve's deception is even

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[32] The Greek expression for the women's activities here probably refers to spreading false teaching; see Gordon Fee, *1&2 Timothy, Titus* (NIBC; Peabody: Hendrickson, 1988), 122.

[33] Given Roman society's perception of Christians as a subversive cult, false teaching that undermined Paul's strategies for the church's public witness (see Keener, *Women*, 139-56) could not be permitted (cf. 1 Tim. 3:2, 7, 10, 5:7, 10, 14, 6:1; Tit. 1:6, 2:1-5, 8, 10; cf. Alan Padgett, "The Pauline Rationale for Submission: Biblical Feminism and the *hina* Clauses of Titus 2:1-10," *EQ* 59 (1987) 52; David Verner, *The Household of God: The Social World of the Pastoral Epistles*, SBLDS 71 [Chico, CA: Scholars, 1983]).

more likely to fit this category. If Eve's deception prohibits all women from teaching, Paul would be claiming that all women, like Eve, are more easily deceived than all men. If, however, the deception does not apply to all women, neither does his prohibition of their teaching. Paul probably uses Eve to illustrate the situation of the unlearned women he addresses in Ephesus; but he elsewhere uses Eve for *anyone* who is deceived, not just women (2 Cor. 11:3).[34]

Because we do not believe that Paul would have contradicted himself, Paul's approval of women's ministry in God's word elsewhere confirms that 1 Timothy 2:9-15 does not prohibit women's ministry in all situations but addresses a particular situation.

Some have protested that women should not hold authority over men because men are the "head" of women. Aside from the many debates about the meaning of the Greek term "head" (for instance, some translate it as "source" instead of "authority over"),[35] Paul speaks only of the husband as head of his wife, not of the male gender as head of the female gender. Further, we Pentecostals and charismatics affirm that the minister's authority is inherent in the minister's calling and ministry of the Word, not the minister's person. In this case, gender should be irrelevant as a consideration for ministry, for us as it was for Paul.

Conclusion

Should we allow background to influence our understanding? Nearly everyone takes into account background and local situations when they read biblical texts[36]—although they sometimes do so selectively. To take examples just from two letters cited above, 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy: Do we all set aside money for the Jerusalem church each Sunday (1 Cor 16:2)? Do we all drink wine to solve our stomach problems (1 Tim 5:23), or are antacids allowed? Do our churches support widows on the condition that they have washed the saints' feet (1 Tim 5:10)?

Expanding to 2 Timothy, how many of us have traveled to Troas and looked for Paul's cloak so we can bring it to him (2 Tim 4:13)? We, of course, recognize such a reading as absurd. We can learn principles from

[34] 1 Tim 2:15 may also qualify the preceding verses; see Keener, *Women*, 118-20.
[35] With Gordon Fee, I suspect that ancient literature allows both views, but that Paul uses an image relevant in his day (see further Keener, *Women*, 32-36, 168).
[36] This is the reason I worked to supply it in my *IVP Bible Background Commentary: New Testament* (2nd ed.; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014).

all texts—in that case, from the trusted mentor-mentee relationship between Paul and Timothy—but we cannot apply the text without taking into account the specific situation that it addresses. Why then do some interpreters press two passages that seem to mandate women's silence in church against the many other passages that support them speaking for God?

Today, we should affirm those whom God calls, whether male or female, and encourage them in faithfully learning God's Word. We need to affirm all potential laborers, both men and women, for the abundant harvest fields.

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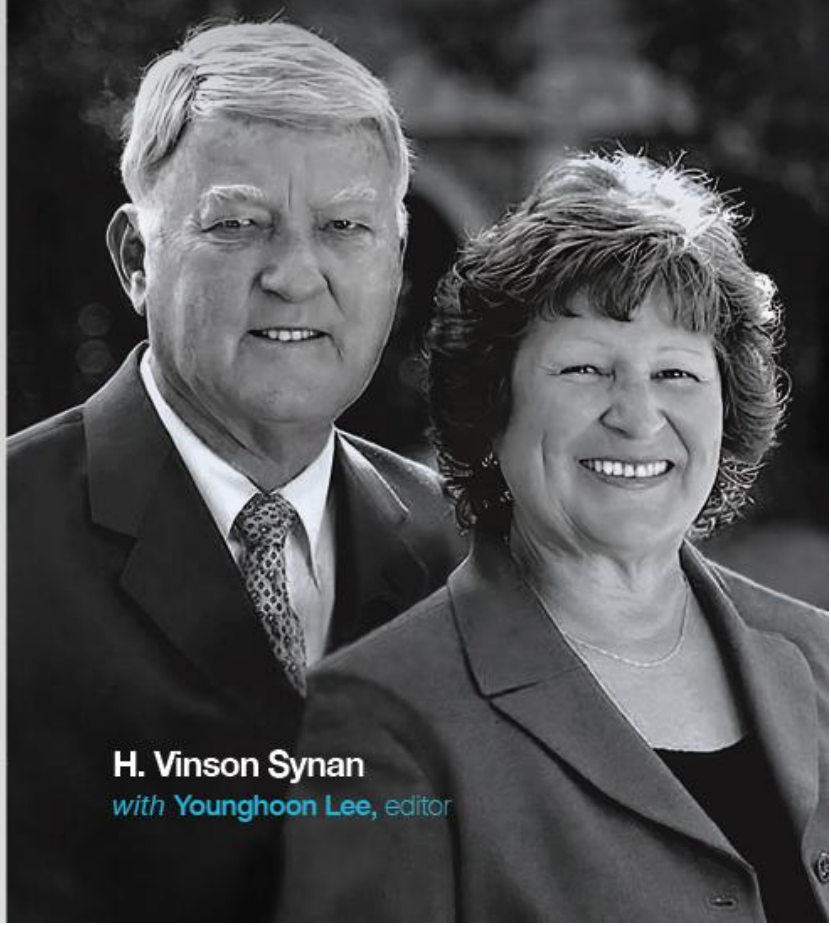

H. Vinson Synan

with **Younghoon Lee,** editor

Response to Craig Keener's "Women in Ministry"[1]

Daniel Lim

Abstract

This is a response to Dr. Craig Keener's "Women in Ministry". He centers the egalitarian outpouring of Pentecost (Acts 2) as the primary theological framework and interprets the restrictive Pauline passages as pragmatic cultural solutions rather than universal bans. This brief response traces the Pentecostal legacy from the Azusa Street Revival to the pioneering Asian female leaders who affirm women in ministry, while highlighting how institutionalization and cultural patriarchy marginalize women in ministry. Its aim is to serve as a renewed call for "Pauline advocacy" for the full participation of Spirit-gifted women in the global Church, and that ministry authority resides in the Spirit's calling rather than in gender.

Keywords: women in ministry, Pentecostal egalitarianism, Spirit-gifted, Asian female leaders

Introduction

This article is a response to Dr. Keener's excellent work on "Women in Ministry". As a father of two daughters, I deeply reflect on the release of women into Christian ministry and how the full participation of Spirit-gifted women is essential for the building of the global Church and our Christian witness to the world. In this response, I would like to offer three observations: First, Keener's hermeneutical framework. Second, the theological and historical Pentecostal foundations of women in ministry. Lastly, I would like to highlight a few critical challenges faced by Pentecostal churches today.

[1] The original version was presented at the Asian Pentecostal Summit, Singapore, Oct 2025. Published with the permission of the Global Pentecostal Voices.

Contextualizing Pauline Advocacy and Prohibition

First, the paper focuses on contextualizing Paul's voice in advocating for women in ministry. Keener states that despite Paul's conservative Jewish background, he followed Jesus' example and demonstrated an exceptional level of support for women's public ministry. Keener highlights Paul's commendation of women in the concluding salutations in Rom 16:1–16 is evident as he names seven women alongside five men as co-laborers, calling them "women who work hard in the Lord" (Rom 16:12, NIV), where women bore significant leadership titles such as deacon, apostle, and prophet. This same observation is also shared by Lampe and Johnson.[2] In particular, Junia's identification as a female apostle (Rom 16:7) further solidifies the case for women holding foundational apostolic authority in early Christianity.[3] John Chrysostom, the Early Church Father, writes, "To be an apostle is something great…They were outstanding on the basis of their works and virtuous actions. Indeed, how great the wisdom of this woman must have been that she was even deemed worthy of the title of apostle."[4] Keener prioritizes these clear commendations of women over the debated restriction passages. This insight underscores Keener's hermeneutical methodology to interpret the ambiguous texts through the lens of the unambiguous.

Second, the two isolated restriction passages, 1 Cor 14:34–36 and 1 Tim 2:11–15, are critically re-examined as pragmatic, short-term solutions addressing specific, cultural issues, rather than universal bans on female speech or authority. The long-term solution in both contexts is not subordination but empowerment through education: "Let them learn in silence" (1 Tim 2:11). This reframes Paul's instruction from a gender-based subordination to an act of nurturing informed participation. The "silence" described a posture of humility and readiness to learn, applicable to all believers, male and female, before God calls them to speak or lead.

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[2] Peter Lampe and Marshall D. Johnson, *From Paul to Valentinus: Christians at Rome in the First Two Centuries* (London: Continuum, 2003), 169.

[3] James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 9-16*, Word Bible Commentary (Dallas, TX: Word, 1988), 895, where Dunn states that Junia is regarded as "one of the foundation apostles of Christianity (who) was a woman and wife."

[4] John Chrysostom, *Homily 31 on Romans, Rom XVI ver. 7*. In Phil Schaff, *The Complete Works of the Church Fathers* (Toronto,. 2016. Kindle edition), loc 402133.

Our Pentecostal Foundations

The Pentecostal concept of "woman" and "ministry" is rooted in the theological implications of Pentecost - restoration and new creation.[5] The Spirit's outpouring in Acts 2:17–18 is explicitly egalitarian and inclusive: "I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh. Your sons and your daughters will prophesy. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days..." Social theologian Doug Petersen characterizes Pentecost as "a theological justification for diffusion of leadership, a division of labor" [6] where the Spirit dismantles restrictive social and gender inequality. The equality of male and female in Christ (Gal. 3:28) affirms that sexual differentiation is no barrier to full participation in ministry. Women at Pentecost are liberated, and their contributions are affirmed as needful and valued alongside men.[7]

Historically, early Pentecostalism attests to this egalitarian stance. Arising often from marginalized communities, the movement did not initially discriminate by gender in ministry. Anyone "anointed by the Spirit" was free to preach, teach, prophesy, or pray for the sick. [8] The Azusa Street Revival (1906) serves as powerful evidence of a radical, embracive koinonia in which racial and gender lines were demolished not only at the pew level but also at the pulpit. The racially diverse leadership team at Azusa Mission, which included seven women elders and five men, serves as historical proof of a practical, lived egalitarianism.[9] With the accomplishment of the women's suffrage movement in 1920, women have served in almost every type of ministry position available. This Pentecostal legacy continued with women serving as missionaries, pastors, evangelists, and teachers.[10]

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[5] Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 95.

[6] Doug Petersen, *Not by Might nor by Power: A Pentecostal Theology of Social Concern in Latin America* (Oxford: Regnum, 1996), 130.

[7] MayLing Tan-Chow, *Pentecostal Theology for the Twenty-First Century: Engaging with Multi-Faith Singapore* (Aldershot, England: Ashgate, 2007), 136.

[8] 'Pentecostal hermeneutical considerations about women in ministry'. Accessed 2025-10-15 12:15:23. https://unisapressjournals.co.za/index.php/SHE/article/view/2126/1514

[9] Tan-Chow, *Pentecostal Theology for the Twenty-First Century*, 45-48. When asked about the results of the outpouring, Seymour was quoted, "The priority of love, i.e., embracive koinonia, is the definitive evidence…that 'the love of God was to be demonstrated in unity across boundaries of color and gender."

[10] Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 191-193.

Our Asian Pentecostal Roots in Female Leadership

Early Pentecostalism in Asia also featured dynamic female leaders such as Pandita Ramabai, who led the Mukti Revivals in India (1905).[11] Dora Yu, a revivalist preacher in China, would also become the only Chinese woman invited to speak at the Keswick Convention in 1927. [12] Kong Mui Yee, a former Hong Kong film actress, sparked a significant revival in 1963, leading to the birth of numerous independent Pentecostal churches. [13] Evangelist-turned-pastor Naomi Dowdy, whose thirty-year tenure as the founding pastor of Trinity Christian Center, one of Singapore's largest Assemblies of God churches, demonstrates the practical acceptance of women as the spiritual authority in the highest pastoral role.[14] These examples remind us that the Spirit who once called women to rise within restrictive Asian culture is still speaking. However, is the church still listening? Various ecclesial and cultural factors have left women subordinated under their husbands in the homes and under the leadership and authority of males in the churches.[15]

Keener's biblical examination of the role of women in ministry echoes the historical roots of Asian Pentecostalism, where women played a significant role, warranting further reflection at this juncture. As such, I would like to propose that the challenges facing Pentecostal women in ministry today are largely internal rather than external.

Alignment with Non-Pentecostal Traditions

As Pentecostal churches get institutionalized, there is an increasing alignment with North American evangelicalism, driven by the adoption of a more literalist, Bible-centered piety. This has resulted in some loss of our distinct Pentecostal witness, especially in the role of women in ministry in Asia. A key consequence is the gradual alignment with

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[11] S. Clifton, "Empowering Pentecostal Women," *Australasian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 12, no.2 (2009), 171–179.

[12] "The Remarkable Story of China's 'Bible Women." Accessed 2025-10-20 10:15:23
https://www.christianitytoday.com/2018/03/christian-china-bible-women/

[13] D. Tan, "Singapore," in S.M. Burgess and E.M. van der Maas(eds), *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 224-225.

[14] English de Alminana, Margaret, and Lois E. Olena, *Women in Pentecostal and Charismatic Ministry: Informing a Dialogue on Gender, Church, and Ministry*. (Leiden: Brill, 2017), 389–390.

[15] Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 191.

evangelical complementarianism, leading to a perceptible "eroding and silencing of women's voices."[16] This alignment often adopts the flawed premise that women are permanently "deceived" (derived from Eve's frailty in 1 Tim 2:14). This undermines Christ's atonement and the Spirit's outpouring in women as incomplete and relegates women to only certain ministry roles.[17] As Amos Yong contends, "Full salvation includes the redemption of women and of the fallen social structures that have conspired to prohibit women's full realization of the image and calling of God in their lives."[18] Thus, our refusal to women's full participation makes us complicit in this conspiracy.

Ambivalence in the Ordination of Women

The institutionalization of Pentecostalism has also been accompanied by a decline in the number of women in ministry and their subsequent marginalization from positions of authority. With the rise of liberal hermeneutics carrying feminist undertones, conservative Pentecostals are drawn to adopt an evangelical, restrictive ministry model where women can be active as long as they do not have authority over men (1 Tim 2:12).[19] This understanding has led to pervasive "glass ceilings" for women ministers. [20] Gender gaps still exist in some contemporary Pentecostal churches, which constitutionally limit women's roles, permitting titles like "missionary" or "mother" but forbidding the title of "pastor" and demanding women to operate under the spiritual "covering" of a man, should she "temporarily" function in the capacity as the lead pastor.[21] This inconsistency causes Pentecostal women to

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[16] Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 32.

[17] Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 192.

[18] Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 95.

[19] Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 193.

[20] 'Saddleback and Fern Creek churches face off against Al Mohler at SBC meeting'. Accessed 2025-10-19 10:15:23. https://baptistnews.com/article/saddleback-and-fern-creek-churches-face-off-against-al-mohler-at-sbc-meeting/. In upholding the decision to disavow Saddleback Church after they have ordained women pastors in top positions, Mohler affirms that women can work as assistant pastors, but "there is no doubt that in the New Testament, particularly in the writings of Paul," that men and women's roles are "not identical but complementary. "For nearly 2,000 years, Christian churches unanimously understood the preaching office as restricted to men," he said.

[21] E. J. Dabney, *What It Means to Pray Through* (Memphis, TN: Church of God in Christ Publishing, 1987), 45.

struggle to reconcile their call to ministry with the prevailing expectations of their times, their churches, and even their spouses.

Contextual Challenges of Traditions

Contextual challenges of traditions in Asia are compounded by Confucian-influenced patriarchal and hierarchical traditions. The idea of men as "sky" and women as "earth" forces women to subordinate societal and ecclesial roles, often restricting their identity to "wife" and "mother". [22] Asian Pentecostals must recognize that many restrictive church traditions passed down are often conflated with our unredeemed culture and human prejudices. Therefore, the need for a revision of our church traditions is not a concession to culture but a reflection of biblical truth. [23]

A Pauline Advocacy for Asian Women in Ministry

The issue of women in ministry is not simply a matter of ethics or politics, whether secular or ecclesial; it is essentially theological. [24] Keener states, "The minister's authority is inherent in the minister's calling and ministry of the Word, not the minister's person. In this case, gender should be irrelevant as a consideration for ministry, for us as it was for Paul". How then can we imitate Paul within the boundaries of Asian culture to advocate for women in ministry? I would like to offer two reflections:

First, we need to safeguard our Pentecostal witness by constantly articulating the theological and pneumatological basis for women in ministry. The Pentecost event serves as a divine, "prophetic destabilizing voice" that transcends all traditional and cultural hierarchies[25] which provides the theological authority to challenge our traditions, to promote women in ministry as a Kingdom ideal, and not a cultural preference. Second, we need to critically examine and dismantle

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[22] Julie Ma, "Women's Leadership in Asia and Their Influence on Global Christianity," in *Voices Loud & Clear*, eds. Kong Hee, Bryon D. Klaus & Douglas Petersen (Oxford, UK: Regnum Books, 2024), 228.

[23] Craig S. Keener, "Women in Ministry: An Egalitarian View," in *Two Views on Women in Ministry*, edited by Linda L. Belleville and Craig L. Blomberg. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 130-193.

[24] Tan-Chow, *Pentecostal Theology for the Twenty-First Century*, 138.

[25] R. M. Gabaitse, 'Pentecostal Hermeneutics and the Marginalisation of Women," *Scriptura: Journal for Biblical, Theological and Contextual Hermeneutics*, Volume 114 (2015): 1-12.

structural and cultural biases within our church governance that limit women's access to authority. Like Paul, we can create advocacy and practical pathways for women's ordination and placement at all levels. This involves the intentional use of positional authority in the church to open doors for the nurturing of women ministers and allow their full release in their ministry giftings, letting their ministry fruit to become the evidence of their divine calling.

Conclusion

The whole biblical narrative reveals women's crucial role in salvation history. The criteria for spiritual leadership is not based on gender, but on character, lifestyle, and the recognition of God's calling and gifting for the flourishing of the Church. Pentecostal ecclesiology requires us to have a renewed desire to listen to what the Spirit is saying to the Church today. Have we examined why the Church appears receptive to female leadership in the non-religious sphere yet hesitates to endorse women leaders within its own ecclesiastical boundaries? Perhaps it is time for both women and men, especially men, to listen, to "learn in silence", and restore women in ministry. Let the Church embody that which was affirmed on the Day of Pentecost - to see women empowerment not as a loss of authority but as a participation in God's justice and ecclesial vision. May the 'Marys' who sit at the feet of Jesus, walk boldly in full pursuit of her calling as the Holy Spirit beckons her till the Lord returns.

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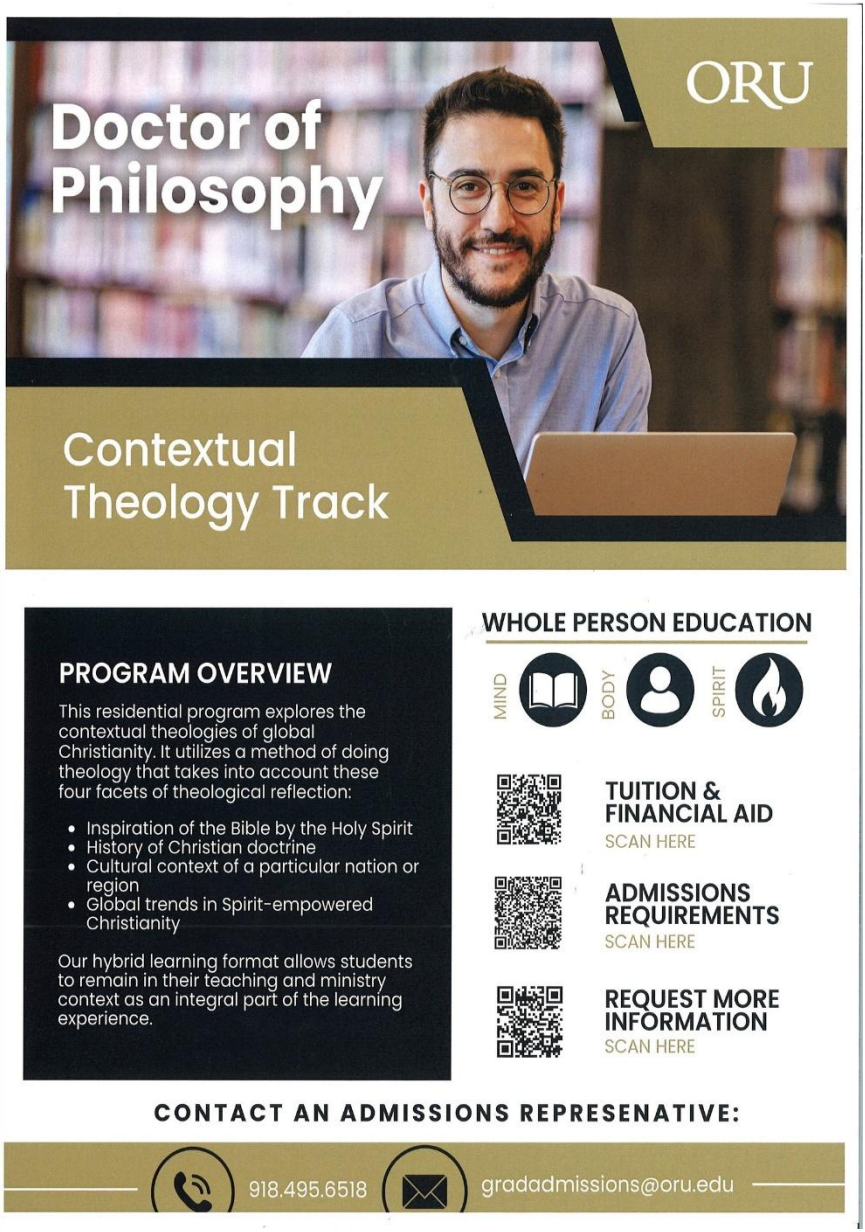
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The Tension between Expectations of Spirit Empowerment and Everyday Life: Pentecostal Experiences of Depression in the United States

Robert McBain

Abstract

This article explores how Pentecostals in the United States experienced and interpreted depression. Using Constructivist Grounded Theory, the study developed the theory that participants experienced and interpreted their depression as a tension between expectations of Spirit-empowerment and the realities of their everyday lives. They trusted that the Spirit would protect or empower them, but life demonstrated otherwise. In this tension, participants described a heightened awareness of their socio-theological contexts and noticed inconsistencies in their communities and behaviors they said were "not of God." To address their depression, they turned to counseling, medication, and Christian consumer resources. While these provided coping strategies and temporary relief, they reinforced the same socio-theological framework that shaped participants' expectations, leaving the underlying tension between expectations of Spirit-empowerment and the reality they encountered unresolved. The findings highlight the need to reexamine Pentecostal pneumatology and cultivate theological literacy, mental health awareness, and open dialogue within Pentecostal communities to support believers living in this tension.

Keywords: Pentecostalism, depression, Spirit-empowerment, United States, constructivist grounded theory

Introduction

Depression is one of the most pressing mental health concerns in the United States, yet little research has examined how it is experienced within Pentecostal contexts. This article presents a Constructivist Grounded Theory study that explores how U.S. Pentecostals understand depression.[1] The paper begins with the stories of two participants,

[1] An earlier version of this paper was presented at the PhD Colloquium, Oral Roberts University, February 24, 2025. The research on which it is based was

Heather and Dan, to introduce the dynamics being discussed. After this, it interacts with various participants involved in the study. This study uses pseudonyms for all participants, and in some cases, combines multiple accounts into composite figures to preserve confidentiality while capturing shared experiences.[2]

Meet Heather and Dan

Heather describes herself as a Spirit-filled believer who holds a deep conviction that God's Spirit is present in the world and at work in her life and the lives of other believers. She believes the Spirit empowers believers for daily living and spiritual service, guiding, protecting, blessing, and sustaining them throughout their faith journey. She grew up in a family and church community that reinforced these convictions and was deeply formed in the belief that God had called her to be a helpmate to her husband and a mother to her children. After marrying, she embraced this calling as the foundation of what it meant to be a tongue-talking, Bible-believing, Spirit-filled woman. She anticipated the children she believed God would give her.

Then came her first stillbirth, followed by her second, and then her third. The losses devastated her, and she found herself in a place that her faith had not prepared her for. Yet, she continued to stand on the promises of God that she would have children. She fasted, prayed, and spoke in tongues. She received prophetic words from family members and friends about God's fruitfulness and blessing, and she spoke such Bible passages over her life. Then she lost her fourth baby, and then the fifth. In total, she lost five babies within ten years.

Even forty years later, at the time of our interview, she described how the pain was still tender as she remembered those "little lives." She said, "I always thought I'd be cradling my babies. That's why we tried so hard to have children even after losing the previous one. But instead, I found myself holding nothing, and the weight of those losses has been harder to bear than I ever imagined."

Heather's life spiraled into depression during and after her losses. She described those years as a period of profound isolation and despair. She struggled to get out of bed, lost all motivation to care for her home,

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undertaken as part of my doctoral dissertation: Robert D. McBain, *How Pentecostals Living in the United States Experience, Interpret, and Respond to Depression* (PhD diss., Oral Roberts University, 2025), https://digitalshowcase.oru.edu/cotmdissertations/10/.

[2] This study was approved by the Oral Roberts University Institutional Review Board, Tulsa, OK., #5-F2022.

and felt emotionally detached from her husband and family. The church that once supported her and prayed Scripture over her had its own ideas as to why she lost the children. One of the elders' wives personified this turn when she said to Heather, "Well, now we know that it is not God's will for you to have children." In a Pentecostal environment where testimonies of miraculous healing and divine breakthroughs were expected, Heather's inconsolable grief and persistent depression did not fit the narrative. As a result, she felt alienated from the community that formed her.

It has been forty years since Heather lost her first baby, and she still struggles with depression. For her, depression is consistently linked to her grief and the traumatic loss of her babies. Dan's depression experiences, on the other hand, are not linked to such trauma and show another dimension.

From a young age, Dan believed that God, through the Spirit, had called him to pastoral ministry and would open the way for that calling to unfold. This conviction was reinforced through sermons, leadership conferences, family encouragement, and church life. His perception of calling was more than a pipedream; it was the central axis of his self-identity. He trusted that the same Spirit who had called him would guide his steps, provide opportunities, and empower him to serve in full-time ministry. Like the other participants I interviewed, Dan seemed to see the Spirit as a filter, allowing into his life all the good things that would make his life thrive (i.e., God's blessings) while keeping out the bad things that would harm him. With this mindset, he believed the Spirit would lead him to the right places, people, and opportunities, and empower him to fulfil his calling. This deep trust in the Spirit and sense of calling influenced his major life decisions, from his college degree to the state he lived in, and even whom he married.

Two decades later, his calling still has not materialized. Although he has regularly volunteered at church and served in lay ministry, full-time pastoring remained out of reach. Any ministry he has participated in has always been secondary to the need to provide for his wife and three children through working full-time as an accountant. His unmet expectations of calling have taken a toll on his mental health. "I feel a constant pressure," he admitted. "It's there in my mind, a nagging feeling of regret that my life's screwed up, that I've failed at the one thing that matters most: God's call." The weight of unmet vocational expectations lies heavily on him and characterizes his depression. The disappointment is a persistent ache that shadows his days, casting doubt

over his achievements, sucking the hope out of his life, and straining relationships with his loved ones.

Heather's and Dan's depression experiences differ in their underlying factors, but they share a common phenomenology in how they describe profound hopelessness, emotional numbness, and a pervasive sense of failure, along with other mental states that often accompany depression. Yet, underlying these feelings is a deeper tension between their expectation that the Spirit would bless, protect, and empower them to succeed in life and overcome life's challenges, and the reality that life fell short of those expectations. This tension was not unique to Heather and Dan; it emerged throughout the analysis of the participant interviews. The circumstances of the participants' depression varied, such as bereavement, illness, strained relationships, vocational disappointments, and so forth, but the underlying dynamics remained the same. They trusted that the Spirit would protect, bless, and empower them, but their lived experiences did not match those expectations. This tension between Spirit-empowerment expectations and lived realities shaped how the participants lived and how they narrated their experiences of depression. It is this tension that this paper explores.

Outline

The paper first provides the research context, outlining the theological and cultural background of U.S. Pentecostalism and explaining why it is important to study depression in this setting. It then briefly discusses the study's Constructivist Grounded Theory research design. Constructivist Grounded Theory is a qualitative approach that develops theory inductively from participants' accounts. The research design section outlines the methodology and details how participants were selected and how their narratives were analyzed. From there, the paper presents the findings, showing how participants described life in this tension between expectations and reality, how depression took shape within it, and how their efforts to make sense of it often reinforced the socio-theological pressures that sustained the tension. The discussion engages these findings in dialogue with relevant theological and social science literature. The conclusion considers their implications for Pentecostal theology, pastoral practice, and future research.

The Research Context

Heather and Dan, as with this study's other participants, lived in the United States and self-identified as Pentecostals. United States Pentecostalism emerged in the early 1900s because of various historical,

theological, and sociological factors.[3] It now comprises many diverse groups that focus on the experience and activity of the Spirit.[4] Social constructionism provides a valuable framework for understanding Pentecostalism by demonstrating how sociocultural contexts influence its conceptualization and expression of the Spirit.[5] Within this framework, Pentecostal understandings of the Spirit reflect an interplay of human desires, cultural elements, and social influences.[6] This results in a socially constructed pneumatology and an embodied spirituality that Dave Courey argues developed throughout the twentieth century as US cultural ideals such as resilience, success, and progress shaped the Pentecostal understanding and expression of the Spirit. As a result, Pentecostals see the Spirit as an active, tangible, and transformative agent. They believe the Spirit empowers believers to overcome adversity and succeed in life, aligning with God's soteriological and eschatological purposes for creation.[7] It is this orientation toward the Spirit's empowering presence in daily life that participants in this study described when they referred to themselves as "Spirit-filled."[8]

Just as the sociocultural context influences how Pentecostals understand and express themselves, it also affects how people experience other aspects of life, like depression.[9] For instance, Laura S. Abrams and Laura Curran's research on low-income mothers' postpartum depression and Karen J. Foli's study on depression post-

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[3] Augustus Cerillo, "Interpretative Approaches to the History of American Pentecostal Origins," *Pneuma* 19 no. 1 (1997), 29-52.
[4] Allan H. Anderson, *Introduction to Pentecostalism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 4-6; Allan H. Anderson "Varieties, Taxonomies, and Differences," in *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods*, ed. Allan Anderson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 13-29.
[5] See Viven Burr, *Social Constructionism* (New York: Routledge, 2003), 2-5.
[6] Nestor Medina, "Culture: Disruption, Accommodation, and Pneumatological Resignification," in *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology,* ed. Wolfgang Vondey (New York, NY: Routledge, 2021), 106, 112; Donald E. Miller and Tetsunao Yamamori, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Social Engagement* (Berkley, CA: University of California Press, 2017), 219-20, 224.
[7] David J. Courey, *What Has Wittenberg to Do with Azusa? Luther's Theology of the Cross and Pentecostal Triumphalism* (London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 5-6.
[8] Stephen G. Parker, "Psychological Formation: A Pentecostal Pneumatology and Implications for Therapy," in *The Holy Spirit and Christian Formation*, ed. Diane J. Chandler (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016), 52-3.
[9] Anthony J. Marsella, "Cultural Aspects of Depressive Experience and Disorders," *Online Readings in Psychology and Culture* 10, no. 2 (2003), 4-6; Tasia Scrutton, *Christianity and Depression* (London, UK: SCM Press, 2020), 1-6.

adoption provide compelling evidence of how cultural norms, social expectations, and environmental stressors deeply influence how depression is experienced.[10] Within this sociocultural framing, individuals experience depression as a mental state marked by sadness, loss of interest, and diminished energy or motivation. Depressed individuals may also struggle with sleeping, concentrating, or eating, and may experience thoughts of suicide or self-harm.[11]

Although cultural and social forces clearly shape experiences of depression, little is known about how Pentecostal beliefs and practices shape those experiences. Existing studies tend to address clinical issues, Pentecostal perceptions of depression, implications for counseling and psychotherapy, or proposed interventions.[12] Joy Allan's phenomenological study into UK Pentecostal experiences of depression is one significant study that explores the relationship between Pentecostalism and depression. Allan argues that Pentecostals' social interactions with other people, their selves, their diagnosis, their church community, and God shape their experiences of depression.[13] While Allan's work offers important insights into what it is like for Pentecostals to live with depression, its phenomenological design focuses on describing the essence of the lived experience of depression more so than analyzing how the Pentecostal socio-theological context

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[10] Laura S. Abrams and Laura Curran, "And You're Telling Me Not to Stress? A Grounded Theory Study of Postpartum Depression Symptoms among Low-Income Mothers," *Psychology of Women Quarterly* 33 (2009), 359; Karen J. Foli, "Depression in Adoptive Parents: A Model of Understanding Through Grounded Theory," *Western Journal of Nursing Research* 32 no. 3 (2010), 379-400. See also Yyu-Te Huang and Lin Fang, "Understanding Depression from Different Paradigms: Towards an Eclectic Social Work Approach," *British Journal of Social Work* (2015), 1-17.

[11] Harold G. Koenig, *Faith and Mental Health: Religious Resources for Healing* (West Conshohocken, PA: Templeton Foundation, 2005), 279.

[12] Some examples are Richard Dobbins, "Psychotherapy with Pentecostal Protestants," in the *Handbook of Psychotherapy and Religious Diversity*, eds. P. Scott Richards and Allan E. Bergin (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Association, 2014), 155-78; Don Calbreath, "Serotonin and the Spirit" in *Science and the Spirit*, eds. James K.A. Smith and Amos Yong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 133-55; and Pamela D. Trice and Jeffrey P. Bjorck, "Pentecostal Perspectives on Causes and Cures of Depression," *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice* 37, no. 3 (2006), 283-294.

[13] Joy Allan, "Sertraline, Suffering, and the Spirit: How do Pentecostal/Charismatic Christians respond faithfully to depression?" (Ph.D. diss., University of Aberdeen, 2018), 148-49.

may produce and sustain those experiences. Without such analysis, the voices of those living with depression risk being subsumed under idealized or external portrayals of Pentecostal life.

Research Significance

This lack of socio-theological analysis has consequences. When the experiences of depressed Pentecostals are overlooked, it creates space for others, including clinicians, fellow Pentecostals, theologians, and church leaders, to impose their own interpretations of depression without fully understanding the unique challenges these believers face.[14] One example of this can be seen in the theological literature itself, where idealized portrayals of Pentecostal worship and theology overlook the realities faced by many believers who live with depression. Michael Wilkinson's and Daniel E. Albrecht's analyses of Pentecostal ritual and worship provide two examples of a broader body of literature that emphasizes the nourishing potential of Pentecostal theology and practice.[15] However, Allan's findings complicate this picture. Her participants said their churches did not give them the space or time to connect with the Spirit in ways that could help them process their depression. Instead, they felt pressured to conceal their struggles, fearing judgment from their church community.[16] Therefore, for Allan's participants, their church experience was not a sustaining resource, as Wilkinson and Albrecht claim, but a negative experience.

Another example of misrepresentation emerges in pastoral and clinical discourse, where external interpretations often stigmatize depression and strip sufferers of ownership over their experiences. These interpretations can induce shame, undermine individuals' ability to define their struggles, and compel them to internalize harmful narratives that frame depression as a personal or spiritual failing.[17] This dynamic strips individual of ownership over their mental health and

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[14] For how healthcare professionals interpret patient experiences, see John Swinton, *Spirituality and Mental Health: Rediscovering a 'Forgotten' Dimension* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2001), 94.

[15] Daniel E. Albrecht, "Pentecostal Spirituality: Looking through the Lens of Ritual," *Pneuma* 14, no. 2 (1992), 107-25; Michael Wilkinson, "Worship: Embodying the Encounter with God," in *Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology*, ed. Wolfgang Vondey (New York: Routledge, 2020), 117.

[16] Allan, "Sertraline, Suffering," 152, 258-61.

[17] J. Allan and A. Dixon, "Older Women's Experiences of Depression: A Hermeneutic Phenomenological Study," *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing* 16, no. 10 (December 2009), 866.

reinforces rigid expectations about how they should think and behave, and who to go to for help. For example, Jennifer Shepard Payne's qualitative research reveals that African American Pentecostal preachers often attribute depression to individual negative attitudes, framing it as a failing of faith rather than a condition shaped by broader psychological, social, or systemic factors.[18] Similarly, Robert McBain's study on how Pentecostal preachers address depression from the pulpit highlights how preachers attribute depression to "faulty thinking," such as incorrect beliefs, negative thought patterns, or a lack of faith.[19] These interpretations present recovery as a matter of mindset change or deeper trust in God. However, in doing so, the interpretations overlook the broader social and systemic forces that influence Pentecostal mental health.

These kinds of theological and pastoral interpretations of depression, which emphasize personal or spiritual deficiency and overlook social/systemic factors, do not exist in a vacuum. They are sustained by theological frameworks within Pentecostalism, particularly triumphalism, which emphasizes Spirit-empowered victory and certainty through faith. By promoting a vision of success and overcoming adversity, triumphalist theology creates normative expectations that shape how Pentecostals view themselves and their struggles. However, when individuals cannot meet these expectations, they may feel inadequate, isolated, or disconnected in their relationship with God and their faith community.[20] This confluence of external interpretations, theological frameworks, and triumphalist ideals marginalizes those who do not align with these narratives. The confluence also exacerbates their mental health challenges by framing their struggles as personal failures rather than recognizing them as the result of complex, multifaceted influences. These dynamics underscore the need for research, like this study, that attends to Pentecostals' own experiences of depression within their socio-theological contexts.

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[18] Jennifer Shepard Payne, "Saints Don't Cry: Exploring Messages Surrounding Depression and Mental Health Treatment as Expressed by African-American Pentecostal Preachers," *Journal of African American Studies* 12, no. 5 (2008), 215-288.

[19] Robert D. McBain, "Exploring How Pentecostals Preach about Depression," *Salubritas* 3 (2024), 59-78.

[20] Courey, *What Has Wittenberg to Do with Azusa?* 17.

Methodology and Research Design

As a work of contextual theology, this study explored how social, cultural, and historical contexts shape the lived realities of faith.[21] In line with contextual theology's openness to using social science methodologies, this study used Grounded Theory to analyze data from participant interviews. Grounded Theory is a qualitative research method that collects and analyzes data to develop a theory explaining the participants' experiences in relation to the broader social and cultural processes that shape those experiences.[22] This approach enabled me to construct a theory, anticipated in Heather and Dan's vignette, that accounts for how Pentecostalism shaped participants' experiences of depression.

The study gathered data through participant interviews using convenience sampling.[23] Participants had to live in the USA; be over eighteen years old; self-define as Pentecostal; and self-identify as experiencing or having experienced depression. Participants did not have to identify with any particular Pentecostal denomination or organization. This study defined Pentecostalism as those Christians who believe in the Spirit's activity in their lives on theological and phenomenological grounds.[24] Nor did participants require a clinical depression diagnosis, although some did. The study considered it sufficient that the participants understood they fit the criteria. This openness allowed for a unique range of participants from all over the US.

I conducted interviews with nineteen participants via Zoom, using an open, in-depth interview method that treated participants as conversation partners.[25] I then transcribed and analyzed the transcripts using Constructivist Grounded Theory techniques, like line-by-line and focused coding, memo writing, diagramming, and axial coding. The constant comparative method was integral to the whole process. This

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[21] Angie Pears, *Doing Theology Contextually* (New York, NY: Routledge, 2010), 1; Steven B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (New York, NY: Orbis Books, 2009), 3-4.

[22] Kathy Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory* (London, UK: SAGE, 2006), 126.

[23] Jannice Morse, "Sampling in Grounded Theory," in *The SAGE Handbook of Grounded Theory*," 235.

[24] Anderson, Introduction to Pentecostalism, 4-6.

[25] Herbert J. Rubin and Irene S. Rubin, *Qualitative Interviewing: The Art of Hearing* (Los Angeles, CA: SAGE, 2012), 7.

method involved simultaneous data collection and analysis through which new data was continually compared with existing data to refine and synthesize conceptual categories.[26] This iterative process deepened emerging categories until theoretical saturation was reached, at which point a theoretical framework was developed that explained participants' experiences.[27]

As the analysis developed, I engaged with literature from Pentecostal theology, the Christian tradition, and the social sciences to examine how participants' Pentecostal contexts shaped their experiences of depression. The discussion extends the dynamics first seen in Heather and Dan's stories, showing how the tension between Spirit-empowerment expectations and reality reflects broader patterns in Pentecostal contexts. For now, the next section presents the research findings using thick descriptions of the participants' experiences.

Presentation of the Findings

Statement of the Theory

The core category that emerged from the analysis was that participants experienced depression as a lived tension between their expectations of Spirit-empowerment and the realities they encountered. They experienced this tension across three interconnected dimensions: Stressful Conditions, which brought participants into conflict with their expectations of Spirit-empowerment; Depression's Disruption, which described how this conflict unsettled their daily lives and sense of self; and Making Sense, which captured their efforts to address the tension by drawing on therapeutic resources such as counseling, medication, and Christian consumer materials (e.g., self-help books, sermons, and worship music). The following subsections describe each dimension, showing how participants lived in the tension between expectations of Spirit-empowerment and the reality they encountered.

Stressful Conditions

As the introduction with Heather and Dan illustrated, the participants believed the Spirit would eliminate or minimize life's challenges or empower them to overcome adversity; stressful conditions

[26] Rita Sara Schreiber, "The 'How To' of Grounded Theory: Avoiding the Pitfalls," in *Using Grounded Theory in Nursing*, eds. Rita Sara Schreiber and Phyllis Noerager Stern (New York, NY: Spring Publishing Company, 2001), 57.
[27] Charmaz, *Constructing Grounded Theory*, 113; Kathy Charmaz, "Grounded Theory," in *Rethinking Methods in Psychology*, eds. J. A. Smith, R. Harré, and L. Van Langenhove (London, UK: SAGE, 1995), 47.

demonstrated otherwise. Stressful conditions were uncontrollable events or situations that caused participants emotional, mental, or physical strain and disrupted their daily lives. These included marital difficulties, shifting social roles, unexpected life events, childhood dysfunction, trauma, unresolved pain, and failure to meet social norms. The common thread among these stressful conditions was that they undermined participants' core theological belief that God wanted the best for their lives and that, if calamity did strike, the Spirit would shield them from adversity, minimize its impact, or empower them to overcome it. When these expectations went unmet, participants felt powerless, disoriented, and theologically unsettled.

Lynda's story exemplifies this disruption. As a teenager, she became pregnant by her pastor's son, who abandoned her. The church accused her of seduction, shamed her for being unmarried, and forced her to leave the community she once called home. Seeking a new beginning, she joined another congregation that welcomed her and her child. There, she met and married Jim. She believed this marriage was God's will and that her home would be harmonious and Spirit-filled. Instead, daily conflict with Jim, tensions with her mother-in-law, and the erosion of her autonomy left her feeling trapped and disillusioned. The reality of constant strife clashed with her expectations of a Spirit-infused marriage. She wrestled with the troubling question: If this marriage was truly God's will, why was the Spirit not facilitating peace?

Where Lynda's disillusionment centered on family life, Jolene's unfolded through illness and relational loss. Jolene's experience followed a similar pattern. She believed the Spirit would protect and guide her toward health and relational fulfillment. Yet a traumatic accident in college left her bedridden for a year, and subsequent struggles with illness and a failed relationship with a man she thought was God's choice only deepened her disappointment and unsettled her faith. The counseling she attended helped her reinterpret some of these experiences, but she still questioned why God had allowed the accident, why the illness persisted, and why her conviction that this man was God's chosen man for her life proved false. Her struggle revealed how fragile the promise of Spirit-empowered protection, guidance, and the Pentecostal ideal of womanhood became when confronted with suffering, loss, and unfulfilled expectations.

Lynda and Jolene's stories were not unique. Their struggles resonated throughout the participant interviews. Whether through illness, financial hardship, relational breakdown, career disappointments, or personal loss, the participants encountered circumstances that

contradicted their expectations of Spirit-empowerment. Participants' depression was intertwined within these stressful conditions, embodying them with emotional weight and theological significance.

Depression's Disruption of Daily Life

The participants' descriptions of depression resonated with commonly recognized features of depression, such as pervasive sadness, hopelessness, loss of motivation, and suicidal ideation and self-harm. Lynda spoke of an overwhelming heaviness that made even the simplest tasks insurmountable. Heather shared, "I couldn't find joy in anything: not my family, not my work, not even church. It was like the world had lost its color." Feelings of hopelessness deepened into despair. Brenda lay in bed, hoping the damp spot on her ceiling would cause the roof to fall and bury her. New mother Alesha thought about driving her car off the road, telling herself, "Wouldn't it be good to die?"

Depression also robbed participants of their ability to carry out everyday responsibilities. Lynda explained how she lacked the energy to function, making household chores and parenting impossible. Alesha felt detached from her newborn and even more detached from her workplace, which she had once seen as a mission field. She felt ineffective in both areas. Ginger, a stay-at-home mother whose depression began after her mother's death, did her best to get her teenage daughters to school but spent most of three years confined to her bedroom, unable to summon the strength to care for her household. These struggles left participants isolated, disconnected, and unable to participate fully in the lives they had built.

The disruption pointed toward a disconnection between the participants' thoughts and feelings, making them numb and overwhelmed. Brenda described her experiences as "numbing, where you just wouldn't feel anything, and you just lay there." Moira also felt "emotionally numb." Like Nathan and Heather, she "cerebrally" pushed through each day to meet the expectations of family, friends, colleagues, and the church, but she did so emotionlessly. Together, these accounts show how numbness and detachment shaped participants' daily existence. In light of this cognitive and emotional disconnection, participants put on a performance and pretended that everything was okay as they went about their daily lives at work and among their family members. Masked by pretense, they felt like charlatans because their performance did not correspond with how they really felt.

Nowhere was their pretense more evident than in the church. Jolene explained that within her church community, it was "not okay, not to be

okay." In saying this, she meant that her church implicitly forbade expressions of weakness, sadness, or struggle. While the church might tolerate these expressions within certain parameters, the expectation was that believers should ultimately be joyful and Spirit-filled. Other participants described experiencing attitudes and behaviors from their church communities that were "not of God." Participants used this term to explain how the church treated them in ways that, in their view, failed to reflect the love and support of an authentic Christian community. As a result, participants found it easier to maintain a charade at church than to be authentic about their depression and stressful conditions. Lynda said about her experiences at church and with family, "I am going to try to smile anyway." Such decisions to keep up appearances suggested that although participants could not control how they felt, they could control how they presented themselves and, by extension, what others thought about them.

The pressure to conceal their depression and stressful situations forced participants to ask questions of their social contexts, such as: if the church was meant to be a place of healing, why did it require concealment? And if fellow believers acted toward them in ways "not of God," what did that mean for the ideals of Christian community they were taught to trust? These contradictions coincided with theological questions concerning the role of the Spirit in their lives. Although the participants did not feel the Spirit's presence when depressed, they still believed the Spirit was present. Even then, participants found their lack of feeling the Spirit's presence perplexing. Their logic was: "I don't feel the Spirit, but I know it is present. So, if the Spirit is present, why am I depressed and can't break out of it?" Their answers to this question raised more questions about their feelings of powerlessness and lack of control. These feelings puzzled participants because their theological expectations said that the Spirit should empower, heal, and bring joy, yet their lived experiences told a different story.

Making Sense of the Tension Through Therapeutic Resources

Participants found the disruption between expectation and reality confusing, as they thought the Spirit would shield them from stressful conditions or empower them to overcome them. Struggling to make sense of their experiences, they recognized inconsistencies within their Pentecostal communities, theological constructions, and the behaviors of those around them that they described as "not of God." To resolve the tension, participants turned to therapeutic resources such as

counseling, medication, and Christian consumer materials (e.g., self-help books, worship music, sermons, podcasts).

While these resources helped participants in various ways, the main theme emerging from the analysis was that they only dealt with surface-level issues. For instance, counseling helped Patrice reframe her depression and learn coping techniques, but it never addressed how Pentecostal ideals of motherhood had defined her self-worth or why others in the church saw her as a fifty-five-year-old, unmarried, childless anomaly. Likewise, Jolene found counseling helpful for coping with the stigma she faced after illness, but it did not lead her to examine the broader cultural forces that produced that stigma, nor why people treated her that way. In both cases, counseling provided relief but did not lead them to think through the deeper theological and social systems that contributed to their suffering.

The same was accurate for the participants' use of medication. It gave the participants the mental space to process their experiences, but it did not address the deeper issues affecting their lives. For instance, medication helped Frank mentally pause and reframe his interactions with his wife, so he no longer saw her as critical of him. However, the medication did not help him process why he "felt like a failure in God's eyes." Nor did the medication help him think through how he was projecting his disappointment with God onto his wife. Similarly, Ginger said, "Medication helped, so that I could finally focus at work and not feel so depressed, but I still don't understand why joy seems impossible when the church said it should be normal." In this sense, her ability to function improved, but medication did not help her name the theological expectations of victory that shaped her distress.

Lynda turned to prayer, Christian self-help books, and women's Bible study groups to cope with depression. She described how they "keep me going when I think I can't face another day. They give me the strength to endure." Yet the relief they provided also reinforced the dynamics in her unhappy marriage by making submission to her husband (and, by extension, her mother-in-law) her only recourse. As she admitted, "They [the Christian self-help resources] helped me survive, but they didn't change what was happening at home. I was still crushed on all sides and was slowly changing into someone I did not recognize." In her case, therapeutic resources helped her endure her marriage problems, but did not identify the influence of strict gender and marital roles that enforced ideals of Christian submission. These forces continued to shape her self-perception, her marriage, and her relationships with her in-laws.

Together, these resources helped participants function and find meaning amid stressful conditions and depression. However, the resources did not explore the deeper theological and social structures that shaped their suffering, which their depression experiences were exposing. This meant that while participants could endure their circumstances, they could not reconcile their ideals of Spirit empowerment with their lived realities.

Discussion

The preceding section showed how participants experienced and interpreted their depression as a tension between their expectations of Spirit-empowerment and the realities of everyday life. This section interprets the findings in dialogue with theological and social science literature to highlight how participants' struggles were shaped by broader cultural and theological discourses.

Stressful Conditions

The participants' experiences of depression were intertwined with their unmet expectations of Spirit-empowerment. They believed the Spirit would bring good things into their lives that aligned with God's will, protect them from harmful events, and, if bad events occurred, it would enable them to overcome these adversities. These beliefs provided participants with a sense of certainty about their future and purpose, reflecting a broader tendency to project oneself into an imagined future.[28] However, stressful conditions occurred that challenged these beliefs, creating a tension between expectations and reality, where they experienced depression.

Although participants experienced the emotions of depression as an intensely personal struggle, their suffering was simultaneously shaped by social interactions, language, and shared beliefs.[29] These everyday social processes were themselves organized by deeper discursive structures, which provided the frameworks through which participants interpreted their experiences.[30] Normative social scripts emerged as expressions of

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[28] Fiona Shirani and Karen Henwood, "Taking One Day at a Time: Temporal Experiences in the Context of Unexpected Life Course Transitions," *Time & Society* 20, no. 1 (2011), 50; Anthony Giddens, *Modernity & Self-Identity: Self & Society in the Late Modern Age* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 1991), 129, 133-34.
[29] Burr, Social Constructionism, 2–5.
[30] Nick Crossley, *Key Concepts in Critical Theory* (London, UK: SAGE, 2005), 58; Julianne Cheek, "At the margins? Discourse analysis and qualitative research," *Qualitative Health Research* 14, no. 8 (2004), 1142.

these discursive structures, functioning as roadmaps that sanctioned some ways of being while excluding others.[31] By internalizing these scripts, participants came to expect life to follow a structured trajectory.[32] However, when stressful conditions disrupted the script, their sense of self destabilized, producing the kinds of stress, anxiety, and depression described in this study.[33]

Pentecostal triumphalism appeared to function as the participants' dominant script. Pentecostal triumphalism is disseminated through beliefs and practices. It promotes Spirit-empowerment as the key to victory, success, and divine purpose, assuring believers of protection from adversity.[34] Pentecostal triumphalism appeared to shape their expectations about divine intervention, personal success, and overcoming adversity. This framework structured their decisions, relationships, and sense of purpose, reinforcing the belief that faithfulness would lead to Spirit-empowered outcomes. For instance, Patrice grew up believing the Spirit would prepare a husband for her, so she lived her life trying to be led by the Spirit, trusting God would lead her to the right man. Likewise, Jarrod shaped his education, career, and marriage choices around a youth camp experience where he felt called to ministry. Both believed that by following this script (i.e., by being "obedient"), the Spirit would fulfill their expectations. In this sense, their triumphalist expectations exemplify Anthony Giddens' concept of "colonizing the future," as it encouraged them to construct a sense of certainty about their future through present practices and institutional narratives of Spirit-empowerment.[35]

Patrice and Jarrod exemplify how participants scripted their lives according to triumphalist beliefs. However, stressful conditions disrupted the script, exposing its inability to accommodate real-life complexities. Participants experienced a tension between their expectations of Spirit-empowerment and the reality they encountered,

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[31] See Dorthe Berntsen and David C. Rubin, "Cultural Life Scripts Structure Recall from Autobiographical Memory," *Memory & Cognition* 32 (2004), 427-442; Carol B. Stack and Linda M. Burton, "Kinscripts," *Journal of Comparative Family Studies* 24, no. 2 (1993), 157-170.

[32] Shirani and Henwood, "Taking One Day at a Time," 50; Anthony Giddens, *Modernity & Self-Identity*, 129, 133-34.

[33] Peggy Thoits, "Sociological Approaches to Mental Illness," in *A Handbook for the Study of Mental Health*, eds. Teresa L. Scheid and Tony N. Brown (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 109-10.

[34] Courey, *What Has Wittenberg to Do with Azusa?* 5-6.

[35] Giddens, *Modernity & Self-Identity*, 129, 133-34.

which the script lacked the language to interpret, leaving them without a framework to make sense of their 'off-script' experiences. Depression embodied the participants' struggle of living in this tension, which then acted as a stressful condition in its own right. The participants' experiences align with Dave Courey's concerns that Pentecostal triumphalism fosters unrealistic expectations, disregards life's complexities, imposes emotional and intellectual burdens, and often leads to frustration, blame, guilt, and suffering.[36]

Depression's Disruption

Depression is commonly understood as an emotional mental state that includes feelings of sadness, hopelessness, and loss of motivation, which disrupts a person's daily life. However, research shows that depression also opens pathways for self-reflection. On the one hand, such reflection can devolve into rumination, trapping individuals in repetitive thoughts that amplify hopelessness and impair problem-solving.[37] Conversely, self-reflection may also serve as a coping mechanism, helping individuals process emotions, identify challenges, and build resilience through deeper self and contextual understanding.[38]

This dual-reflective nature was evident in the participants' experiences. They ruminated on their stressful conditions, depression's disruption of their lives, and their sense of powerlessness. While their rumination followed rigid patterns, they also linked their experiences to Pentecostal contexts.[39] For instance, despite being taught that the Spirit would empower them, participants questioned why they were powerless against depression and why their experiences deviated from the triumphalist script into which they were socialized. They struggled with ideas about where their (unmet) expectations originated and why their social contexts lacked space for authentic self-expression. As such, depression appeared to heighten their self-awareness and foster their consciousness-raising, where they became more alert to the

[36] Courey, *What Has Wittenberg to Do with Azusa?* 17.
[37] Younga Lee and Jürgen Margraf, "German Version of the Depressive Rumination Questionnaire: Psychometric Evaluation and Validation," *Journal of Affective Disorders* 187 (2015), 73-80.
[38] Anna Sutton, "Measuring the Effects of Self-Awareness: Construction of the Self-Awareness Outcomes Questionnaire," *European Journal of Psychological Assessment* 32, no. 1 (2016), 46-52.
[39] Milena Mancini et al., "Major Depression as a Disorder of the Narrative Self: A Qualitative Study," *Psychopathology* 57, no. 5 (2024), 427.

contradictions in their Pentecostal contexts and the ways these constrained their ability to live authentically.[40]

However, there were limits to how far participants connected their personal struggles with broader systemic forces. For instance, although Nathan questioned why he could not be his authentic, depressed self among his family and church community, and what it was about those contexts that forced him to put on a façade, he still could not connect his need for concealment to the deeper systemic pressures shaping his experience, such as his breach of purity culture, internalized shame, fear of rejection, and the absence of safe spaces for vulnerability. The same was true for Patrice. Although she recognized that her Pentecostal upbringing had set her expectations of womanhood and marriage, her self-awareness only extended so far, and she was never able to question these ideals critically. In practice, she maintained a veneer of respectability in a church environment, asking why a fifty-five-year-old woman had never married or had children. As Patrice and Nathan illustrate, while participants sensed the systemic factors constraining them, they could not fully name or directly confront them.

Making Sense of Living in the Gap

The participants' inability to link their struggles to broader systemic factors was evident in their use of therapeutic resources. These resources helped participants cope with and make sense of their experiences, but they did so in a way that constrained their capacity to engage with their environment critically.[41] For example, counseling helped Patrice to reinterpret her depression within a biblical framework. Still, it did not help her confront how the Pentecostal construct of motherhood shaped her sense of self. Similarly, while counseling helped Jolene cope with illness-related stigma, it did not prompt her to examine the broader social forces that produced it. Frank had a similar experience with medication. It helped him communicate better and reduce conflict in his marriage, but it did not resolve his questions about the Spirit's role in his calling or the other contextual factors that contributed to his depression.[42]

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[40] Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York, NY: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), 35, 51.

[41] Dan Blazer, The Age of Melancholy: Major Depression and its Social Origins (New York, NY: Routledge, 2005), 4; Freire, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, 5-8, 76-7, 136-40.

[42] Blazer, *Age of Melancholy*, 5-8, 136-40.

Nathan and Lynda illustrated the same pattern. Nathan relied on sermons and worship music to manage his depression. However, this diverted attention from the deeper problem of his prolonged guilt over premarital sex and masked the systemic pressures of purity culture, internalized shame, fear of rejection, and the absence of safe spaces for vulnerability. Lynda turned to prayer, Christian self-help books, and women's Bible study groups. These resources helped her endure marital difficulties but also confined her options, making submission to patriarchal gender norms her only recourse. In her case, therapeutic resources obscured the influence of strict gender roles, enforced ideals of Christian submission, and intensified the pressures of intensive mothering. These forces shaped her self-perception, marriage, and relationship with her in-laws.[43]

The participants' reliance on therapeutic resources reflects a broader cultural trend where therapeutic tools emphasize individual transformation while neglecting the systemic issues that create the need for such transformation. Eval Illouz highlights how these resources serve as vehicles for diffusing therapeutic knowledge throughout society.[44] This knowledge prioritizes emotional well-being, self-fulfillment, and psychological autonomy as markers of a good life, while often reinforcing ideals of self-reliance and personal responsibility.[45]

This societal diffusion of therapeutic knowledge is evident in Pentecostalism, whereby it frames faith and Spirit-mediated piety as personal pathways to self-actualization and emotional healing as proof of the blessings of a close relationship with God.[46] Pentecostal

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[43] Intensive mothering is a cultural ideology that expects mothers to devote extraordinary time, emotional labor, and self-sacrifice to child-rearing, often at the expense of their own well-being and personal identity. See Sharon Hays, *The Cultural Contradictions of Motherhood* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1996), ix-xv, 8, 130, 159.

[44] Eva Illouz, Saving the Modern Soul: Therapy, Emotions, and the Culture of Self-Help (Berkely, CA: University of California Press, 2008), 7.

[45] See Roger Foster, "Therapeutic Culture, Authenticity, and Neo-Liberalism," *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 42, no. 1 (2016), 9-14; Mohsen Joshanloo and Dan Weijers, "Ideal Personhood Through the Ages: Tracing the Genealogy of the Modern Concepts of Wellbeing," *Journal of Positive Psychology* 19, no. 1 (2024), 101-102.

[46] Julius H. Rubin, *Religious Melancholy and Protestant Experience in America* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1994), 227-30; Joseph W. Williams, *Spirit Cure: A History of Pentecostal Healing* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2013), 20, 99.

triumphalism reflects the same ethos, recasting healing, self-actualization, and success as tangible signs of Spirit-empowerment and divine blessing.[47] The downside of the diffusion of therapeutic knowledge, according to Arlene Stein, is that it casts social problems (in this case, the deficiency of Pentecostal triumphalism) from the perpetuating institutions onto individuals by suggesting that they should process the adverse effects of these institutions through the subjection of self, which is what the participants' therapeutic resources leaned toward.[48]

By framing their struggles within a self-focused framework, these resources obscured the social and theological Pentecostal system that participants began questioning. This redirected energy away from critically engaging the tension between Spirit-empowered expectations and lived realities that their experiences instigated. In this sense, therapeutic culture functioned less as a resource for transformation than as a mechanism that numbed the conscientization process that depression kick-started.[49] Ultimately, therapeutic resources provided spaces for expressing grievances and frustrations, but rather than reconciling the tension between expectations of Spirit-empowerment and reality, these resources kept participants trapped within that tension.[50]

Reflection and Practical Considerations

This study examined how Pentecostals in the United States experience and interpret depression as a tension between Spirit-empowered expectations and lived reality. Within this tension, participants grew aware of how their Pentecostal context shaped their struggles. They turned to counseling, medication, and Christian self-help resources to help them make sense of their experiences, but because these resources operated within the same socio-theological framework that shaped their expectations, the resources reinforced rather than resolved the tension. Thus, even as participants became more conscious of the dynamics that shaped them, the system's strength constrained their ability to see things differently.

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[47] Courey, *What Has Wittenberg to Do with Azusa?* 8.
[48] Arlene Stein, "The Forum: Therapeutic Politics—An Oxymoron?" *Sociological Forum* 26, no. 1 (2011), 189.
[49] John Dale and Emery J. Hyslop-Margison, *Paulo Freire: Teaching for Freedom and Transformation* (New York, NY: Springer, 2010), 124.
[50] Donaldo Mecado, "Introduction," in *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (New York: Continuum, 2005), 18.

Even though this study is specific to the participant sample, its Grounded Theory methodology and its use of the constant comparative method point toward broader social dynamics shaping depression within Pentecostal contexts, particularly the influence of Pentecostal triumphalism.[51] Readers may see echoes of these social dynamics in their lives or those around them. Such resonance indicates that the themes identified in this study extend beyond the participants' immediate contexts to other Pentecostal environments.[52] Recognizing such dynamics in one's own life, community, or ministry invites us to reflect on how Pentecostal beliefs and practices shape experiences of depression, and what might be done to help Pentecostals experiencing the tension between expectations of Spirit-empowerment and reality.

One practical implication is the need to create spaces where believers can openly discuss how their experiences of the Spirit diverge from traditional Pentecostal expectations. As noted, Pentecostals understand the Spirit as the facilitator of the one who empowers them, leads them to victory, and protects them. While participants held to these ideals, their lived experiences frequently fell short, leaving them in tension between expectation and reality. Creating spaces to voice this tension can help believers reimagine the Spirit's presence, not only in triumph, but also in weakness, struggle, and resilience. Unfortunately, the findings pointed toward how Pentecostal communities did not like such honesty. The danger is, however, if they continue to avoid these conversations, the tension between expectation and lived reality will persist, and believers will remain isolated in their suffering. Therefore, it is essential that Pentecostalism takes the experiences of such believers seriously and facilitates a reshaping of Pentecostal culture around a more faithful and life-giving understanding of the Spirit.

Navigating such discussions within Pentecostal communities requires two actions. First, compassion takes priority. Churches and institutions must listen to and take seriously the marginalized voices of those whose experiences of the Spirit do not align with dominant narratives. This

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[51] P. Jane Milliken and Rita Sara Schreiber, "Can You 'Do' Grounded Theory Without Symbolic Interactionism?" in *Using Grounded Theory in Nursing*, eds. Rita Sara Schreiber and Phyllis Noerager Stern (New York: Springer, 2001), 188.
[52] See Egon G. Guba and Yvonna S. Lincoln, "Epistemological and Methodological Bases of Naturalistic Inquiry," in *Evaluation Models*, eds., D.L. Stufflebeam, G.F. Madaus, and T. Kellaghan (Boston: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2000), 363-81. See also James W. Drisko, "Transferability and Generalization in Qualitative Research," *Research on Social Work Practice* 35, no. 1 (2024), 103.

includes recognizing that living in 'the tension' is not a failure of faith but a reality of faith; one that needs to be addressed with empathy rather than silence. This means creating safe spaces where individuals can express honest and unfiltered reflections on their spiritual lives. Second, fostering theological literacy is essential. Pentecostal leaders and laypeople need a deeper understanding of Pentecostal history, its theological diversity, and insights from other Christian traditions. This knowledge will help them engage critically and constructively with different theological perspectives and off-script experiences. A better-informed Pentecostal community will be more capable of identifying blind spots in its theology and practice, leading to a richer and more nuanced understanding of the Spirit's work. This literacy must include an honest engagement with 'the tension.' Only by doing so can Pentecostals recognize how theological discourse shapes their expectations and how those expectations contribute to mental distress.

Churches, however, do not need another Sunday School class or cell group, which may numb critical awareness and fragment integration within the church communities. Neither should churches nor other Pentecostal institutions ignore the issues by recommending that dissenting voices attend counseling, pray harder, or read their Bible more. Instead, this study suggests that at every level of the church, from the pew to the pulpit, and perhaps particularly within Pentecostal educational institutions, there must be a reform of how Pentecostals discuss, teach, and experience the Spirit.[53] This reform must ensure that future Pentecostals and church leaders move beyond simplistic narratives of empowerment and emphasize the Spirit's role as a comforter, advocate, liberator, and the one who stands in solidarity against oppressive systems (theological or otherwise).

By integrating this multifaceted perspective into Pentecostal theological discourse and education, Pentecostalism can equip future

[53] Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff provide a framework for understanding how theological engagement can occur at every church level. They describe liberation theology as operating across three interconnected levels: popular, pastoral, and professional. The popular level arises from grassroots communities, where the faith of the oppressed is expressed through collective reflection and action. The pastoral level is a bridge, as clergy and lay leaders integrate grassroots theology into broader church missions. Finally, the professional level offers systematic academic reflection, drawing on scholarly tools while remaining grounded in the lived realities of marginalized communities. See Leonardo Boff and Clodovis Boff, *Introducing Liberation Theology* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1987), 11-21.

believers to navigate life's complexities with spiritual power and a deep sense of communal responsibility. This will foster a more cohesive and vibrant church community that is prepared to engage in the challenges and opportunities of the modern world. Ultimately, the goal is not to achieve uniformity of belief but to cultivate a culture of discernment.

By encouraging open dialogue, theological literacy, and compassionate listening, Pentecostalism can create a space where believers grapple with their own experiences of the Spirit and arrive at a mature and liberating faith. This, in turn, will enable Pentecostalism to become even more socially engaged and capable of addressing urgent issues, including depression and mental health struggles within its communities. One that accounts for the tensions and struggles of life in the gap rather than dismissing them.

Concluding Summary

This study used Grounded Theory to explore how Pentecostals in the United States experience and interpret depression. The theory that emerged is that participants experienced and interpreted their depression as a tension between expectations of Spirit-empowerment and the reality of everyday life. Their struggles were marked by sadness, hopelessness, and disruptions to daily functioning, but they also experienced a heightened self-awareness of the inconsistencies within their communities and theological frameworks. To cope, participants turned to counseling, medication, prayer, and Christian self-help resources. Yet because these resources operated within the same theological framework that produced their expectations, they reinforced rather than resolved the tension, leaving participants spiritually internalizing their struggles while obscuring the broader socio-theological dynamics contributing to their distress.

Addressing the tension requires critical engagement with how Pentecostals conceptualize Spirit-empowerment. Pentecostal scholars and leaders must reexamine theological frameworks that reinforce unrealistic expectations, while integrating perspectives that acknowledge suffering and emotional struggle as part of the faith journey. Fostering theological and mental health literacy within Pentecostal communities can equip believers with the tools to navigate their experiences without internalizing triumphalist narratives. Creating safe spaces for open dialogue where believers can express their struggles without fear of stigma is essential for breaking cycles of silence and stigma. Future research should explore how Pentecostalism can develop a more holistic pneumatology centered on individual believers' experiences rather than

historical, institutional, or doctrinal ideals. This approach should emphasize empowerment while embracing a more nuanced understanding of human vulnerability and mental well-being. By doing so, Pentecostalism can move beyond reinforcing the tension identified in this study and provide believers with a more sustainable and life-affirming faith.

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Beyond Otherworldliness: Pentecostal Potential for Integral Transformation in India

Paulson Pulikottil

Abstract

This article challenges the traditional perception of Pentecostalism as a movement solely focused on "otherworldliness" by highlighting its capacity for significant social and structural transformation. Central to this argument is the concept of "integral transformation," a theological framework that moves beyond the limitations of traditional liberation theologies. Unlike liberation theology, which the author argues often leaves oppressive systems intact while focusing on the oppressed, integral transformation seeks to permanently reshape oppressive power structures and address all facets of human existence, including economics, politics, spirituality, and physical health. The author posits that this transformation is characterized by five key elements: the aim for total welfare, a comprehensive approach to human life, the permanent dismantling of oppressive structures, the creation of communities rooted in mutual aid and dignity, and the empowerment of the oppressed as the primary agents of their own change. To illustrate these principles in practice, the article examines ethnographic research conducted by non-Pentecostal academics in India. Specifically, it highlights the work of sociologist Sabreswar Sahoo regarding the Bhil tribes of Rajasthan. The study demonstrates how Pentecostal missionary movements have catalyzed a "silent social revolution" among the Bhils, who were historically marginalized by the dominant Rajput Hindu community. By changing converts' self-perceptions and instilling a newfound sense of confidence and hope, the movement has challenged rigid caste foundations and fostered an identity that promotes both spiritual and material prosperity within the community.

Keywords: integral transformation, Pentecostalism, liberation theology, Bhil tribes, social empowerment.

Introduction

Pentecostals are often recognized for their focus on otherworldliness rather than the concerns of the present. However, recent sociological and developmental studies have highlighted the significant influence of the Pentecostal movement in transforming society and reshaping power structures. This paper explores the foundational elements of Pentecostal theology that contribute to its transformational potential.

Then, what is integral transformation? In my recent book, as I explored a way forward from stagnant liberation theologies, I proposed the concept of "integral transformation."[1] The theology of integral transformation is not another liberation theology. First, it envisions releasing people from oppression and aims to ensure their overall welfare by transforming the world in which they would live. Second, it is inclusive and comprehensive, addressing all aspects of human existence, including economics, politics, spirituality, physical health, and overall well-being. Third, while liberation theologies tend to leave oppressive power structures intact while expending their energies mostly on liberating the oppressed, the theology of integral transformation goes beyond liberation to permanently transform oppressive structures, thereby enhancing human life. Fourth, the theology of integral transformation moves from liberation to the creation of communities of love, forgiveness, and mutual aid where people can live with dignity. Fifth, the agents of liberation are not any outside agency but the oppressed themselves.

Two Case Studies

I must begin with two recent case studies from India, authored by non-Pentecostal academics, that illustrate the integral transformational potential of Pentecostalism. For a global picture of Pentecostal social engagement, read Miller.[2]

The Bhils of Rajasthan

Sabreswar Sahoo, a sociologist at the Indian Institute of Technology, Delhi, studied conversions among the Bhil tribes, whom the dominant

[1] Paulson Pulikottil, *Beyond Dalit Theology: Searching for New Frontiers* (Minneapolis, Minnesota: Fortress Press, 2022).
[2] Donald E. Miller, *Global Pentecostalism: The New Face of Christian Social Engagement* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

Rajput Hindu Community disdained.[3] He conducted extensive ethnographic fieldwork on this tribe over many years, interacting with converts and leaders of the various mission movements. Various native missionary movements, led by Pentecostal evangelists, have been active among the Bhils of Rajasthan over the years. These Pentecostal missionary movements have led to a silent social revolution, shaking the foundations of caste and social injustices in Rajasthan. Sahoo noted that the conversion to Pentecostalism has changed the self-perception of this community. He writes, "Religious conversion and association with the church have provided tribal Christians with confidence and hope and made them optimistic. They found their newfound identity empowering."[4] Sahoo further notes that the Christian principles these communities uphold have transformed people's lives and "have generated hope to bring material as well as spiritual prosperity in the lives of poor tribals."[5]

Though the Bhil tribe is patriarchal like the Hindu society around them, their experience of Christ has altered gender relationships, especially to the advantage of women. Sahoo observes, "As a consequence of such teachings, the relationship between husband and wife in Pentecostal households, compared to the tribal Hindu household, is more equal. Because of this 'gender-egalitarian impulse' of Pentecostalism, women enjoy more freedom and autonomy."[6] Women also have an active role in spiritual leadership. When questioned about this unusual role of women in the churches, one of the leaders responded, "If our Prime Minister, President, and the leader of the Congress Party can be women, why cannot women lead the church?"[7] True to this conviction, women are empowered to take leadership roles in their Christian community, family and society. Sahoo sums up his findings as follows:

> For the converts, the Pentecostal church has provided an egalitarian space for all without discriminating against anyone. It is in the church that the converts feel equal in the eyes of the Lord; it is where they sit, pray and eat together as a community of

[3] Sarbeswar Sahoo, *Pentecostalism and Politics of Conversion in India*, First edition (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018).
[4] Sahoo, 47.
[5] Sahoo, 48.
[6] Sahoo, 110.
[7] Sahoo, 112.

believers. In a sense, Pentecostalism has helped adivasis to convert to "modernities."[8]

Dalit Women in the Slums of Chennai

Karin Kapadia, a social anthropologist at the University of Oxford's School of Global and Area Studies, has studied the growth of Pentecostalism among Dalit women in the slums of Chennai since 2010.[9] Over the nine years, she made two visits each year to study this revolution, which began forty years ago, in the 1970s. Dalit men, who were the sole breadwinners, began to lose their traditional jobs as head-load workers and porters as technology and, consequently, the economy slowly changed to their disadvantage. As men began to lose jobs, Dalit women had to enter the job market and earn enough to support their families. Consequently, the life of the Dalit women became very stressful. The jobless or under-employed men continued to exert their authority over the women and their households; most of them became alcoholics who depended on their wives' meager income. The jobless men, who thought their dignity was under threat, began to harass the women.

At this juncture, some non-Dalit pastors from the new and independent Pentecostal churches came to their streets, ignoring the rules of untouchability and caste inequalities. The prayer groups that they established attracted many Dalit women who were suffering psychologically and economically. These prayer groups evolved into support groups led by Dalit women for the Dalit women and men. Later, they turned into care cells and churches. Since Dalit women were leaders in these churches, outsiders called them "female churches." These groups empowered women to pray without the help of "ritual experts," read the Bible and use their Bibles to teach and encourage other Dalit women. Many Dalit women who were semi-literate or illiterate began to learn to read the Bible so they could read it to others.[10] These churches were financially independent and free of any hierarchies.[11] They changed the gender equations as women played an active role in the churches as evangelists, counselors, etc. Dalit women

[8] Sahoo, 158.
[9] Karin Kapadia, "'Mirrored in God": Gramsci, Religion and Dalit Women Subalterns in South India', *Religions; Basel* 10, no. 12 (December 2019).
[10] Kapadia, 4.
[11] Kapadia, 6.

were given public roles, such as lay pastors and group leaders. This has given them growing confidence in themselves. Kapadia comments that

> Dalit women's growing confidence in the public roles they have accessed as lay-teachers, lay-preachers, and lay leaders in the liberating spaces of their Dalit Pentecostal churches have slowly enabled them to challenge male power in the arena where it is strongest—the domestic sphere. This is where Indian democracy must begin, within the four walls of the home.[12]

Kapadia observes that the Pentecostal movement among the Dalits in Chennai is a form of emancipatory political movement. She observes that

> it is precisely because the effects of Pentecostal conversion are clearly so liberating for Dalit women in terms of their own gender politics, and for both Dalit women and men, in terms of Chennai's race/caste politics, that I am arguing that we should see Dalit Pentecostalism as constituting not just a religious movement but also an emancipatory political movement.[13]

Kapadia argues that this movement in the Chennai slums has nurtured female self-confidence. She calls them "natural greenhouses for nurturing female self-confidence and a feminist sensibility."[14] These female churches, though they do not challenge male hegemony directly, have created "an irresistible desire for emancipation from male control among ordinary, dispossessed Dalit women."[15] Kapadia's study has also shown that they challenge power equations imposed by caste by inviting caste-Hindus to join them. As Kapadia says, "The very fact that Dalit Pentecostal evangelists happily and proudly invite non-Dalit 'caste-Hindus' to join them in their new identity suggests how radically the relations of power have changed."[16]

Kapadia concludes that "Dalit Pentecostalism has enabled poor women to access new mobility, both physical and intellectual, across the new public spaces and public roles created by the Pentecostal churches. This has given Dalit Pentecostal women greater physical freedom, a powerful sense of agency and an astonishing and radically new moral

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[12] Kapadia, 14.
[13] Kapadia, 6.
[14] Kapadia, 7.
[15] Kapadia, 14.
[16] Kapadia, 15.

authority, allowing women to change Dalit gender dynamics significantly."[17]

These two case studies demonstrate the transformative power of Pentecostalism. These Pentecostal communities challenge the enslaving power structures to emancipate themselves without an external agency and create communities that celebrate gender equality, dignity, and self-power. With these two case studies in mind, I aim to elucidate some key features of Pentecostal theology that underlie its transformative potential in the following pages.

Re-imagining the Church

Pentecostals, inheritors of the tenets of the Radical Reformation, reimagined the church by rejecting established Christianity's traits, such as clericalism, sacred places of worship, and liturgy.[18] In addition, the new mission trends, following the end of colonialism in the Global South, boosted the reimagining of the Church of Jesus Christ. As Christianity shifts to the global South, there is a great demand for the church to be imagined not as an extension of Western ecclesiastical structures but as a community of believers.

Church Defined

Pentecostal ecclesiology is in line with the free church ecclesiology (following the footprints of radical reformation) that Miroslav Volf elucidates. Pentecostals do not see the church merely as a physical or power structure; on the contrary, the church is essentially the community gathered in Jesus' name. Volf follows the long tradition of church fathers—e.g. Ignatius, Tertullian, et al.—to find the definition of the church in Matthew 18:20. He affirms that "where two or three are gathered in Christ's name, not only is Christ present among them, but a Christian church is there as well, perhaps a bad church, a church that may well transgress against love and truth, but a church nonetheless."[19] Although the church is a gathering of people, not all gatherings are qualified to be a church, as they should be in Christ's name. Volf asserts, "Gathering in the name of Christ is the precondition for the presence of

[17] Kapadia, 15.

[18] Radical Reformation began in the sixteenth century in Germany and Switzerland by groups dissatisfied with the Protestant Reformation. Anabaptists who advocated believer baptism against infant baptism are the primary group that led this movement. Most free churches, including many Pentecostals, trace their origin to this point.

[19] Volf, 136.

Christ in the Holy Spirit, which is itself constitutive for the church."[20] This means those gathered are committed to allowing Christ to determine their lives.[21] He further strengthens his argument by saying, "Without an acknowledgment of Christ as Lord, there is no church."[22]

The Mission of Jesus

Since the church is understood as a gathering of people in Jesus' name, the Pentecostal ecclesiology is rooted in the transforming mission of Jesus Christ. In the Nazareth Manifesto (Luke 4:16–21), Jesus Christ expressed his self-understanding of being sent by the Father God to accomplish a broad range of transformations that involve physical healing, deliverance from exploitation, and freedom from oppression. "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor" (Luke 4:18—19).

True to this self-understanding, Jesus challenged social, economic, racial, and political boundaries. Though he affirmed the poor while condemning the rich (Luke 6:24), the poor and the rich had equal access to him as he pulled down the barriers that divided them. In the community he built, the poor fishermen and the rich people like Simon, the leper, feasted together (Mark 14:3–9). A woman could walk into such a get-together to touch Jesus' feet. Though he paid Roman taxes (Matt 17:27), he challenged the tax collectors who oppressed the poor. He did so not by protesting the tax system but by transforming tax collectors like Levi (Mark 2:13–17), who followed him, and by converting Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1–8). He insisted on redistributing wealth when he challenged the rich ruler to sell all his possessions and give them to the poor (Mark 10:21 and Luke 18:22). He held that wealth is not for hoarding but must be used for the welfare of society. The transformation of Jesus was integral as it liberated the disadvantaged and transformed the oppressors to abhor their evil ways.

Early Church in Christ's Mission

Pentecostals claim that the Bible and practices of the pre-Constantine, first-century church define the nature and goal of their mission to the world. They affirm that Christ Jesus sent the church to continue his

[20] Volf, 145.
[21] Volf, 147.
[22] Volf, 148.

ministry, for which the Father God sent him. John Stott emphasized in the Berlin World Congress on Evangelism (1966), based on John 20:21, "As the Father has sent me, I am sending you," that the church has not only a mandate for her mission but a model for mission.[23] The church is mandated to continue the mission of Jesus Christ precisely as he did, in obedience to the Father God who sent him. The early church and the apostles continued the mission of God the Father that Jesus modeled. They were inspired by their understanding that Jesus, the Messiah sent by God, was the one who had sent them.

Although most of the members were socially and politically insignificant, the early church believed that Jesus was the Christ who had sent them to be in charge of their world. So, they challenged the systems that governed their world, believing that Christ was the victor and that he reigned. Their conviction that Jesus the Messiah has taken over stimulated their mission. In the Pauline thinking, as Palmer and Noelliste put it, "The Messiah is still large and in charge of Empire, for 'he must reign until he has put his enemies under his feet' (1 Cor 1:25)."[24] In other words, Paul argues that the Messiah has taken over the empire. He has begun subjugating the evil systems, a process that will be completed in the future. Though there is tension between the present and the not-yet, Christ is powerful and present in the struggles of the world's oppressed.

This conviction of the apostles led them to build interracial and inter-class communities all over the Greco-Roman world, where they practiced mutual sharing or *koinonia*. One evident example is the list of noteworthy people in the church in Rome, which is a mixture of Greek and Jewish names (Rom 16:3—16). Further evidence of mutual sharing and caring comes from the Christian community in Jerusalem, where the poor and needy were cared for, and again, this was a racially mixed group (Acts 2:44–45; 4:34–35; 6:1–6). Good works and charity were the virtues that they promoted (Acts 9:36–39; 11:28–30). They valued sharing with others rather than receiving (Acts 20:35). This was not limited to communities that Peter or Paul initiated. James also believed that the Christian message directly addresses human issues. As Palmer

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[23] Samuel Escobar, *A Time for Mission: The Challenge for Global Christianity* (Carlisle: Langham Global Library, 2013), 12.

[24] Delano Palmer and Dieumeme Noelliste, "Christ and Liberation: Toward a Messianic Christology for a Postcolonial Society," in *Diverse and Creative Voices: Theological Essays from the Majority World*, ed. Sung Wook Chung and Dieumeme Noelliste (Havertown, UK: James Clarke Company, Limited, 2015), 91.

and Noelliste put it, true faith for James is "a philanthropic engagement with especially the poor."[25]

The concern for the poor they exhibited was not limited to their localities or their race; it crossed all imaginable boundaries of race, gender, and class. Paul raised funds from all over Asia and Europe for the poor suffering Jewish Christians in Jerusalem (Rom 15:25–28; 1 Cor 16:1–4). The Jerusalem community absorbed the widows to be cared for (Acts 6:1, 9:39; 1 Tim 5:3; James 1:27). The community that met in Philemon's house was told to accept a runaway slave called Onesimus and treat him as a brother (Philemon 1:16), according to him, equality and dignity. Pentecostal mission shares the vision of the early church, which cared for those on the margins of society. As Byron Williams says, "A community that cannot see those on the margins is an ecclesia that is inconsistent with the teachings of Jesus."[26] The early church did not limit its vision to caring for the poor, but, as Lopez points out from the Book of James, they maintained the "prophetic criticism of those who oppressed them."[27]

The Holy Spirit in the Pentecostal Mission of Integral Transformation

The Pentecostal emphasis on the Holy Spirit (sometimes overemphasized) is another link to the pre-Constantine church. Besides the direct link to Christ's mission, the early church also recognized that the power for mission came from the same source—the Holy Spirit who empowered Jesus was the same Holy Spirit who empowered them. Jesus and the early church were engaged in a liberation mission empowered by the Holy Spirit. Luke presents Jesus' ministry to the poor and the marginalized as a liberation mission empowered by the Holy Spirit. Luke affirms that Jesus was "full of the Holy Spirit" after his baptism (Luke 4:1). When he announced his plan of action, he claimed that "the Spirit of the Lord is upon me" (Luke 4:18). Above all, even his incarnation was the work of Holy Spirit as the Holy Spirit came upon Mary and the power of the Most-High overshadowed her (Luke 1:35).
The centrality of the Spirit in the life and mission of Christ is also evident in the church. The Holy Spirit constituted the church in the

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[25] Palmer and Noelliste, 100.
[26] Byron Williams, "Prophetic Public Theology," *Review & Expositor* 111, no. 2 (May 2014): 165.
[27] Dario Lopez, "The Church as Liberated and Liberating Community: A Primer for a Latin American Ecclesiology," in *Diverse and Creative Voices: Theological Essays from the Majority World*, ed. Sung Wook Chung and Dieumeme Noelliste (Havertown, UK: James Clarke Company, Limited, 2015), 165.

Upper Room on the Day of Pentecost, as the power of the Holy Spirit was transferred to the community of the disciples. As Pinnock puts it, on the Day of Pentecost, "the isolated disciples were incorporated into the Spirit-filled Body of Christ."[28] Thus, they became the agents of God's Kingdom on earth. Otherwise, without the power of the Holy Spirit empowering their mission, the early church would have been a bunch of "Jesus disciples" who perpetuated his teaching like any religious movement. Healy says, "What renders the church unique and superior to all other religious and non-religious bodies is what I have already noted in passing, namely its Spirit-empowered *orientation* to Jesus Christ and through him, to the triune God."[29]

The presence of the Holy Spirit in the church implies that the church's mission is a continuation of Christ's mission. There could be no church without the power of the Holy Spirit, who is also called the Spirit of Christ or Jesus (Acts 16:17; Rom 8:9; 1 Pet 1:11; Phil 1:19). This implies that meaningful engagement with the world is possible by the power of the Holy Spirit that empowered Jesus Christ, if its mandate and model is Jesus's mission. The church should not be considered merely as an association of people but as the sphere where the Holy Spirit operates. The church cannot be imagined without the Spirit; a church without the Holy Spirit is no better than any other human organization.

Pentecostals follow the pattern of the early church, which believed that the Holy Spirit was present in the mission of Jesus and should be so in the mission of the early church. The Pentecostal worldview integrates Christology, Pneumatology, and Ecclesiology, treating them as interrelated and not separate entities. Zokoue suggests they should not be treated even as "three juxtaposed and disjointed disciplines" but as inseparably dependent on each other.[30] Though the experience of the Holy Spirit is an individual matter, the New Testament makes it evident that even the individual believer's spiritual experience has a corporate dimension, which the community maintains. The Holy Spirit came upon

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[28] Clark H Pinnock, "Church in the Power of the Holy Spirit: The Promise of Pentecostal Ecclesiology," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 14, no. 2 (April 2006): 150.

[29] Nicholas M. Healy, *Church, World and the Christian Life: Practical-Prophetic Ecclesiology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 17.

[30] Isaac Zokoue, "The Church as Pneumatic Community: Toward an Ecclesiology for the African Context," in *Diverse and Creative Voices: Theological Essays from the Majority World*, ed. Sung Wook Chung and Dieumeme Noelliste (Havertown, UK: James Clarke Company, Limited, 2015), 158.

all of them while they were gathered together and were waiting for him in the Upper Room. Luke highlights the corporate dimension of the individual experience thus: "And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them and rested *on each one of them*. And *they were all filled* with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance" (Acts 2:3—4, emphasis mine). In other words, without the community, there is no experience of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit constitutes the church, equips her by giving gifts, and directs her mission. Commenting on the theology of Yves Congar, Annan affirms that not only does the Holy Spirit constitute the church but also has "a prominent role not only in the Church's *bene esse* but also its very *esse*."[31] Annan also notes that the Holy Spirit continues its constitutive work, as it is not limited to a single event. It is "a continuous recalling of the Spirit upon the Church."[32]

The Pentecostals acknowledge through their engagement with society that the Holy Spirit can transform everything according to God's plan. They affirm that the Holy Spirit exists in all avenues of human existence and invoke his power to challenge poverty, sickness, and bondage. They are active partners with the Holy Spirit. Simon Chan suggested that all churches believe in the Holy Spirit and must "cooperate with the Spirit in the advancing of the Kingdom of God in these structures."[33] Though on the surface, Pentecostals may seem to emphasize the personal transformation that the Holy Spirit affects, in actual practice, they emphasize the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor 12) for service. They emphasize that the corporate experience of the Holy Spirit is as vital as the individual experience of the Holy Spirit. They believe that the Holy Spirit is given for the benefit of the body of Christ and those outside the church. As Snell observes, the activity of the Holy Spirit "is not limited only to the sphere of the individual believer or even the Church but extends to the whole creation."[34] Pentecostals affirm the Holy Spirit's presence outside the body of Christ in the broader world of human existence, transforming lives through healing and deliverance services.

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[31] Stephen Ebo Annan, "'Do Not Stifle the Spirit': The Vision of Yves Congar for Charismatic Ecclesiology," *New Blackfriars* 95, no. 1058 (2014): 453.
[32] Annan, 453.
[33] Simon Chan, "Mother Church: Toward a Pentecostal Ecclesiology," *Pneuma* 22, no. 2 (September 2000): 206.
[34] Jeffrey T Snell, "Beyond the Individual and Into the World: A Call to Participation in the Larger Purposes of the Spirit on the Basis of Pentecostal Theology," *Pneuma* 14, no. 1 (1992): 48.

They challenge oppressive structures, recognizing that the Holy Spirit is above the evil spirits in the popular notions of spirits that animate this world's social, political or economic structures—ideologies, persuasions, religious convictions and so on. The Holy Spirit is different from all the spirits that govern this world. Elaborating on the fact that on the Day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit "came from heaven" (Acts 2:2), Zokoue stresses this essential character of the Holy Spirit. He observes, "The Holy Spirit does not emerge from the bosom of humanity; he is not of earthly origin, and he cannot, therefore, be comparable to the spirits which haunt this world."[35]

Empowering Community

The Pentecostal communities are empowering communities as the church continues Christ's mission in the power of the Holy Spirit. The church is envisioned as a place where the powerless are empowered for their God-given tasks, as the early church exemplified what God could do with a group of ordinary people when they were united as a community.

The power of the individuals ensues from the power of the community. Although using military imagery, Dutch theologian Abraham Kuyper envisioned the church as a table where soldiers could eat and drink to refresh themselves after being tired from the battle outside the church. He says, "The church is rather like the army tent of the Lord where soldiers strengthen themselves before that battle, where they treat their wounds after the battle, and where one who has become 'prisoner by the sword of the Word' is fed at the table of the Lord."[36] The church thus exists to empower individuals for their God-given engagement with the world.

Doctrine of the Priesthood of all Believers

The priesthood of all believers is a doctrine shared by all Christians, although they may differ in its interpretation and implications. Most Pentecostal movements subscribe to the doctrine of "priesthood of all believers," which is a doctrine of the Radical Reformation, with some modifications. Groups like the Plymouth Brethren deny any distinction between the clergy and laity, refuse to use ecclesiastical titles such as Pastor, Reverend, or Bishop, and reject formal ordination. However,

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[35] Zokoue, "The Church as Pneumatic Community: Toward an Ecclesiology for the African Context," 151.

[36] Abraham Kuyper, *Rooted & Grounded: The Church as Organism and Institution*, Kindle (Grand Rapids, MI: Christian's Library Press, 2013) loc. 318.

Classical Pentecostals affirm the five-fold ministry (Eph 4:11—12), recognizing these offices through ordination and, using ecclesiastical titles, refer to the leader of a community of believers as Pastor. However, Pentecostals generally believe that a believing, baptized person is eligible to lead, pray, preach, and preside at the Lord's Table, where in other denominations, only an ordained person is allowed to do so. This democratic and inclusive definition of the priesthood of all believers has essential implications for Pentecostal identity and mission.

The place of Hierarchy

One of the main implications of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is the place of hierarchy in the community of believers. Hierarchy is paternalistic as it does everything for the people without allowing the people anything to do for themselves or each other. It stands in the way of the believers becoming a community with equality and mutual sharing as in the early church. Some historians of Christianity argue that Nicea and the subsequent reimagining of the church as an appendage of the Constantine Empire made hierarchy a necessary evil within the church. Consequently, the church left her call to serve the world and the political interests of the empire. Alexandre J. M. E Christoyannopoulos portrays this impact on Christian mission in somewhat sarcastic terms: "Christ, who had turned the Roman empire upside down, was turned into a lapdog for the Roman emperor."[37] Hierarchy is the church aping the political structure of the empire to serve the interests of the empire somewhat covertly.

Pentecostals who conceive the church as a community of believers of equal standing with God affirm that the church "is not a pyramid whose passive base receives everything from the apex."[38] Pentecostal understanding of the Trinity as three equal persons, who practice mutuality and love, negates any hierarchy. Hierarchy robs the people of power as it creates dependency upon itself. However, though appearing to be all-powerful, the hierarchies also have limits.

With all its hierarchies and bureaucracies, the church is not conducive to acting as an agent of transformation. As Elliott comments, "The church acts as an enormous clobbering machine." According to him, it discourages the activists who "suffer at the hands of hierarchies and bureaucracies which, exhibiting little of the freedom and the joy

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[37] Alexandre J. M. E Christoyannopoulos, *Christian Anarchism: A Political Commentary on the Gospel*, Abridged ed. (Exeter: Imprint Academic, 2011), 70.
[38] Annan, "Do Not Stifle the Spirit," 456.

Christ entrusted to his apostles, secure the status quo and, along with it, their own survival."[39] The diminishing role of hierarchy is a feature of ecclesiology that churches in the non-Western world tend to gravitate toward. As Volf calls it, this "ecclesiological shift" makes the new churches move away from the hierarchical models to "participative models of church configuration."[40] The church emerging in the global South is the movement of the subalterns.

Autonomy of the Local Community

Another important implication of the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers is the autonomy of the local community and the individual's autonomy. Autonomy means freedom from coercion from a dominant system or individuals. In addition to freedom from coercion, it implies the ability to make independent decisions sensitive to the context. Social scientists agree that, despite globalization, local issues still dominate human life. Autonomy of the believing community paves the way for faith to become contextual. Such communities are the seedbeds of genuine contextual theologies. For the Pentecostals, the autonomy of the local community extends not only to its governance but also to its inner life, encompassing confession, prayer, and worship, which does not require a ritual expert. This is very much in line with what Clarke, a Dalit Liberation theologian, suggested: "Proper worship in the Indian context is not a law that needs to be discerned by the specialist and made binding on the people."[41] Similarly, Volf argues that "the presence of Christ does not enter the church through the 'narrow portals' of ordained office, but rather through the dynamic life of the entire church."[42]

Autonomy of the Individual

The autonomy of the local community does not mean that it replaces the hierarchy and imposes its powers on the individual. The Pentecostal church structure and confessions empower persons of average ability to engage in God's work of liberation. Autonomy of the individual means freedom from cohesion, even within an autonomous community.

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[39] Michael C Elliott, *Freedom, Justice and Christian Counter-Culture.* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 210.
[40] Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 12.
[41] Sathianathan Clarke, "Hindutva, Religious and Ethnocultural Minorities, and Indian-Christian Theology," *Harvard Theological Review; Cambridge* 95, no. 2 (April 2002): 221.
[42] Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 152.

Autonomy allows individuals the freedom to speak and to share power with other community members. Autonomy of the individual within an autonomous community is not a new concept, but it has precedents in the early Christian church. Paul claims that he did not consult anyone when he launched his mission after the risen Christ met him on the Damascus Road.

> But when he who had set me apart before I was born, and who called me by his grace, was pleased to reveal his Son to me, in order that I might preach him among the Gentiles, I did not immediately consult with anyone; nor did I go up to Jerusalem to those who were apostles before me, but I went away into Arabia, and returned again to Damascus. (Gal 1:15—17)

It took another three years before he met any of the apostles. His mission was an autonomous decision guided by the Holy Spirit. Similarly, when Paul and Barnabas parted ways—one on a Jewish mission and the other on a mission to the Gentiles—it was also an individual decision, made without the cohesion or consent of a higher, centralized authority. However, history bears witness to the fact that both were part of God's plan for his mission in the world. Autonomy of the individual is essential for social transformation. Autonomy is freedom; the opposite is slavery. Structures controlled by those who oppress and the collaborators of oppressors naturally muffle the voice of the oppressed. The oppressed can speak only if everyone is autonomous and exercises their right to speak.

Autonomous Individuals in Autonomous Communities

In Pentecostal movements that are liberating, the individual gets the vision and inspiration for social action from the faith community. The autonomy of the community and the autonomy of the individual are interlinked. Only individuals with autonomy must form the community. The community of people empowered to think, act, and inspire is the transformative community. Such communities inspire individuals and communities to transform themselves and their contexts. The autonomy of the individual and the autonomy of the community are the direct work of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit, and not the structures, empowers individuals for liberation. On the Day of Pentecost, the empowering tongues of fire rested "on each one of them" (Acts 2:3), not just on the movement's leaders. However, this individual empowerment leads to the formation of the community. When the Holy Spirit empowered the individuals, they formed into a community: "And

all who believed were together and had all things in common" (Acts 2:44).

Autonomy of the individual doesn't mean individualism. Individualism is as dangerous as hierarchical structures. The church is a local assembly; it exists only when gathered together. Thus, it is against both individualism and hierarchical constructs. Volf further expounded this: "Christ's presence through the Spirit makes a person into a Christian and simultaneously leads that person into ecclesial communion, constituting the church thus in a twofold fashion: first by adding a person to the church and, second, by mediating faith to others through that person."[43]

Conclusion

The Pentecostal mission is not only a spiritual movement that focuses exclusively on an individual's salvation and prepares them for heaven. As a Holy Spirit-driven movement, like the wind, Pentecostals have been sensitive to the challenges of their world. Their re-imagination of what the Church of Jesus Christ ought to be and do has propelled their mission of integral transformation. Their understanding of the church's ministry, grounded in the doctrine of the priesthood of all believers, has created an egalitarian and democratic space in which all can be active agents in transforming the individual and society.

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[43] Volf, *After Our Likeness*, 175.

The Role of the Supervisor and the Importance of Quality Communication in Supervision: A Storied Approach to Doctoral Supervision

Kenneth J. Archer

Abstract

The PhD is one of the highest academic degrees awarded by universities and institutions of higher education. An increasing number of Pentecostal and Charismatic students are pursuing a PhD. In response to this demand, many universities and seminaries within the Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions are incorporating the PhD into their graduate and postgraduate programs. This essay suggests a storied approach to doctoral supervision and emphasizes the vital role of communication in the doctorateness process. I propose a storied approach to supervision that focuses on all aspects of a story—the beginning, the middle, and the end—while underscoring the importance of communication in supervision. The educational journey of the research student will become a part of their life story, and I believe that their supervision experience is crucial for a successful experience, as well as how they develop and share their narrative of their educational journey.

Keywords: doctorateness, PhD supervision, story, Pentecostal and Charismatic education

Introduction[1]

The PhD is one of the highest educational degrees awarded by universities and institutions of higher education.[2] An ever-growing

[1] A portion of this paper was submitted to Stellenbosch University in fulfillment of the Certificate of Competence for "CREST Online Training Course for Supervisors of Doctoral Candidates at African Universities." The Certificate was awarded on November 29, 2025. Special thanks to Dr. Carol Alexander, Dean of the Graduate School, Trinity Bible College and Graduate School, Ellendale, ND, for the opportunity and financial support that enabled me to take the training course.

[2] Professional doctorates, such as the traditional DMin, are considered equivalent to the PhD at some institutions. The Association of Theological

number of Pentecostal-Charismatic students are seeking a PhD. Those seeking a PhD as part of a ministry vocational calling will most likely apply to higher education institutions whose primary purpose is training ministers for various kinds of pastoral ministry.[3] In response to this demand, the PhD degree is becoming part of the graduate/postgraduate degree programs of many universities and seminaries in the Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions.[4] This essay proposes a storied approach to doctoral supervision and addresses the crucial role of communication in the doctorateness process.[5]

Earning a PhD is not an easy process; there is no guarantee of the successful completion of the degree. Moira Peelo writes, "the PhD is a risky enterprise for both supervisors and students … The PhD is not a uniform degree, and supervision is not a clear-cut, simple activity; students study part-time, at a distance from their universities, on doctoral programmes and in the workplace."[6] However, to complete the degree, supervision is necessary. Literature universally attests that the

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Schools (ATS) Commission Standards for Accreditation (June 2020) states, "The Doctor of Ministry degree is an advanced professional doctorate" (7). https://www.ats.edu/files/galleries/standards-of-accreditation.pdf; see also https://www.ats.edu/. Yet many see the PhD as the highest degree awarded because it requires them to contribute something new to human knowledge and practice. For hiring purposes at graduate higher education institutions, the PhD is typically preferred.

[3] For the distinct challenges of educating clergy, see Charles R. Foster, Lisa E. Dahill, Lawrence A. Golemon, Barbra Wang Tolentio, *Educating Clergy: Teaching Practices and Pastoral Imagination* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 2006), 20-38. They argue that "Clergy education involves more than teaching students a particular way of thinking; it requires that those ways of thinking be linked constructively with ways of being and doing" (p. 22). Such an understanding of clergy education works well with the concept of the doctorateness process, for it is more than thinking skills and is also concerned about becoming as a way of being through doing, and this brings about personal transformation.

[4] For a succinct overview of Pentecostal theological higher education, see Mark J. Cartledge, "Pentecostal Theological and Higher Education: From Tensions to Opportunities" in *Pneuma*, 46: 3-4 (2024), 345-366. In fact, this entire journal issue is dedicated to higher education in Pentecostal and Charismatic traditions.

[5] The following proposal would also be beneficial to those supervising students pursuing an MA thesis.

[6] Moira Peelo, *Understanding Supervision and the PhD,* 1st ed. (London and New York: Continuum, 2010), 11. https://www.perlego.com/book/806693. [Accessed 29 September 2025].

student cannot achieve it as a solo endeavor.[7] Supervision is required; it is mandatory.

Supervision of the doctorateness process (doing and earning a doctorate) involves a student, an accredited academic institution that will confer the doctorate on the student, and the student's supervisor(s).[8] The supervisor's role is often highlighted as the key to the student's doctoral journey.[9]

Given the time, emotional, intellectual, and physical effort involved in tackling a PhD, framing the journey as a story would benefit everyone involved, especially the students and supervisors. I am proposing a storied approach to supervision that focuses on all aspects of a story—the beginning, the middle, and the end—while highlighting the importance of communication in supervision. The research student's journey will become part of their life story, and I believe their supervision experience matters most to how they will construct and tell their story.

Supervision and Supervisors

From the moment a research student is admitted into a PhD program to the final defense of their thesis/dissertation, earning a PhD is a long, challenging, and, at times, frightening journey. One vital factor in a student's survival on this journey is the quality of supervision they receive. Supervision is an essential factor in the successful completion of

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[7] https://network.febs.org/posts/guiding-principles-for-phd-supervision. [Accessed 1 April 2026]

[8] In keeping with the emphasis on the importance of the original contribution of the research project and development of an independent scholar, the Salzburg Principles II (2010) recommendations affirm that "doctoral education is an individual journey" (2). However, principle 2 addresses the significant role of the institution in being responsible for quality educational process, and principle 5 speaks to the crucial role of supervision. "Supervision must be a collective effort with clearly defined and written responsibilities of the main supervisor, supervisory team, doctoral candidate, doctoral school, research group, and the institution, leaving room for the individual development of the doctoral candidate" (5); *Salzburg II Recommendations: European Universities' Achievements Since 2005 in Implementing the Salzburg Principles* (The European University Association, 2010).

[9] K. Fulgence, "A Theoretical Perspective on how Doctoral Supervisors Develop Supervision Skills," *International Journal of Doctoral Studies* 14 (2019), 722. https://doi.org/10.28945/4446.

a PhD.[10] In addition to the traditional PhD, professional doctorates also require the necessary involvement of supervisors. Furthermore, the quality of student supervision also affects the institution's reputation and financial health, as it has been shown that quality supervision decreases attrition rates.[11] It is in the best interest of all involved to assist the students as best as possible, even if they cannot complete the degree satisfactorily and are not awarded the sought-after PhD.[12]

For students to have a positive supervisory experience, supervisors must enter the student's educational journey. Supervisors should do so with a clear sense of what is expected of them as supervisors, and the students must know what is expected of them by the institution, especially their supervisor(s). Furthermore, supervisors should investigate the expectations of the doctoral students they supervise.[13] The core of the supervisor and researcher relationship is communication.[14]

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[10] Martyn Polkinghorne, et al. "Doctoral Supervision: A Best Practice Review" *Encyclopedia* 3, no. 1 **(**2023), 46-59. https://doi.org/10.3390/encyclopedia3010004.

[11] See Ryland Egan, et al. "Relationships Between Area of Academic Concentration, Supervisory Style, Student Needs, and Best Practices," *Studies in Higher Education* 34, no. 3 (May 2009), 337. For a helpful study focusing strictly on online doctoral students' attrition and retention, see Ted M. Cross, "The Gritty: Grit and Non-Traditional Doctoral Student Success," *The Journal of Educators Online* 11, no. 3 (October 2014), 1-29. https://www.thejeo.com/archive/archive/2014_113/crosspdf. Cross argues that grit, which he defines as a passion and persistence for attaining long-term goals, is a vital psychological characteristic necessary for the student to complete the PhD. I suggest that this should be equally true for doctoral supervisors.

[12] There are multiple reasons a student will be hindered in their progress and may not finish the process. Health, time constraints, personal problems, family responsibility, work constraints, and money are often major challenges. Poor supervision should not be assumed to be the precipitating cause, yet according to Moira Peelo, 28% of students said that poor supervision was the primary problem; Moira Peelo, *Understanding Supervision and the PhD,* 1st ed. (London: Continuum, 2010). 81. https://www.perlego.com/book/806693.

[13] Anne Lee, "How Can We Develop Supervisors for the Modern Doctorate?" *Studies in Higher Education* 45, no. 3 (2018), 878-890. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075079.2018.1438116.

[14] Jacqueline Lück, "So What Do You Think? The Role of Dialogue in Doctoral Learning," in Liezel Frick, et. al. *Postgraduate Study in South Africa:*

The traditional or dyad approach to supervision is one of the oldest approaches. It is characterized by more one-on-one supervision, where an academic scholar is a supervisor and a research student becomes the supervisor's apprentice. This is also identified as an apprentice model. In this model, "the supervisor acts as a critical mediator and mentor, forming a symbiotic and cooperative relationship with the student."[15] Supervision in any model requires healthy, wholesome, and honest communication throughout the student's doctoral journey.[16] The relationship's health requires good communication between both parties, and quality communication involves time.[17] Regular conversation is essential for a successful supervisor-student relationship to flourish.[18]

In the remainder of this paper, I will address communication as related to storied supervision. This will be grounded in and related to the relationship between the one supervisor and one postgraduate research student.[19] This supervisory relationship is when the student's educational journey becomes intertwined with the PhD supervisor. A story motif will highlight the importance of maintaining regular communication in supervision, for the supervisor will be a main character, and hopefully a supportive protagonist, not an antagonist, in the research student's story.

Supervision as a Storied Journey

The educational process is frequently referred to as a personal journey. As such, it is more of a storied experience than simply a series of checkpoints to achieve. Even the dissertation is the culmination of years

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Surviving and Succeeding (Stellenbosch: SUN Press, 2016), 174-176. See also Peelo, *Understanding Supervision and the PhD*, which addresses communication throughout the book.

[15] Liezel Frick, CREST Online Training Course for Supervisors of Doctoral Candidates at African Universities, Module 4.1, Models of Supervision, slide 5.

[16] Although other models are used, competent communication is necessary. Communication becomes more complicated when more than one supervisor is involved.

[17] Rylan Egan, et. al. "Relationships Between Area of Academic Concentration, Supervisory Style, Student Needs, and Best Practices," *ERIC* 34, no. 3 (May 2009), 337-345. They write, "The literature makes clear that spending time to meet the diverse needs of graduate students is a crucial component of the graduate supervision process" (340).

[18] Lee, "How Can We Develop Supervisors for the Modern Doctorate?"; Egan et al., "Relationships Between Area of Academic Concentration, Supervisory Style, Student Needs, and Best Practices," 340.

[19] However, it is applicable to various styles and models of supervision.

of research, writing, and rewriting. As a storied experience, various kinds of conflict drive the journey to find a resolution. The primary motivational plotline is the pursuit of the PhD. Hurdles, challenges, and competing factors contribute to the complications of reaching the desired destination of this educational journey, which is being awarded the PhD. A good supervisor is a vital lifeline in the student's academic journey and will enable them to resolve it well.[20]

Stories are a fundamental way humans make sense of their lived experience.[21] Like a story, the educational journey process has a beginning, middle, and end. In a dyad model, the supervisor is introduced to the postgraduate research student (PGT) at the start of the process and is expected to journey along with the student as a supervising mentor until the student reaches the end of the journey, which hopefully will be a positive oral defense of the written dissertation, and then is awarded the PhD.[22] For such a positive experience to transpire, effective, practical, and critical-friendly communication must occur regularly to develop and maintain a meaningful mentoring relationship. Before I address communication, it would be beneficial to address supervisory models, for this has ramifications on communication in supervision.

Supervisors and Their Preferred Style of Supervision

To supervise from one's strengths would mean that the supervisor has some sense of their approach to supervision. Supervisors often draw upon their own doctoral journey, especially how they were supervised,

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[20] Katherine Flugence, "A Theoretical Perspective on How Doctoral Supervisors Develop Supervisory Skills," *International Journal of Doctoral Studies* 14 (2019), 723-724.

[21] Alasdair Macintyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory,* 2nd Edition, (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984); Dan P. McAdams, "Narrative Identity" in *Handbook of Identity Theory and Research*, edited by Seth J. Schwartz, Keon Luyckx, and Vivian L. Vignoles (London: Springer, 2011), 99-115.

[22] Doctoral attrition rates are high and have held steady over recent years. 35-50% depending on the discipline, according to Zora M. Wolfe, Katia Ciampa and Ashley DiRienzo, "Supporting First-Year Doctoral Students" *Inside Higher Ed*'s, December 19, 2023, https://www.insidehighered.com/opinion/career-advice/2023/12/19/best-practices-supporting-first-year-phd-students-opinion#.

for their pedagogy and approach to supervision.[23] If a supervisor is unaware of the style of supervision they prefer, they may be unable to adapt to the supervision preferences of a student. Reflecting on the strengths and weaknesses of one's doctoral supervision is helpful, for it provides an opportunity to identify a relational style one might operate out of as a supervisor. It will also help the supervisor become more aware of students' different perspectives about the supervisor's role in their educational journey.

Terry Gatfield's study proves beneficial in further identifying a supervisor's preferred operating style. He identifies four prominent types: laissez-faire, pastoral, directorial, and contractual.[24]

The laissez-faire style is more non-directive and less committed to high levels of personal interaction with the student. This style implies the supervisor would offer less support and structure to the student. Relationally, the supervisor would appear distant, uncaring, and uninvolved.[25] A student with this type of supervisor would need to be proactive in initiating and engaging their supervisor for specific help with the research project. However, students who are more independent and experienced researchers might enjoy academic freedom and creativity enabled by a laissez-faire style.

The pastoral style, like the laissez-faire, is one in which a supervisor operates with low structure yet offers much more support to the student. The "supervisor provides considerable personal care and support, but not necessarily in a task-driven way."[26] This style encourages students to share more about their lives and challenges. Given the environment being generated by such a style and the frequency of interaction between the two, it is more likely that students needing some structural elements added to their supervision would ask for it, unlike the laissez-faire style. This, however, would depend more on the student to initiate than the supervisor.

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[23] Anne Lee, "How are Doctoral Students Supervised? Concepts of Doctoral Research Supervision," *Studies in Higher Education* 33, no. 3, (June 2008), 267-281. https://doi.org/10.1080/03075070802049202; M. Polkinghorne, et al. "Doctoral Supervision: A Best Practice Review," 51.

[24] Terry Gatfield, "An Investigation into PhD Supervisory Management Styles: Development of a Conceptual Model and its Managerial Implications," *Journal of Higher Education Policy and Management* 27, no. 3, (November 2005), 317-318.

[25] Ibid, 317.

[26] Ibid, 318.

The directional style of supervision is high on structure because the supervisor schedules regular opportunities for guidance on functions related to the research project. This supervisor style features structured learning activities, encouraging and holding the students accountable for time management, and meeting assigned writing deadlines and tasks. Working regularly and closely with students develops an interactive relationship, yet the supervisor avoids personal, non-task-related issues.[27] But what if the student desires the supervisor to be more of a friend and mentor? This would mean the supervisor needs to become more pastoral. Such a supervisor would be a personal and critical friend while remaining an academic guide. Such a mentoring friendship might not be possible if the supervisor is not able or open to such a possibility. If this is the case, then supervision will be more of a hindrance than help to such a student.

Gatfield's fourth type is the contractual style. This style reflects a supervisor who gives high structure and high support. The supervisor has good interpersonal and relational abilities and competent management skills, providing direction and guidance to the research student.[28] The student may not need such a detailed structure nor desire a close relationship. A supervisor who is aware of the degree of the student's desired need for structure and personal relationships would be able to adopt the most suitable style. Such adaptation, however, would be limited by the supervisor's management skills, personality, and interpersonal emotional health.

A supervisor can benefit from reflecting on their supervision style using Gatfield's typology for comparison. They could identify their preferred style and then develop and expand it. Combining the four as needed would strengthen their supervisory abilities and enhance the student experience.

The contractual and directional approach would introduce more consistency to meetings and create additional opportunities for structural guidance. If a supervisor's initial understanding is that supervision should be more clinical and relationally distant, they could benefit from adjusting their perspective and adopting a more pastoral style without losing sight of their essential role. Regardless of the chosen style, the supervisor needs to develop strong interpersonal skills to be approachable and foster a mutually beneficial supervision experience.

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[27] Ibid, 318.

[28] Ibid, 318.

Cultivating a pastoral attitude towards the student would be helpful for the student, unless they prefer a more distant, clinical relationship.

Developing a pastoral supervisory style involves the supervisor engaging with students' everyday life experiences. This requires supervisors to create space during meetings to listen to personal challenges students face and how these impact their research. Students may encounter crises, family issues, time management struggles, health problems, frustrations, and more during their doctoral journey. The supervisor should consider this when scheduling meetings and possibly set aside a specific time before or toward the end of the session to invite the student to share. The pastoral approach promotes a mentor-coach-friend relationship that fosters personal growth and transformation for both the student and the supervisor.

For supervisors in Pentecostal settings, such a pastoral attitude is expected by the student, and for higher education institutions, the spiritual aspect should be connected to and integrated within academic experience. Good supervision requires qualified supervisors who are both academically and spiritually mature. These supervisors will provide the quality time necessary for students to complete their doctoral degrees successfully.

The Beginning of the Storied Journey

Communication is a crucial element of supervision. A supervisor with poor communication skills and interpersonal abilities, regardless of their academic achievement and spiritual maturity, can seriously hinder the supervisory relationship and threaten the successful completion of the research. Starting off strong on this journey means that the supervisor approaches the relationship with a pastoral mindset, valuing good communication. Such an attitude would promote the creation of a memorandum of understanding (MOU) between the supervisor and the student. Effective supervision depends on clear communication of roles and expectations. It is important to address and clarify expectations regarding meeting frequency, feedback deadlines, and research progress.

The MOU provides for a positive beginning of a relationship and encourages good, clear communication throughout the relationship. It will unmask expectations by enabling the supervisor to understand the student's desired supervision goals. Together, they identify and agree on

the level of structure and establish the boundaries that the supervisor and student prefer.[29]

Sound ethical practices are important to good supervisory relationships.[30] Professional supervision demands that the relationship avoid sexual involvement and even be sensitive to appropriate physical touch and awareness of the possible development of inappropriate levels of emotional dependence. A pastoral style would maintain a professional relationship while encouraging a friendly, approachable posture, thus enhancing the supervisory process. The journey begins, and the story starts to unfold with the aid of a memorandum of understanding.[31]

The Middle of the Story

The MOU officially begins the middle of the supervisory relationship. The middle of the story transpires through regular supervisory meetings. Trust must be built, and the relationship deepened. The sessions would focus on students' research design and drafts.[32] Feedback is necessary, and students need and desire it. Because the middle covers an extended period, an occasional review of the MOU would help maintain clarity on the purpose and process of the meetings. Conflict will inevitably occur, obstacles will appear, and challenges will arise. The student should have

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[29] For an MOU, see Enhancing Postgraduate Environment https://postgradenvironments.com/, specifically, https://postgradenvironments.com/2018/01/31/memorandum-understanding-mou-supervisor-postgraduate/#:~:text=How%20do%20you%20feel%20about,along%20the%20research%20journey%20together?

[30] E. Löfström and K. Pyhältö, "What Are Ethics in Doctoral Supervision, and How Do They Matter? Doctoral Students' *Perspective*," *Scandinavian Journal of Educational Research* 64, no. 4 (2019), 535-550. https://doi.org/10.1080/00313831.2019.1595711.

[31] For a more detailed template provided by Enhancing Postgraduate Environments, see https://postgradenvironments.com/; https://postgradenvironments.com/2018/01/31/memorandum-understanding-mou-supervisor-postgraduate/. Stellenbosch University requires an MOU between supervisors and research students and provides an example template to assist the various supervisors and research departments. The templates would also help in developing an MOU; https://www.sun.ac.za/english/research-innovation/Research-Development/memorandum-of-understanding-supervisor-and-postgraduate.

[32] On research design, see Donileen R. Loske, *Methodological Thinking: Basic Principles of Social Research Design,* 2nd Edition (Thousand Oaks, Sage Publications, 2017).

a way to address these issues with the supervisor, and in doing so, they will become part of the storied experience of the supervision process. If the supervisor is the primary issue for a student, institutional leadership would need to be brought in to assist in finding a workable resolution, and this process should be discussed early in the relationship.

Regular meetings will mark the middle of the story, and sometimes additional meetings between the supervisor and researcher may be necessary. This will depend on the students' progress and their need to meet. This encourages students and supervisors to practice good time management and organizational skills. A supportive mentor-friend-coach supervisor might need to step in and schedule meetings with short task assignments to assist the student or to encourage them to seek additional support if needed. The middle of the unfolding story should keep the end in mind—the final draft of the dissertation. This way, the student navigates the process with the supervisor in a manner that helps them complete the task. Submitting the final draft and preparing for the viva marks the beginning of the end.

The End of the Story

The end of the storied journey is completing and passing the doctoral program and receiving the PhD. The student's dissertation is approved for submission. In some institutions, a student might want to submit the dissertation and may do so without their supervisor's permission. The student then moves to prepare for their viva, the living voice of the doctoral thesis.[33]

In the traditional, more European-influenced model, the supervisor is not involved in the oral defense. Depending on the institution, the supervisor may or may not be present in the student's defense, and if they are present, they do so as a silent observer. Regardless, the supervisor will be informed of the outcome.

A chairperson usually moderates the viva, often someone from the institution. The traditional dyad model involves one internal examiner (reader) and one external examiner (reader). The external examiner should be a seasoned academic scholar with a sound academic

[33] Jacqueline H. Watts, "Preparing Doctoral Candidates for the Viva: Issues for Students and Supervisors," *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 36, no. 3 (2012), 371-381. http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/0309877X.2011.632819; Ndileni P. Mudzielwana, "THE VIVA Voice: The Living Voice of a Doctoral Thesis" in Liezel Frick, et. al. *Postgraduate Study in South Africa: Surviving and Succeeding* (Stellenbosch, SUN Press, 2016), 213-222.

reputation. Typically, the external examiner is a specialist in the student's research area. The student is aware of the responsibilities of both the external and internal examiners. The outcome of the viva is detailed in the examiners' final report, which states whether they pass; will pass once the required revisions are completed within a reasonable time; or fail. The worst-case scenario for the student and supervisor is that the student fails and is not awarded a degree.[34] In such cases, the researcher might be awarded a lesser degree (MA, ThM, or MPhil), or no degree at all. It is in everyone's best interest that, when a student is admitted into the doctoral program, barring any severe calamity, they should be able to complete the process successfully, bringing a celebratory ending to their lengthy educational journey.

Conclusion

The essay discussed supervision from a storied perspective. This viewpoint highlights the centrality of good communication, particularly with attention to the traditional or dyad model of supervision. Communication between a supervisor and a postgraduate student would improve by implementing and using an MOU. Additionally, communication would be bettered by adopting a pastoral deposition in the supervision of research students. Regular meetings that provide guidance and keep the end goal in focus require effective communication built on strong relationships. Mutual prayer and support would be a regular part of supervisory meetings.

The doctorateness process will be told and retold through several narrative perspectives, such as family members, friends, colleagues, administrative personnel, and the supervisor, but what matters most is the student's story. In the student's journey, the supervisor is a crucial character.[35] The dyadic model requires the student to work with one supervisor throughout the PhD program. The supervisor works closely with the students, mentoring, coaching, advising, reviewing their research, and monitoring their progress.

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[34] Here the supervisor as a pastoral-mentor can assist the student process experience overall, and the unsuccessful completion of the PhD this in ways that would help the student move forward.

[35] In Christian institutions, the students' stories will be embedded into their more extensive spiritual journey, one that will make sense of their lived reality. For more on a Pentecostal theological formational story, see Kenneth J. Archer, "Pentecostal Theology as Story: Participating in God's Mission" in *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology,* ed. Wolfgang Vondey (Oxford and New York: Routledge, 2020), 18-28.

Communication during the educational journey will contribute significantly to the student's storied experience. Quality and quantity are necessary for a mentor-friendship and student-researcher-colleague relationship to flourish. Supervision is a storied journey with a beginning (MOU), middle (supervisory meetings), and end (dissertation and viva). The students and supervisors must have grit and determination to move the journey forward to the desired ending.[36] The end of the story will either culminate in celebratory praise or a hymn of lament. Yet either, or even something in between, should enable the person to move forward in their relational life story with the Holy Spirit. The supervisor-mentor-pastor will be key in providing ways to end the story well—that is, for the student's well-being.

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[36] Ted M. Cross, "The Gritty: Grit and Non-Traditional Doctoral Student Success," in *The Journal of Educators Online* 11.3 (October 2014), 1-29. Grit is understood as the determination to press through the process regardless of the many challenges.

Reviews

Robert P. Menzies and Craig S. Keener, *Acts*, Word and Spirit Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2025). 380 pp**.**

In this co-authored volume, Robert P. Menzies and Craig S. Keener, both leading Pentecostal New Testament scholars, offer a paragraph-by-paragraph exposition of the book of Acts (Acts 1–28) as part of the Word and Spirit Commentary on the New Testament series. The commentary is divided both structurally and thematically: Menzies contributes the theological portion of the introduction and covers Acts 1–12, while Keener, building on his magisterial four-volume work on Acts, provides the historical introduction and comments on Acts 13–28. Together, the authors highlight a unifying Lukan theme: the Spirit as the agent of prophetic empowerment for mission, transcending cultural and ethnic boundaries.

A distinctive feature of this commentary is its consistent articulation of the Spirit's role in Acts as enabling prophetic witness. According to the authors, Luke presents the gift of the Spirit not as a soteriological agent, but as divine empowerment for participation in God's redemptive mission (6). The commentary organizes the book around this prophetic theme, tracing its development through seven sections: the prophetic call (Acts 1:1–14); the prophetic vocation embraced (Acts 1:15–2:47); prophetic witness in Jerusalem (Acts 3:1–6:7); in Judea and Samaria (Acts 6:8–9:31); the beginnings of Gentile mission (Acts 9:32–12:25); Paul's prophetic witness in the diaspora (Acts 12:25–19:41); and his final witness in Rome (Acts 20:1–28:31).

In his interpretation of Acts 1:1–14, Menzies argues that the "promise of the Father" (Acts 1:4–5) is fulfilled at Pentecost (2:4), which he sees as the realization of Joel's prophecy. This event, he contends, signifies prophetic inspiration rather than cleansing, consistent with earlier Spirit-empowerments in Luke's Gospel (e.g., John, Elizabeth, Zechariah, Jesus) (33–34, 59). Grounded in this continuity, the commentary interprets Spirit-baptism primarily through the lens of prophetic vocation rather than its soteriological significance.

One of the commentary's strengths lies in its ability to bridge the first-century Lukan narrative with contemporary Christian experience. Menzies argues that the same Spirit who empowered the early church continues to empower believers today. For instance, Joel's promise (Joel 2:28–29), fulfilled at Pentecost, is illustrated through the life of Jashil Choi, co-pastor of the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Korea (pp. 63–64). Similarly, in discussing Peter's boldness before the Sanhedrin (Acts 4:1–12), Menzies draws parallels with the post-1949 Chinese house church movement, which has resisted Communist state control by affirming Christ as the church's sole head (84, 93).

Menzies further highlights the Spirit's empowering presence in Stephen's witness and martyrdom (Acts 6:10), drawing a parallel with Ukrainian Pentecostal leader Ivan Voronaev, who proclaimed the gospel under Soviet persecution and ultimately died for his faith (126). Both figures, he argues, embody obedience to the Spirit, reinforcing the commentary's thesis that prophetic empowerment remains essential for faithful witness in the contexts of suffering and persecution. The miraculous ministry of the apostles in Acts 5, particularly healings associated with Peter's shadow, is interpreted as a defining mark of the eschatological "last days"—the period between Christ's first and second comings (95–100). Menzies argues that these signs underscore the continuity of Spirit-empowerment and serve as a model for contemporary ministry. He positions Luke's portrayal of healing and miracles as theologically foundational for Pentecostal and Charismatic theology, affirming the Spirit's ongoing role in equipping believers for mission and supernatural works.

In Acts 8, where the Spirit is imparted to the Samaritans through apostolic laying on of hands, Menzies challenges James Dunn's interpretation. He argues that the Spirit's coming here is not simply a marker of incorporation into the body of Christ but a distinct experience of empowerment for mission. The Samaritans had already believed and been baptized (Acts 8:12–14), and thus the subsequent reception of the Spirit signals a separate, prophetic enabling. Menzies also emphasizes the differences between Lukan pneumatology and that of Paul or John (136–137). Acts 19:1–7, which recounts the Ephesian disciples receiving the Spirit, speaking in tongues, and prophesying, is interpreted as another instance of prophetic empowerment. Keener affirms that prophecy (2:17–18) and tongues (as in Acts 2:4 and 10:45–46) are indicators of Spirit-empowered mission (263). Both authors agree that Luke presents these manifestations as markers of the Spirit's ongoing missional work (264).

Keener's analysis of glossolalia in Acts 19 emphasizes its corporate character. Unlike Paul's instructions in 1 Corinthians 14, which pertain to orderly public worship, all instances of tongues in Acts occur in communal, simultaneous settings (2:4; 10:46; 19:6). Keener draws parallels with Korean Pentecostal prayer practices, where simultaneous prayer—whether in tongues or native languages—does not hinder edification but exemplifies Spirit-led unity (263–64). His insights offer a robust theological rationale for contemporary Pentecostal prayer practices within a framework of order and edification.

In Acts 20:7–12, the raising of Eutychus is contextualized alongside other biblical resurrections (e.g., Elijah, Elisha, Jesus, Peter). Keener supplements this biblical theology with modern testimonies of resurrection, including Jeff Markin in the U.S. and a young girl in the Congo, both reportedly revived through Spirit-led prayer (277–78). These accounts underscore the continuity of divine power and challenge cessationist claims. In Acts 21:1–14, Luke's reference to Philip's four prophetic daughters (Acts 21:8–9) is treated as evidence of the Spirit's inclusive empowerment across gender and age (cf. Acts 2:17–18). Keener contrasts their prophetic role with Agabus (Acts 21:10), emphasizing that Luke affirms both women and men as legitimate vessels of divine speech. He traces this egalitarian impulse through the Wesleyan and Holiness movements, highlighting female leaders such as Jarena Lee, Phoebe Palmer, and Catherine Booth, and notes that Pentecostalism remains the largest global movement supporting women's ordination (286).

Keener also addresses cessationist arguments against contemporary prophecy, contending that Scripture offers no indication that prophetic gifts ceased with the closure of the canon. While prophecy today must not establish new doctrine, it serves to encourage, warn, and edify (Acts 21:11; 1 Cor. 14:3). Thus, the cessationist position emerges as a post-biblical construct lacking textual support. In rejecting this view, Keener affirms the ongoing relevance of Spirit-empowered prophecy in the life of the church.

Finally, in his discussion of the conclusion of Acts, Keener argues that its open-ended nature reflects Luke's theological vision of an ongoing, Spirit-led mission (Acts 1:8). By concluding with Paul preaching "with boldness and without hindrance" (28:31), rather than narrating his martyrdom, Luke signals that the mission continues beyond the narrative itself. The Spirit who empowered Paul remains active, calling believers into the same prophetic witness and missional vocation (333–39).

This commentary constitutes a significant contribution to Pentecostal and evangelical scholarship and to the wider field of New Testament studies, particularly Lukan scholarship. Through rigorous exegesis and theological reflection, Menzies and Keener underscore the Spirit's function in Luke–Acts as the empowering force for prophetic mission. The work challenges interpretive frameworks that subordinate Luke's pneumatology to Pauline categories, allowing Luke's distinct theological voice to emerge. It also engages constructively with contemporary issues, such as gender, ecclesial authority, persecution, and charismatic gifts. By integrating scholarly rigor with pastoral sensitivity, this commentary is an invaluable resource for pastors, students, and academics seeking a Spirit-informed reading of Acts. It affirms not only the theological depth of Pentecostal tradition but also the enduring relevance of Luke's narrative for the global church today.

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Jorma Kuitunen, ed., *Transforming into an Intercultural Church in Multicultural Europe, Theological Roots and Practical Reflections from Central Europe and Finland* (Vantaa, Finland: Pentecostal Church of Finland, 2025). 292 pp.

Transforming into an Intercultural Church in Multicultural Europe is a scholarly volume that examines how European churches can adapt to increasing cultural diversity. Building upon the Finnish publication *Home for All Peoples, The Church in Multicultural Finland* (2019), this volume has been revised for the European context and expanded with additional chapters, including one from Germany. It assembles contributions from scholars and practitioners across Finland and Central Europe who reflect on the biblical imperative for the Church to serve as a "home for all peoples." The volume comprises five sections that explore biblical and theological foundations, reconsider the intercultural dimension of the early Church, and offer practical recommendations for local congregations.

The book presents a comprehensive and diverse examination of the pursuit of intercultural transformation within congregations in Finland and across Europe. The contributors, recognized experts in their fields, provide critical insights into the challenges facing global Christianity. The volume invites readers to broaden their perspectives, critically assess perceptions of the contemporary Christian church, and consider its

complex, global mission. Its relevance is underscored by current societal trends, notably the increased tensions surrounding refugees and immigrants.

In general, the book explores how the church's response to growing ethnic and cultural diversity tests its spiritual integrity: whether it remains rooted in the gospel or risks marginalization. It emphasizes that a loving spiritual community is characterized by an atmosphere of the Holy Spirit that revitalizes the church, an environment that does not occur by chance but requires intentional cultivation. The book discusses how European churches, particularly in Finland, are learning to develop welcoming, inclusive environments that emulate the early Church's model. It advocates viewing intercultural transformation as a strategic element of church revitalization. Integrating insights from theology, missiology, and intercultural ministry, the authors offer practical guidance for churches aiming to embrace diversity and evolve into more inclusive and vibrant communities. The authors assert that intercultural church transformation extends beyond adopting culturally sensitive practices; it involves reaffirming core values of the Kingdom of God.

Kuitunen and colleagues convincingly argue that intercultural transformation is not optional but fundamental to the Gospel. They draw on the early Church's cross-cultural identity to challenge congregations to rediscover the Kingdom of God as an "ideal culture" that transcends ethnicity, language, and tradition. Case studies illustrate how fostering inclusion, engaging leadership, and promoting mutual learning can rejuvenate church life, bringing joy, vitality, and fresh perspectives to members. Subsequent chapters address practical issues such as hospitality, the experiences of youth caught between cultures, volunteer burnout, and media portrayals of migrants.

What makes this book particularly valuable is its blend of theological depth and field-tested insight. Most chapters include "Key Insights," "Reflection Questions," and "Tips for Application," making the work not merely theoretical but a hands-on guide for pastors and leaders. In an age when migration continues to redefine Europe's social fabric, *Transforming into an Intercultural Church* offers a hopeful, Spirit-filled vision of unity in diversity, an indispensable guide for any congregation seeking to embody the Kingdom of God in a multicultural Europe and embracing migration as a catalyst for ecclesial renewal. It deserves a place on the reading list of anyone shaping the future of European Christianity.

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Craig S. Keener, *Suffering: Its Meaning for the Spirit-Filled Life* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2025). 285 pp. ISBN:9781540969439

Craig S. Keener's *"Suffering: Its Meaning for the Spirit-Filled Life"* presents a theologically rigorous and biblically grounded analysis of a perennial question within Christian doctrine. Keener endeavors to explain the significance of suffering for Spirit-empowered believers, emphasizing its role in the Christian experience. Renowned as a New Testament scholar known for meticulous exegetical methodology, Keener employs an accessible yet scholarly tone to support believers navigating trials and affliction.

According to Keener, suffering constitutes an inherent element of the Christian journey, serving a divine purpose rather than being a mere accident. He argues that God uses suffering to test and refine discipleship, witness, and spiritual formation. The work's distinctive contribution lies in its explicit Pentecostal-charismatic perspective, which frames suffering in the context of the Holy Spirit's empowering presence. Keener asserts that suffering is essential to the Spirit-imbued life, functioning as a divine instrument through which the Holy Spirit empowers and edifies believers. Consequently, suffering emerges as a crucible for spiritual refinement and transformation, resonating with global experiences of persecution, conflict, displacement, and various forms of violence.

Keener advocates for a comparative analysis that integrates biblical exegesis with contemporary global testimonies. His exegesis resists simplistic proof-texting, instead illustrating how suffering manifests across the biblical canon, particularly within lament traditions, endurance, missional contexts, and eschatological hope. The author critically examines prevalent Pentecostal-charismatic portrayals of suffering, identifying tendencies to either romanticize suffering as divinely virtuous or to interpret it as a sign of spiritual deficiency linked to spiritual warfare. Keener grounds his critique in biblical realism, emphasizing the Holy Spirit's sustaining power without offering facile assurances of immediate mitigation.

Theological and pastoral implications are central to Keener's contribution. He situates the Spirit-empowered life within the biblical paradigm of cross-bearing discipleship, offering a corrective perspective to leaders who may inadvertently shame those suffering due to triumphalist tendencies. The integration of global suffering narratives broadens ecclesiological horizons, urging Pentecostal and charismatic leaders to extend their concern beyond local metrics of success and

attend instead to marginalized and persecuted communities. The work aligns with pastoral ethics by fostering a church culture rooted in empathy, endurance, prayer, and hope, prioritizing care over performance indicators.

Key analytical findings include: the clarity of Keener's intent to challenge insular Western ecclesial paradigms; the balanced integration of biblical texts with global experiential data; the contextual applicability of Pentecostal-charismatic perspectives without exclusive reliance; the eschatological framing that situates present suffering within the expectation of future divine consummation; and the genre's accessibility tailored for practical guidance rather than scholarly exhaustiveness. Methodologically, questions arise regarding the representativeness and selection criteria of suffering narratives, prompting reflection on regional and theological biases.

While Keener aims to address prevalent triumphalist distortions in prosperity teachings through biblical framing rather than polemics, some readers may find room for more explicit critiques in contexts heavily influenced by prosperity or healing ministries. Overall, Keener's "Suffering: Its Meaning for the Spirit-Filled Life" functions as a biblically informed, Spirit-conscious, and pastoral resource that reveals the importance of suffering as integral to Christian life. Its global orientation enhances its relevance among Pentecostal and charismatic communities in the Majority World, where suffering is often quotidian, and also provides a reflective counterpoint to Western prosperity models. The tone remains scholarly, serious, and mission-oriented, suitable for academic settings, clergy peer groups, seminary courses, and leadership development programs that emphasize resilient discipleship and ecclesial integrity. The work offers a constructive framework for understanding the cruciform nature of the Spirit-filled life as a paradigm of spiritual formation amid adversity.

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