

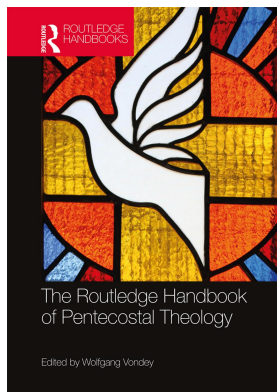
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On: 22 Mar 2023

Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology

Wolfgang Vondey

Experience

Publication details

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780429507076-11>

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Published online on: 20 Apr 2020

How to cite :- Peter D. Neumann. 20 Apr 2020, *Experience from: The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology* Routledge

Accessed on: 22 Mar 2023

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780429507076-11>

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8

EXPERIENCE

The mediated immediacy of encounter with the Spirit

Peter D. Neumann

One of the primary characteristics of Pentecostalism is its emphasis on the experience of God. Whereas other Christian traditions may emphasize doctrine or formal liturgy as starting points for theological reflection, Pentecostals begin with the assumption of the direct or immediate experience of the Spirit, both personally and communally. Experience serves, then, as a significant theological resource for Pentecostals. For this reason, the nature of the Pentecostal experience of God, as well as the appeal to this experience as an authority, warrants closer examination. In this chapter, I argue that the Pentecostal appeal to experience is motivated by a sense of “mediated immediacy” of the encounter with the Spirit of God. This essay will seek to outline the character of the Pentecostal experience of God by placing it within the broader theological and philosophical discussion of experience. I explore Pentecostalism’s affinity for experience and how experience has functioned as an authority within the Pentecostal worldview, spirituality, and theology. The chapter then identifies important developments within Pentecostal theology that nuance traditional understandings of immediate experience of the Spirit in favour of mediated immediacy.

Pentecostal experience in the theological landscape

When situating the Pentecostal experience of God within the larger theological and philosophical discussion, it is important to note that the appeal to experience in Christian theology has become ubiquitous. Not only Pentecostals, but also liberation, feminist, and other theologies regularly draw on the resource of experience for theological construction. One challenge accompanying this appeal, observes Harvey Cox (1995, 304), is that experience can be used as warrant for almost any theological idea, “virtually anyone can claim anything in the name of experience. The results are often exciting but confusing.” George P. Schnier (1992, 40–42) suggests that the present assumption of experience’s function as an authority within theology in large part emerged in connection with Enlightenment and modern philosophy with its turn to the subject. Further, this development came with the accompanying assumption that such experience is common to human beings in general. However, the supposition that experience is somehow universally shared has become subject of significant critique with the rise of the postmodern challenge to foundationalist epistemology. In its place, it has been proposed that experiencing God (or the world) does not come in raw

form (common to all human beings), but rather it arrives already mediated in and through the language and culture in which the appeal to experience occurs (Fiorenza 2005, 184–88; Hart 2005a, 81).

Another challenge to understanding the appeal to experience is that the notion of “experience” itself is notoriously difficult to define (Gelpi 1994, 1–2). Experience can refer to everything from practical cumulative wisdom, to conscious perception and sense data, to uncritical communally accepted beliefs, to “human evaluative responses” (conscious and unconscious), and even to a metaphysical category (Neumann 2012a, 22–24). For our purposes, when speaking of the Pentecostal experience of God, it involves at least two (possibly three) of the following definitions.

First, the Pentecostal appeal to and testimony of experiencing the divine assumes that God is perceived in a particular mode. Second, and along with this initial perception, is the general Pentecostal acceptance, the “*uncritical cognition*” (Yun 2007, 2) of the content and mode of the experience that has been passed on within the Pentecostal faith community, the sub-cultural theological context. Thus, the Pentecostal appeal to experience is usually an appeal to an unmediated perception of the Holy Spirit occurring within a particular cognitive epistemological framework containing various assumptions about theology and spirituality. In short, for Pentecostals, experiencing God happens within a particular communal experience of God—an experience within an experience—an encounter with God within and shaped by a tradition of accepted experience. Before exploring this aspect further, more needs to be said about the current state of the question concerning the appeal to experience in theology.

The evolution of experience

In the past two centuries, an evolution has occurred concerning the appeal to experience. By the end of the nineteenth century, under the influence of the Enlightenment philosophical turn to the subject, appeal to one’s experience as an epistemological authority had grown considerably. Further, since all presumably have access to common human experience, what could be more common sense than to appeal to such experience as important, if not the final word on all sorts of philosophical, theological, and other matters? The late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, however, introduced substantial philosophical challenges to the assumptions of direct comprehension of the external world. If access to external reality was not direct, then the appeal to common human experience was also not obvious. Appeal to experience could hardly be assumed to be “disinterested” and objective (Schner 1992, 42–46). Critiques from within linguistic philosophy argued that human experience is always bound within linguistic horizons, further challenging the modern project with its foundationalist epistemology (Schlitt 2001, 22–30; Pattison 2007, 192). Because language and culture are intricately interwoven, all human experience of the world (and God) must be understood as not universal but rather as shaped by these particular frameworks (Fiorenza 2005, 84–88). The central theological question was to what extent the cultural-linguistic framework determines one’s experience of God.

Correlational vs. non-correlational approaches

One way to frame this question is to label the two opposite theological poles concerning experience of God as “correlational” and “non-correlational” respectively (Boeve 2005, 13–24; Hart 2005b, 5–7). The correlational approach connects the Christian theological tradition to the broadest context of human experience—the world. This approach generally

looks to common human experience of God for establishing theological truth claims, and less so to specific ecclesial traditions or doctrines. Experience in this view, explains Kevin Hart (2005b, 5), is not so much a “source of our apprehension of God but rather . . . the medium through which we encounter the deity.” God is experienced through and within human experience.

Non-correlational approaches are those influenced by postmodern linguistic doubts concerning foundationalist epistemology. This approach emphasizes a radical discontinuity between common human experience and the Christian theological tradition. Karl Barth serves as a primary example of a non-correlational approach, and such emphasis is also held by post-liberal theologians such as George A. Lindbeck. In this camp, appeals to direct experience of God are viewed with considerable scepticism, since unmediated experiences (experience apart from a cultural-linguistic context) are considered impossible (Pattison 2007, 191–94). In Lindbeck’s (1984, 18–23, 113–24) view, for example, language and culture serve to determine one’s experience of God. Any appeal to a direct experience of God, therefore, is fraught with trouble because it risks simply equating the beliefs and assumptions of a given cultural-linguistic context or community with being revelation of God, potentially giving humans potential “mastery” over God (Hart 2005a, 80–81).

This latter view of experience has gained considerable traction, in that it is becoming more widely accepted that language and culture mediate human experience of the world and God. Yet some, such as David Brown, believe that the cultural-linguistic approach can become too deterministic and overly suspicious of the appeal to the experience of God. Brown (2007, 160–73) appeals for a middle ground between the extreme poles of the correlational and non-correlational approaches. On the one hand, then, God’s otherness needs to be preserved (his distinction from the world); on the other hand, may not God still allow himself to be encountered (experienced) within a cultural-linguistic context?

James K. A. Smith proposes a way forward. He grants that human experience of God is always shaped by linguistic and cultural faith horizons yet also posits that God may concede to the conditions of human beings as horizon-bound creatures (Smith 2005, 89–90). The finite human and cultural-linguistic horizon must be understood as never able to contain God. Instead, experiencing God is “an encounter in which God gives himself (in a mode of donation) to be experienced by a finite perceiver” embedded in the world of experience “because the very conditions of encounter for finite perceivers (as created by God) demand that both experience and what [Kevin] Hart calls a ‘counter experience’ must nevertheless be an event that takes place on a register commensurate with finitude” (Smith 2005, 91). Hence, we can say that God may be encountered, but always within a faith horizon. Further, such encounters may very well be far more disruptive than appeals to common human experience assume or allow. Proposed here, then, is the possibility of a direct encounter with God, interpreted within a cultural-linguistic context. In this view, experiencing God is best understood as a “mediated immediacy” (Schlitt 2001, 35–36; Macchia 2006, 224; Neumann 2012b), and some form of this position is becoming more explicitly common among Pentecostal theologians.

Pentecostal experience in the Pentecostal worldview

The previous section provided a theological and philosophical overview to help situate the Pentecostal experience of God within a broader context. The task ahead is to identify more closely what Pentecostals mean when referring and appealing to experiences of God, and to highlight why contemporary Pentecostal theology is adopting a mediated immediacy approach to experience.

It is difficult to overstate the importance of experiencing the Spirit for Pentecostals. Harvey Cox (1995, 310) argues that for Pentecostals personal experience is the “sine qua non of spirituality and the indispensable touchstone of faith.” Keith Warrington (2007, 4) fittingly describes experiencing God as the “heartbeat” of Pentecostalism. Likewise, Josh P. S. Samuel (2018, 1) contends that Pentecostal worship is characterized by the assumption of the immediacy of the Spirit’s presence, perceived or felt by the worshipers. Douglas G. Jacobsen (2006, 4) aptly summarizes the significance of experience within Pentecostalism.

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

In classical Pentecostalism, certain experiences with the Spirit take doctrinal pre-eminence and are understood within a defined theological framework of several distinct stages. The most dominant historical framework is known as the four- or fivefold gospel (see Chapter 16). These experiences include conversion (see Chapter 21) and a post-conversion Spirit baptism (see Chapter 23), associated with the reception of power for witness and evidenced by speaking in unknown tongues. Some classical Holiness Pentecostals also advocate for a sanctification stage between these two (see Chapter 22). Also prominent is the experience of divine healing (see Chapter 24). However, Pentecostals globally are not necessarily bound to this framework in an exclusively doctrinal sense but celebrate and encourage the broadest possible spectrum of meaningful encounters with the Spirit. All Pentecostals emphasize openness to the Spirit’s direct activity in the life of any Christian believer, eschewing the need for any third-party ecclesial intermediaries. This hospitality is why Cox (1995, 89) proposes that Pentecostalism’s global appeal is largely due to its belief “that the Spirit of God needs no mediators, but is available to anyone in an intense, immediate, indeed interior way.” The emphasis on direct encounter, and the immediacy of the Spirit’s presence is an indispensable characteristic of Pentecostal experiencing of God (Warrington 2008, 20–27), and it is important to flesh out further the significance of this openness for Pentecostal theology.

Distinguishing Pentecostal experience

Daniel Albrecht (1999, 237–51) has analysed Pentecostal experiences of God by observing Pentecostal rites and rituals in worship. One of his observations is that experiencing God is understood as “mystical” and “supernatural.” He and others (Chan 2000; Castelo 2017; Vondey 2017) believe that Pentecostals should be associated with the broader Christian mystical tradition. Pentecostal worship, Albrecht (1999, 239) states, is “designed to provide a context for mystical *encounter*, and experience with the divine. This encounter is mediated by the sense of the immediate divine presence.” The various rites used in Pentecostal worship, such as singing praise songs and laying on of hands during prayer times, encourage “mystical-type experiences,” which include not only the felt apprehension of God but also revelatory expressions such as dreams and visions. “When a worship leader says, ‘Let’s enter into the presence of the Lord,’ it is not heard as mere rhetoric. The congregation expects to

have a keen awareness of divine presence” (Albrecht 1999, 239). Whether personal or corporate worship, Pentecostals anticipate being able to actively engage with God’s Spirit.

It is important to note that Albrecht qualifies Pentecostal mysticism by identifying this as a “supernatural” encounter, a term emphasizing that the God being encountered is transcendent other, in contrast to God being experienced immanently within common human experience. While Pentecostals do emphasize God’s immanence, in the sense that God is palpably present by his Spirit, especially in corporate worship (see Chapter 11), Albrecht (1999, 241) explains that

the Pentecostal realm envisions a world subject to invasions by the supernatural element. Pentecostals teach adherents to expect encounters with the supernatural. For the Pentecostal the line between natural and supernatural is permeable, but the two categories are radically separate.

For this reason, the term “encounter” is an apt descriptor for Pentecostal experiences of God, and for Pentecostal theology (Warrington 2008), preserving the transcendent distinction between God and creation, and highlighting the experience as a meeting with a distinctly other (divine) reality.

Pentecostal mysticism should also be distinguished from other more traditional mystical accounts within the Christian tradition that emphasize the loss of oneself in the divine, and the ineffability of communicating such experiences (see Chapter 3). Pentecostals do admit that experiences with the Spirit are at times difficult to put into words, yet they testify to experiences with God, with the intent of encouraging others to expect and seek similar experiences. Pentecostals usually accent external expressions over an inward-focused orientation and tend to associate the Spirit’s activity with what is palpably felt and tangibly observed—manifestations that are overtly evidenced emotionally or physically, and testable within their subcultural theological tradition (Lewis 1998, 4–7). The term “religious experience,” is also inadequate for describing Pentecostal encounters with God. Though it overcomes the mystical focus on loss of self in the divine (Nieto 1997, 103–42), the term is too generic to sufficiently identify the God encountered or the nature of the encounter (Alston 1991, 35–36). For these reasons, Albrecht’s “mystical encounter” is a helpful working term, provided it is understood within the Pentecostal theological and spiritual framework outlined below. The adjective “mystical” accents the absence of a human third party mediating the experience while retaining the sense of these being powerful encounters, transforming the affections, and even resulting in physical manifestations. The noun “encounter” captures the transcendence of the God who is present and whose personal and revelatory interaction with the perceiver is able to interrupt and transform the life of the individual and the community (Cartledge 2015, 62–66).

The authority of Pentecostal experience

The discussion above identifies the immediacy of Pentecostal experience of the Spirit but does not identify what qualifies as authentic Pentecostal experience. It is important to remember that experiencing God bears theological weight for Pentecostals. Pentecostals believe they are encountering God directly, and the encounter, therefore, holds revelatory epistemological value (see Chapter 5). Despite such encounters carrying a measure of divine authority, Pentecostals have always been careful not to accept just any experience as genuine experience of God. If an experience obviously contradicts Scripture, it will be rejected

outright. Jacobsen (2003, 3) affirms, experience alone was never self-authenticating for early Pentecostals:

Experiences needed to be examined and evaluated. They needed to be properly labelled and categorized so believers could know where they stood in their relationship with God and to what they should aspire The very act of becoming a Pentecostal was in a certain sense a function of the theological labels one used to describe one's religious experiences. Experience alone did not make one a Pentecostal. It was experience interpreted in a Pentecostal way that made one Pentecostal.

Further, because Pentecostal theology is Christocentric, focussing on the person of Jesus as saviour, sanctifier, Spirit baptizer, healer, and soon-coming king, any experience with the Spirit must be of the Spirit of Jesus as the one revealed in the pages of the Bible (Clark and Lederle et al. 1989, 43–44). While experiences with God may at times precede conscious theological reflection (Warrington 2008, 15–16), Pentecostals recognize that any theological content arising from such encounters needs to be vetted by the established doctrinal norms of the community (Robinson 1992, 2). So, experience does not immediately trump theological norms; Pentecostals intuitively know that not just any experience counts. Pentecostal experiences of God exist in large part with robust, Christ-centred theological boundaries, even if these are sometimes held tacitly.

Pentecostals have not always been sure how to allocate the weight given to experience in relation to Scripture (see Chapter 6), reason (see Chapter 7), and the broader Christian tradition (see Chapter 9). Stephen E. Parker traced the way that some Pentecostals, during the 1970s and 1980s, responded to accusations that they were reading their experience into their biblical exegesis. Initially, some Pentecostals responded to the charge by downplaying the role experience plays in theological understanding (arguing that experience confirms but does not inform biblical truth) or attempted to validate Pentecostal experience through scriptural exegesis largely informed by evangelical historical-grammatical hermeneutical methods (see Chapter 12), especially concerning the doctrines of Spirit baptism and initial evidence. (Parker 1996, 27–40). Parker (1996, 33–39) argues, however, that downplaying experience stifles Pentecostal spirituality and the subjective realities involved in scriptural interpretation, and discourages Pentecostals from drawing on their experiences and practices for constructing their theology.

In the 1990s, following a decade of significant hermeneutical dialogue and development, Pentecostal scholarship began to exhibit a more explicit appreciation for and integration of experience in the hermeneutical and theological constructive process (Parker 1996, 30–32). The evangelical hermeneutical criterion of author intentionality, with its reliance on modernist epistemological rationalism, was increasingly questioned. A number of voices proposed the need for greater integration of the subjective and experiential elements in reading Scripture, often appealing to elements of postmodern epistemology (see Neumann 2012a, 124–33). When it comes to the current interplay between Scripture and experience, Pentecostal theologians tend to prioritize the Luke-Acts narrative (Yong 2005, 27), and the belief in the ongoing experiential revelatory activity of the Spirit in helping the church read Scripture (Vondey 2010, 47–77). The Bible still serves as the primary authority for Pentecostals, but their concept of biblical authority is intricately connected with experience of the Spirit (Ellington 1996, 19; Wacker 2001, 70–76).

To summarize, Pentecostals have traditionally emphasized a conscious, direct, and unmediated view of experiencing God—interruptive mystical encounters with the Spirit—which transform the believer's affections while also manifesting in varieties of physical and tangible

expressions, and functioning with some measure of authority for Pentecostal theology and spirituality. There are, however, weaknesses in this understanding, since it insufficiently acknowledges the (sub)cultural-linguistic reality of the communally accepted Pentecostal traditions, in which the experience occurs. What is preached and taught in the community is often simply assumed to be true, and how this truth impacts the experiences of the believers goes largely unacknowledged. For our purposes, then, the above will be considered a naïve view of Pentecostal experience. This characterization is not intended to be a pejorative accusation but identifies that this view lacks explicit acknowledgment of the tacit yet powerful influence that communal theology and experience have on even the most personal of mystical encounters. The naïve view may grant too much theological weight to a given mystical encounter, and the doctrines and practices that may arise from such experiences. Put another way, if experience with God is unqualifiedly immediate, then the authority of the experience is also immediate and self-authenticating. If there happens to be disagreement over the theology or practice derived from such experience, there is a higher risk of schism within the community.

This unqualified view has sometimes led to the inadvertent theological ghettoizing of Pentecostals as exclusive overtones developed when it came to identifying those who could be considered authentically Pentecostal. The ongoing debate in some denominations over tongues as the “initial evidence” of Spirit baptism is a case in point, since those who have not demonstrated the external manifestation of tongues are either implicitly or explicitly restricted from full acceptance and participation in those communities (see Friesen 2013; Neumann 2019). Pentecostalism has also been marked by frequent schism within their own churches and denominations, all too often caused by one charismatic leader disagreeing with another over experience-based ideas and practices (Jacobsen 2003, 354–56). This situation has been exacerbated by the hesitancy and even suspicion Pentecostals have often exhibited towards ecclesial tradition and ecumenical dialogue, although they have exhibited more openness to this theological heritage and resource in the latter part of the twentieth century (Kärkkäinen 2002; Neumann 2012a, 142–44).

The Pentecostal communal experience that houses Pentecostal experience

The past two decades especially have revealed a shift within Pentecostal theology towards a more nuanced understanding of experiencing God as mediated immediacy. This shift has enabled Pentecostals to overcome some of the weaknesses inherent in a naïve unmediated view of experience because it attempts to acknowledge explicitly that the experience never occurs within a cultural or theological vacuum but exists within a Pentecostal subcultural-linguistic framework (Shuman 1997, 214 and 220). In brief, there is need to flesh out the internal “grammar” of accepted Pentecostal beliefs and practices to better understand how Pentecostals understand their experience of God. Some of this has been done above in identifying the biblical narrative frame as an assumed part of experiencing God. But there are also some theological and metaphysical assumptions that need to be made explicit to appreciate more fully what intuitively counts as true Pentecostal experience within this theological and spiritual tradition. We are seeking here, then, a way of identifying the theological communal experience that frames or houses personal and corporate encounters with God.

James K. A. Smith (2010, 12) proposes five characteristics of a Pentecostal worldview that help frame the broader sense of experiencing God. First, Pentecostals have a “radical openness to God.” This corresponds well with the Pentecostal openness to the supernatural, and the experience of God as encounter. Smith locates this characteristic within the Acts 2 story

of Pentecost, where the disciples encountered God in new and surprising ways (e.g. speaking with tongues) and expected this reality to be ongoing. Second, this worldview is typified by an “‘enchanted’ theology of creation and culture.” This metaphysical outlook assumes the immanent activity of the Spirit in all of creation (and creation includes malevolent spiritual forces as well); so, reality cannot be reduced to physical laws. Third, Pentecostals hold “a nondualistic affirmation of embodiment and materiality,” meaning that God is assumed to be interested in more than redeeming souls but also in healing bodies and bringing well-being to life in general. Fourth, Pentecostals hold to “an affective, narrative epistemology.” Here the emphasis on God communicating directly and interiorly with individuals is corroborated; but further, the means of passing on such experiences with God is accomplished most effectively through testimonies (stories). Fifth, there is “an eschatological orientation to missions and justice.” The purpose of the Spirit’s outpouring in Acts 2 was to include Jesus’ followers in God’s eschatological mission, in which they would bear evangelistic witness to Christ and work to overcome injustice through acts of love, peace, and justness.

Smith’s characteristics confirm and interpret to some extent the fieldwork of Albrecht’s pioneering congregational study of classical Pentecostalism. Albrecht (1999, 116–22) identifies Pentecostal experience as communal, supplementing Smith’s theme of holistic spirituality with an emphasis on the relational component of experience. This emphasis may seem somewhat counterintuitive, since Pentecostals tend to emphasize individual experience of the Spirit. But experiencing God usually happens within the collective worship experience and involves physical interaction with others, such as the laying on of hands in prayer (Wacker 2001, 94). Albrecht also affirms the missional trajectory of Pentecostal experience. While experiences with the Spirit affect the individual, they are nevertheless aimed at accomplishing greater missional purposes for God’s kingdom; the Spirit, in this sense, is given for others. Albrecht further supplements the theme of mission as well as the involvement of the Spirit in daily life by describing the Pentecostal framework of experience as creative, by which he means entrepreneurial and pragmatic. Pragmatism seems to be almost universally embedded in Pentecostal spirituality (Holm 1995; Wacker 2001, 9–14; Yun 2007, 8; Neumann 2012a, 121–22, 152–60) and underscores that Pentecostal experience cannot be reduced to the Spirit merely impacting the inner affections. Because Pentecostals assume the Spirit is active in the world, the sphere of everyday life and work becomes a testing ground for identifying the activity of the Spirit. This means Pentecostals can become impatient with ideas or practices that do not reap (almost) immediate results in practical life. Conversely, when an idea or activity obtains the results hoped for (often related to missional activity and evangelism), this is often taken as evidence of the Spirit’s endorsement, since it is taken for granted that the Spirit is enabling the results. Experiences with God are usually expected to manifest in some tangible way, serving also to verify the Spirit’s activity (e.g. the doctrine of tongues as the initial evidence of Spirit baptism).

Experience as mediated immediacy: a fruitful venture

The discussion detailed thus far characterizes the subcultural-linguistic framework of Pentecostal experience in which personal immediate experience of the Spirit occurs. Pentecostals do not simply experience God in an unqualified direct mode but within and mediated through a spiritual and theological framework, a faith horizon. This sense of mediated immediacy holds promise to help Pentecostals overcome some of the weaknesses of a naïve immediacy; it does so in at least three ways. First, it helps temper the weight of authority granted to personal encounters with God, since any such experiences are already interpreted

experiences, shaped by the theological context in which they occur. Any experience with God cannot be taken as self-authenticating but must be examined within the Pentecostal and broader Christian tradition (see Chapter 9). Second, it encourages Pentecostals to investigate more carefully their own historical, linguistic, social, theological, and philosophical contexts in order to better interpret and articulate their experiences with God. This engagement is becoming progressively more important as broader cultural frameworks and language change and Pentecostals attempt to communicate and pass on their values and experiences in an intelligible way. Third, it enables Pentecostals to listen ecumenically to others within the broad Christian theological tradition (see Chapter 35). If Pentecostal experience is not immediately authoritative, then the experience of God in other Christian traditions cannot be easily dismissed without consideration.

The emphasis on mediated immediacy has become more explicit in the work of a number of contemporary Pentecostal theologians (see Neumann 2012b). Simon K. H. Chan explicitly appeals to Lindbeck's cultural-linguistic theory of doctrine in attempting to help Pentecostals acknowledge the riches of their own and the broader Christian tradition in order to preserve and pass on Pentecostal spirituality (Chan 1997, 81–83, 1998, 16–17, 24–39, 2000, 7–10, 24, 2005, 579; Neumann 2012a, 218–24). Frank D. Macchia (2006, 12–17) also appeals to cultural-linguistic theory, acknowledging that Pentecostals operate within a particular theological symbol-system, while yet insisting that experiencing God is not merely of “interpretive frameworks.” Nevertheless, he utilizes a nuanced approach to the experience of God to inform his expanded understanding of Spirit baptism that he believes better corresponds with God's missional involvement in the world (Macchia 2002, 2006; Neumann 2012a, 162–217). Amos Yong draws on the unique faith horizon of Pentecostal experience in developing the notion of the “pneumatological imagination” (see Chapter 14) through which to view and understand reality (metaphysics) and giving rise to his epistemological “foundational pneumatology” by which to discern the Spirit's activity in the world (Yong 2002, 2003, 2005). This emphasis allows him to engage in theological construction in areas such as interreligious dialogue, science, and politics. Mark J. Cartledge (2015) has argued that the mediated quality of Pentecostal spirituality needs to be embraced explicitly. He uses this mediated approach in the construction of a robust framework for Pentecostal practical theology (see Chapter 15), which he argues needs to move beyond the traditional evangelical approach to “applied theology.” In short, a mediated immediacy view of experience is bearing fruit within various dimensions of contemporary Pentecostal theology.

Conclusion

This essay has outlined the significance of experiencing the Holy Spirit within Pentecostal spirituality and theology. It has demonstrated that experience is a foundational element of Pentecostal spirituality that can be identified as a mystical encounter with the God who is calling Christian believers into mission. Experiencing God is shaped by the cultural-linguistic horizons of the Pentecostal faith community and is best understood as a mediated immediacy of the encounter with God's Spirit. While Pentecostals are clearly people who submit to the authority of Scripture, they also strongly believe that the God the Bible reveals is one who continues to interact with believers in tangible, transformative ways that allow God to be encountered and, hence, experienced. For this reason, experience serves as an important resource for Pentecostal theology, pragmatically justified by the effectiveness of Pentecostal missional endeavours, and also by the growing fruitfulness evident within Pentecostal constructive theologies utilizing this resource.

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