

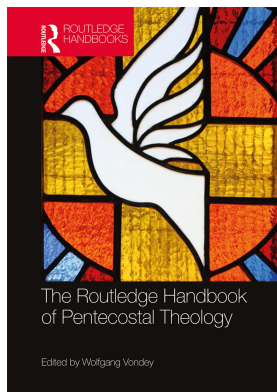
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PENTECOSTAL THEOLOGY AS A GLOBAL CHALLENGE

Contextual theological constructions

Allan Heaton Anderson

Why does Pentecostal theology present a “global challenge”? There are indeed many challenges with the deliberate juxtaposition of “theology” and “global” in the title of this chapter. “Theology” in the singular might assume that there is one common Pentecostal theology, but I argue that just as there are many different kinds of Pentecostalism, so there are also many different kinds of Pentecostal theology. “Global” is a contested term. It usually means a process of homogenisation of various views in a common “globalized” world, which presents challenges. There is tension between the “global” and the “local,” between the “foreign” and the “indigenous,” and this is no less true of Pentecostal theology. Although the electronic media has made ideas and doctrines quickly available to Pentecostals throughout the world, it is in the way these are interpreted in diverse languages and cultural settings that the (sometimes immense) differences lie. In this chapter, I expand on these ideas and begin by outlining the different varieties of Pentecostalism and how their theologies might differ. I discuss the challenges of cultural and religious settings affecting the ways different “contextual Pentecostal theologies” might be understood and examine the importance of Walter Hollenweger’s original proposal of the “oral structures” and “intercultural theology” for our understanding of Pentecostal theology. I conclude with reflections on the possibility of a Pentecostal global theology.

Pentecostal varieties

Categories to define Pentecostalism imposed by academics are often not recognised by the participants themselves, and there are porous borders between these categories (Anderson 2010). The influence of academic power and privilege must also be acknowledged. The task of describing a Pentecostal theology is rendered extremely difficult when these varieties are taken into account. In this discussion it is helpful to remember two broad but important historical facts:

- 1 There is no single point of origin for Pentecostalism, but revival movements in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries sought to restore a primitive and powerful Christianity to evangelise the world before the imminent coming of Christ (Creech 1996; Robeck 2006; Anderson 2013). These ideas were spread globally by evangelical

missionary networks and local indigenous preachers. One could say that Pentecostal theology was forged in the anvil of these revival fires, where the powerful experience of the Holy Spirit was given priority over what were often seen as sterile creeds and doctrines.

- 2 Pentecostalism did not initially set out to have a distinct theology of its own; rather, it was an ecumenical movement of people from many denominations who had had an overwhelming experience of the Spirit. In many cases, it was only the opposition they encountered from their churches that forced them into forming new denominations. Internal theological differences then caused them to draw up statements of faith, but this was not their original focus, and Pentecostal theology has been in a constant process of formation and re-formation. It follows that when we speak of “Pentecostal” theology, standardisation is precarious, if not impossible. Categories of Pentecostalism can be historically defined by outlining diachronous and synchronous links (Bergunder 2010, 59), but these categories have “blurred edges” (Wittgenstein 2001, 66, 71), and one category can easily move into another or disappear altogether.

Chronologically, the “classical” Pentecostal movements emerged from late nineteenth century revivalist, healing, and holiness Protestant movements in Europe and North America. Wolfgang Vondey (2017, 3, 281) shows that early Pentecostalism “was marked by an *ad hoc* doxology rather than a systematic and dogmatic theology” and that Pentecostal theology is “at heart a liturgical theology.” Put differently, Pentecostal theology is not a doctrinal theology, because there were a multitude of diffuse doctrines, which soon led to multiple schisms that have marked Protestantism since its beginnings. At first, people coalesced around their common experience of the baptism in the Spirit (see Chapter 23), but soon their doctrinal differences became apparent. As Douglas Jacobsen (2003, 12–13) demonstrates, since there was “no meta-model of Pentecostalism . . . different theological visions of Pentecostal faith” resulted. Pentecostals disagreed on whether their experience would always be accompanied by speaking in tongues as “initial evidence.” They disagreed over whether sanctification was a separate or progressive experience (see Chapter 22). They differed over models of church government. They disagreed over modes of baptism and the doctrine of the Trinity (see Chapters 17 and 18). They also differed on whether there were present-day apostles and prophets (see Chapter 28). Although most of them shared a premillennial eschatology and “missionary nature” (Anderson 2007), Pentecostals competed with each other for converts, even in faraway places like India, China, and South Africa, where Pentecostal preachers usually began with sharing their experience of Spirit baptism with contacts from other churches, their first converts. By the 1920s there were already scores of different Pentecostal denominations that had little to do with each other and often mounted fierce public arguments against each other.

There was another parallel movement of the Spirit occurring at around the same time across the world and for which Protestant missions were unprepared. This was the emergence of independent churches, which consciously broke off ties with Western mission churches because of paternalism and colonial practices that made indigenous leaders feel like they had no real authority in the churches they had led. The first independent churches were usually replicas of the churches they seceded from, but soon churches arose that embraced Pentecostal ideas that resonated with their religious background. By the 1920s they were well established in many parts of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Some of these churches were born during the rising nationalism and opposition to colonialism but saw themselves as a movement of the Spirit that was not determined by European or North American forms

of being Christian. In some cases, independent classical Pentecostal missionaries actually facilitated the rise of these churches (Anderson 2007, 181). Their theology was sometimes less articulate than that of classical Pentecostals, but they had clear Pentecostal features in that prophecy, healing through prayer, and speaking in tongues were main characteristics of these churches. There was a conviction that they had had an experience of the Spirit that drove them to preach the gospel of healing and deliverance from demons (Onyinah 2012). Across the vast continent of Africa, for example, they were almost universally known as “churches of the Spirit.” But again, we must appreciate that there were many different doctrines and practices across the world. Unlike earlier scholars of African independent churches, Walter Hollenweger (1972, 149 and 166) made the connection of these churches with Pentecostalism by arguing that they were “independent African Pentecostal churches.” Instead of the strident and quite common criticism from European observers that these churches were “syncretistic,” Hollenweger saw the need for common understanding and dialogue.

Much more recently, from the 1960s onwards, Pentecostal experience began to break out in the established Protestant and Anglican/Episcopalian churches in the form of what became known as the Charismatic renewal. At first it was contact with classical Pentecostals, healing evangelists, and popular literature that sparked this renewal. Leading figures travelled around the world to share their experience, and it caught on quickly. But this was not a simple linear history. Many of the early European Pentecostal leaders would be categorised as “Charismatic” in this sense. They never intended to leave their churches but wanted to continue with their newfound experience in order to renew and revitalize their denominations that had grown somewhat old and tired. Spiritual gifts (including tongues) had been experienced in Protestant churches throughout the first half of the twentieth century (Anderson 2014, 158). Once again, this category has blurred borders. After the Second Vatican Council (1962–65), when Pope John XXIII had prayed for the fresh wind of the Spirit to revitalise the Roman Catholic Church, the Catholic Charismatic Renewal began in 1967. The pope had spoken of his desire for “aggiornamento,” letting fresh air into the church, and he prayed that the Vatican Council might be a “new Pentecost” for the church (Suenens 1975, x; Hughson 2008). Catholic Charismatics, originally called “Pentecostals,” saw themselves as the fulfilment of that prayer. The movement opened up a world of fresh expressions of Catholicism and lay participation. Many of these Charismatics believed in a subsequent experience of Spirit baptism, but within their sacramental framework, and most remained loyal to the Catholic faith. Today, Catholic Charismatics number around a tenth of all Catholics worldwide, well over 120 million, and are particularly strong in Africa, Asia, and Latin America (Alva 2016). Catholic Charismatic churches in the Philippines, India, and Brazil are among the largest in the world. Charismatics in the older churches do not usually attempt to alter their denomination’s theology, and today, one can speak of the “pentecostalisation” of many mainline churches, both Catholic and Protestant.

Developments in Pentecostalism more recently render categorisation even more complicated. By far the greatest growth of the movement has happened since the 1970s, when one of the most prolific forms of Pentecostalism emerged in emerging independent “Charismatic” churches. Most of the figures quoted frequently about hundreds of millions of Pentecostals and Charismatics worldwide include the vast numbers of Catholic Charismatics and independent churches. Probably 80% of Pentecostalism worldwide today is found outside North America and Europe. Independent Charismatic churches are now all over the world. They are relatively “new” churches, and often display the entrepreneurial skills of their charismatic (“gifted”) leaders. Some have bishops and archbishops, some wear priestly robes, and some have apostles and prophets, like the Spirit churches in Africa.

Some of the largest megachurches include the so-called “Word of Faith” churches, preaching the “prosperity gospel” (see Chapter 38). The hundreds of these churches worldwide mean again that there are as many different theologies or variations of this theology as there are churches. The “prosperity gospel” presents us with new challenges, and many Pentecostals distance themselves from it. There are different ways of interpreting this doctrine, and it is important to understand the different contexts in which it is found. In Africa and in many other parts of the world, poverty and hardship are seen as the result of a diminishing of power and cannot easily be divorced from the concept of the omnipresent witchcraft, the work of evil-intentioned spirits (see Chapter 30). Good luck, success, progress, and (relative) prosperity are seen as blessings from God, the increasing of power (Asamoah-Gyadu 2013, 116). The Pentecostal message of the power of the Spirit, and especially its focus on healing, deliverance, and abundant living, resonates well with people who live in constant fear of a threatening invisible world of evil forces. Because this “spirit-filled world” is a place of spiritual insecurity only overcome by the power of the Spirit, the prosperity gospel has become widespread in developing countries around the world (Anderson 2018, 137–40). Charismatic preachers proclaim a powerful God who not only heals and delivers but promises success and prosperity to those who have faith. Some of these preachers sincerely believe that their message of prosperity is a contextual message for people troubled constantly by misfortune and poverty. They promote self-help schemes for better living and business initiatives providing employment. These efforts are sorely needed. That a positive message of God’s material provision is so often found in Pentecostal preaching should not come as a surprise. The reasons for this and the context in which this is found are very different from those of notorious preachers of health and wealth in the so-called American Bible Belt (Bowler 2013). I am not seeking to justify a crass interpretation of proof texts and the exploitation of the vulnerable that is characteristic of some forms of these churches. Rather, we need to see how contexts shape and change Pentecostal theology. One way to live above a hostile spirit world in contexts of deprivation is to have more power and material possessions—all of which God can supply. When backed up with biblical verses that show that the power of God’s Spirit can enable people to live above their dire circumstances, this message is very attractive.

When it comes to doctrine, many of the newer Charismatic churches, while acknowledging and practising the gifts of the Spirit, do not insist on speaking in tongues as “evidence” of baptism in the Spirit, have no sense of historical continuity with classical Pentecostals, and would not label themselves “Pentecostal” at all. Nevertheless, we might say that they are “Pentecostal” because there is still an emphasis on the experience of the Spirit and the practice of spiritual gifts. This is how I have defined Pentecostalism in the past (Anderson 2010, 16–17), and this is how we can understand it today, even though this broad definition does not satisfy everyone. When it comes to defining Pentecostal theology, I agree with Vondey (2017, 2, 11) that “Pentecostal theology emerges from the root image of Pentecost” and that “Pentecost is the core theological symbol of Pentecostal theology.” It is the experience of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost and the practice of the gifts of the Spirit that ensued that form the common denominator uniting many different kinds of Pentecostal theology worldwide.

Contextual Pentecostal theologies

It is understandable that in this complex myriad of different kinds of Pentecostalism, finding “a” Pentecostal theology *is* a global challenge. As Vondey (2017, 1) has shown, there are those “who anticipate that a single account of Pentecostal theology would conceal the significant diversity of the global movement.” Obviously, I am one of them; Walter Hollenweger might

be another. In the introduction to his last published volume, *Pentecostalism*, Hollenweger (1997, 2) wrote what he described as a “thoroughly theological book” that “tells theology in the form of histories.” He preferred to describe Pentecostal theology using the plural “contextual spiritualities:”

This seems to me to be a form of scholarly treatment which is more appropriate to the contextual spiritualities of Pentecostalism than propositional, so-called universal statements and discussion, because it places Pentecostal convictions and practices in their different cultural contexts.

Put differently, propositional, universal statements of Pentecostal theology simply will not do. Placing the different theologies in both historical and cultural contexts is essential if we are to understand their global challenges. I have long argued for a de-Westernisation of Pentecostal theology, because the dangers of misinterpretation are multiplied when we assume that there is a standard, homogenized Pentecostal theology where one size fits all. This is not to say that Pentecostal theology cannot be based on the biblical revelation and on the event of Pentecost, but only when that revelation is interpreted in a way that takes into account the context in which it is read. Hollenweger’s distinctive work was that he set global Pentecostalism within the context and parameters of what he termed “intercultural theology” (Anderson 2018, 199–207). I will use the related terms “contextual theology” and “contextualisation.” Contextualisation is not the same as indigenisation, which is making something that is a constant (like the Christian church) into something that is “indigenous.” The result is usually a “three-self” church—one that is self-supporting, self-governing, and self-propagating. This idea has been an important feature of Pentecostal mission education (Anderson 2013, 88–91), and was relatively easy to accomplish when leadership was based on gifting rather than theological education. But the theory did not always become the practice.

The concept of indigenisation also has implications for Pentecostal theology. On the one hand, it is easy to confuse expectations of Pentecostal theology with the particular form systematic theology reached in the West; on the other hand, indigenisation often assumes that cultures do not change. Whenever there are “indigenous” leaders and the use of local languages, perhaps also local music in worship, and adherence to the three-self principles, then its goal is achieved. In comparison, “contextualisation” is more comprehensive and assumes that every theology and form of Christianity is shaped by its particular context, and that they must be so shaped to be relevant and meaningful. Contextual theology relates the Christian message to all social contexts and cultures, including those undergoing rapid change. For example, Wessly Lukose (2013) shows how Pentecostal theology relates to the religious context of India; Sang Yun Lee (2018) traces the role of Korean Pentecostalism in providing a contextual “theology of hope” in a changing society; and Naar M’fundisi-Holloway (2018) shows how Pentecostalism relates to civic engagement in Zambia.

In other words, contextualisation is dynamic and never static. It is much more than presenting the gospel in a culturally relevant way or creating a three-self church. Pentecostals have cultures, and contextualisation is important to questions of culture (see Chapter 10). Pentecostals sometimes think that their own particular culture’s way is the *only* way to be “Pentecostal.” The result can be disastrous, for once Pentecostals encounter a different culture, their own cultural traditions become the “right” way to do theology or to model the church, which often results in conflict and schism. Nevertheless, to some extent Pentecostalism has contextualised Christianity anyway, mostly unconscious of the various theories behind the process, and mostly unnoticed by outsiders. The experience of the fullness of the

Spirit (Pentecost) is the central plank of Pentecostal theology, and it is in this focus on experience that contextualisation occurs. In most societies around the world, everything that exists is influenced by an omnipresent spiritual world. In Pentecostalism, the all-encompassing Spirit is involved in every aspect of life—that is, the Spirit is working in the *context*. Rather than being theorized about, a contextual theology is acted out in the rituals, liturgies, and daily experiences of these Pentecostals (see Chapter 16). Pentecostalism has made a vital contribution to a dynamic contextual theology.

Hollenweger's work is a prime example of a practical contextual theology, and he illustrates this with historical stories. His *Pentecostalism* (1997, 41–53) updated and developed his earlier ideas with reference to recent academic literature at the time. Hollenweger acknowledged the historical and religious continuity between Pentecostalism and African religions, on the one hand (through his ideological appropriation of the Azusa Street revival), and between different kinds of Pentecostalism, on the other hand. By this time, he had a fully developed argument about the importance of Pentecostalism to intercultural theology. He asked whether the different forms of Pentecostalism worldwide could be regarded as forms of syncretism and answered in the affirmative with a provocative qualification: “so are all forms of Christianity, also and in particular Western Christianity.” It was not whether there *is* syncretism but “what *kind* of syncretism”—which led him to discuss a “theologically responsible syncretism” when assessing Pentecostalism. He thought that a “responsible syncretism” was “a pressing theological problem [that] has to be addressed” (1997, 132–33) not only by Pentecostals.

Hollenweger (1997, 20–23) also described what he called the “oral structures” of Pentecostalism as central to his concept of an intercultural Pentecostal theology. These oral structures of Pentecostalism's beginnings—which he likened to Christianity's origins—were the main reason for the movement's initial growth, and not because of any particular Pentecostal doctrine. Putting aside his ideologically driven theory and possible hints of primitivism, there are many features of Hollenweger's analysis that are relevant in a discussion of Pentecostal theology. His well-known list of the characteristics of these oral structures is worth repeating: an oral liturgy, a narrative theology and witness, a reconciliatory and participant community, the inclusion of visions and dreams in worship, and understanding the relationship between body and mind revealed in healing by prayer and liturgical dance. He thought these features were also predominantly African cultural features, evident in the Azusa Street revival (1906–9) of the African American preacher William Seymour, whose “spirituality lay in his past.” Seymour's Pentecostalism, he stated, was “the oral missionary movement, with spiritual power to overcome racism and chauvinism” (1999, 42). Hollenweger's oral structures formed the basis of his assessment of Pentecostalism and its ability to form an “intercultural theology.” I have discussed these structures with reference to African Pentecostalism (Anderson 2018, 204–7), but here adapt them to focus on their relevance to the global challenges of Pentecostal theology. In doing so, I follow Hollenweger's insistence that theology is much more than written, cerebral theology. Pentecostal contextual theologies originate in the liturgies, worship, prayers, songs, preaching, practices, and generally in the life of Pentecostal communities (Cox 1996, 201). These differ from place to place, and as Macchia (2006, 50) observes, Hollenweger's work shows “that doctrinal conceptions among Pentecostals are too diverse to provide us with that which is theologically distinctive to the movement.” Still, Hollenweger offers six structural identifiers that can be attributed to Pentecostals worldwide.

Hollenweger's first structure is what he calls an *oral liturgy*. There are still many communities worldwide that remain preliterate or functionally illiterate. These societies are usually more sensitive to non-verbal signals and forms of communication than Westerners.

They are also more community-oriented. Pentecostals emphasise an oral, spontaneous, and joyful liturgy that is attractive in these communities. Hollenweger (1997, 269–71) points out that this spontaneity and enthusiasm produces flexible liturgies memorised by Pentecostal congregations in their music and worship. The most important element is the active participation of every member. A large part of what happens in the worship services consists of congregational singing, dancing, and praying in unison. Call and response sometimes punctuates the preaching. Everyone feels part of the worshipping community and participates enthusiastically, probably fulfilling the Protestant doctrine of the priesthood of the believer more adequately than older churches have done.

The second structure is a *narrative theology and witness* (Hollenweger 1999, 36–39). Preaching is an important part of Pentecostal liturgy throughout the world. The most successful Pentecostal preachers are usually those who can tell a story and use illustration, narrative, and humour to make a point. Theological preaching in its formal, more cerebral forms as found in older, Western forms of Christianity is not attractive in many parts of the world. Theology narrated in sermons and testimonies in Pentecostal congregations is preferred. The experience of the Spirit's presence is seen as a normal part of daily life and is applied to all situations. God's salvation is seen in different manifestations of God's abiding presence through the Spirit in everyday life. These evidences of God's imminent presence assure Pentecostals that "God is here" to help in every area of human need. The narrative most used by many Pentecostal women is that of personal testimony, telling of divine intervention in what are often situations of extreme hardship and male domination. As women predominate in Pentecostalism, their testimonies empower them on a weekly basis with an acceptable opportunity to participate in and profoundly influence the theology and witness of the congregation. As they are also often the spiritual leaders of their households, their influence on the local congregation is immense, even without the trappings of ecclesiastical office that is often denied them (Anderson 2014, 265–72).

Third, Hollenweger (1999, 39) writes of a *reconciliatory and participant community*. One of the strongest appeals of Pentecostalism is its ability to accept and empower all people who embrace its way of life, without regard to gender, social status, or education. Everyone is made to feel at home and has the opportunity to contribute meaningfully to the community. The church service is one place where maximum participation is encouraged, but this is extended into the involvement of people in church activities throughout the week, particularly in outreaches to the surrounding community. Pentecostal churches see themselves as God's people, called out from the world around them with a distinct mission. They have a sense of identity as a separated community whose primary purpose is to promote their cause to those outside. "Church" for them is the most important activity in life, and their faith is brought into every situation. Unlike older forms of Christianity, Pentecostalism is not as dependent on foreign specialists and trained clergy and the transmission of Western liturgy and leadership. For migrant Pentecostals in the West, for example, their churches have many practical functions—whether obtaining a visa to remain in the country, receiving employment, dealing with racism, marginalization and rejection, finding financial help, getting advice regarding marriage and family affairs, deliverance from demons or healing from sickness, and other afflictions seen as the attack of Satan. In short, the church is a caring, therapeutic community that is at once a refuge from the storms and difficulties of a new life and an advice and comfort centre for every possible eventuality in an uncertain external environment. Many churches influenced by an individualistic and secular society have lost this sense of therapeutic community and belongingness that is so much a central characteristic of these forms of Pentecostalism.

Fourth are *visions and dreams* (1999, 39), perhaps not a universal feature of Pentecostal liturgy, but an important part of guidance in many societies. Through visions and dreams people are called to special tasks and to ministry, warned of impending dangers, and given revelations by the Spirit. Pentecostals justify this aspect of their practice by reference to the Bible, where visions and dreams are seen as a normal means of divine revelation. “Words of knowledge” and “words of wisdom” in Pentecostalism worldwide often involve seeing visions and revealing God’s purpose for individuals and communities. Among many African churches of the Spirit, the prophet is the main channel and interpreter of these divine communications in a role not unlike that of the traditional healer. Intercultural theology always intends to offer a prophetic voice and vision.

The fifth of Hollenweger’s oral structures is *healing and deliverance by prayer* (1997, 228–45). Healing and exorcism (by prayer or sometimes through fasting) has always been one of the important features of Pentecostalism, and one of the main reasons for its worldwide appeal (see Chapters 24 and 30). These elements are essential parts of the life of Pentecostals because these problems affect the whole community, especially where access to adequate healthcare is difficult. The experiences of ordinary people form the crucible in which an intercultural Pentecostal theology is made. In the healing and deliverance liturgies, liberation from the terrors and insecurities inherent in experiences of evil spiritual powers in society is achieved.

The final structure is *liturgical music and dance*. Together with healing through prayer, Hollenweger (1997, 269–87) considers that this aspect illustrates the relationship between body and mind. Participation in almost every kind of Pentecostal community is characterised by participating in a joyful, bodily celebration of praise and dance. One seldom takes place without the other. Africans are well known for their rhythmic music and dance usually accompanied by strong and vibrant percussion. Many churches make frequent use of drums accompanied by dance as a central part of their liturgy in keeping with their religious and cultural practices. Pentecostal dance is seldom choreographed and expresses the desire of participants to celebrate their freedom in Christ. For Pentecostals, Christian worship is a joyful experience to be entered into with the whole body (see Chapter 11). This free, exuberant Christianity exists not merely because it is a cultural trait of some people to be enthusiastic, rhythmic, and noisy but because it is an expression of their heartfelt joy in the freedom they have experienced. A new emphasis on the role of the Spirit in the worship, work, and witness of the church is one of the main reasons for Pentecostal enthusiasm. Although most noticeable in Africa, the antiphonal, boisterous singing, simultaneous and spontaneous prayer, and rhythmic music and dance are found throughout global Pentecostalism. They emphasise the freedom, equality, community, and dignity of each person in the sight of God. These various “oral structures” form a template from where we can analyse a contextual Pentecostal theology. Hollenweger’s work indicates that important is not *what* we do with Pentecostal theology but *how* we do it: we are to approach theology through the contextual practices of Pentecostals rather than through our preconceived theoretical formulations. The essays in this volume reflect the difficulties of this task and the challenges facing the diverse manifestations of Pentecostalism worldwide.

A global theology?

Pentecostal scholars have only relatively recently moved beyond the particularism of classical Pentecostal doctrines to reflection on how Pentecostal theology might relate to its global context (see Chapter 2). Can we find Hollenweger’s structures reflected in contemporary Pentecostal theology? Frank Macchia (2006, 24–25) writes of classical Pentecostal scholars who have moved “significantly beyond the old classical Pentecostal doctrine of subsequence

and tongues as initial evidence.” Vondey (2010) portrays the entire development from classical to global Pentecostalism as a process of going beyond Pentecostals’ historical, sociocultural, institutional, and theological origins. Most elaborately, Amos Yong (2005) frames his study on global Pentecostalism as a paradigm for a global, pneumatological theology. His theological position is that Pentecostalism is diverse, practical, holistic, and has strong connections to the marginalised of this world, so that a reconstruction of a global Pentecostal theology is not only possible but necessary. As Vondey (2006, 294) points out, for Yong:

Pentecostal theology is not merely abstract and speculative but also deeply practical. . . [Yong is] not only speaking from the core-orienting motif of pneumatology but also challenging the dominant creedal formulations of Western theology and presenting the realities of Pentecostal practice, worship, and life in the Holy Spirit.

Yong’s pneumatological imagination (see Chapter 14) tries to weave a common thread in all the diversity of global Pentecostalism. The experience of the Spirit informs and makes possible a global theology.

The question is whether such a global Pentecostal theology is practically possible, or is this only an ideological theory? Yong is at pains to find consensus and to repackage theology while attempting to be Pentecostal, ecumenical, catholic, and evangelical. In his attempt to find a “global theology” with harmony and consensus, he may have overlooked some of the fundamental and irreconcilable differences between his different sources. For example, in his discussion of Spirit baptism, he advocates a conciliatory position, understanding Spirit baptism as at the same time a conversion-initiation, sanctifying, and empowering experience (2005, 118–19). Although much can be said in favour of this position, more conservative Pentecostal theologians who understand what Yong has written will hardly endorse this compromise. Macchia (2006, 20–21) takes a similar position in his attempt to outline “a global Pentecostal theology” that for him finds its centre in Spirit baptism, however variously interpreted.

Still, Yong’s highly selective treatment of a mass of reading is highly purposeful: to justify his theological position that Pentecostalism is diverse, practical, holistic, and with strong connections to the marginalized of this world, and to introduce his contention that a “reconstruction” of a global Pentecostal theology is possible (2005, 79–80). Hollenweger’s insights find expression primarily in Yong’s consistent pneumatological focus: it is the experience of the Spirit in all its diversity in global Pentecostalism that informs a global theology. For Yong, Pentecostal theology is grounded in soteriology, a soteriology that is “thoroughly pneumatological,” but is also multidimensional. His methodology draws his theological construction from biblical sources, from contemporary experience, and in dialogue with the historical church traditions (Yong 2005, 82). His method is dynamic and progressive, and therefore open-ended. The experiences of global Pentecostalism mean that the “multidimensionality” of salvation is expanded comprehensively and holistically to include personal, family, ecclesial, material, social (race, class, and gender), cosmic, and eschatological salvation. He tackles the theme of ecclesiology, tracing a pneumatological perspective on the marks of the church: united, holy, catholic, and apostolic. He discusses the church in the fellowship of the Spirit as the eschatological people of God, a pneumatological theology of baptism, and a pneumatological theology of liturgy (including the Lord’s Supper). He deals with the potential of Pentecostalism for ecumenism, as the experience of the Spirit is able to heal fragmentation and division. Yong shows how ecumenism is biblically grounded, realised in Pentecostal history, and is potentially the most significant contribution of global Pentecostalism to the universal church.

Conclusion

When we ask whether a global “Pentecostal theology” is possible, some scholars suggest that it is. Yong situates this in the “pneumatological imagination,” while Vondey finds its “core theological symbol” in the experience of Pentecost. Macchia centres it in the concept of Spirit baptism. Hollenweger is more eclectic and considers the “oral structures” and histories of Pentecostalism to be the basis of contextual, intercultural theologies. Theological research on the liturgies, narratives, sermons, testimonies, songs, and communities of Pentecostals, especially outside the Western world, is greatly needed. It is important to recognise that Pentecostal theology, like the Spirit, cannot be contained in one form or creed. The challenge is to discover and analyse how Pentecostal theology is done and what it might look like in Africa, Asia, or Latin America, rather than seeking to impose a rigid Euro-American model on the world. Pentecostal scholars from Africa, Asia, and Latin America are emerging with fresh perspectives and different priorities. In the end, it is the experience of the Spirit that forms the basis for a contextual Pentecostal theology, but the Spirit moves as the Spirit wills in contexts that are very different, rendering any attempt at homogenisation impossible. This is the global challenge of Pentecostal theology today.

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