

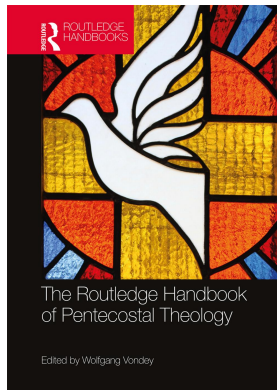
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## The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology

Wolfgang Vondey

### Pentecostal Theology as Story

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Kenneth J. Archer

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## 4

# PENTECOSTAL THEOLOGY AS STORY

## Participating in God's mission

*Kenneth J. Archer*

In studies of Pentecostalism, Pentecostal “identity” is an ever-returning topic of inquiry. Although a young Christian tradition, Pentecostalism is a global phenomenon, making life meaningful for multitudes. Expressions of Pentecostalism are rich and varied, often paradoxical. The concerns for identity and definition are deeply connected with Pentecostalism’s polygenetic origins (McClymond 2015) and global diversity (see Chapter 2). Pentecostalism is seasoned with diverse cultures, enhanced by distinct melodies, mystified by peculiar practices, and can appear both confrontational and consoling. Pentecostal doctrine, in particular, “flows in paradoxical continuity and discontinuity with other streams of Christianity” (Land 1993, 18). The theological identity of Pentecostals seems to involve a myriad of tongues and languages reminiscent of Acts 2 (Yong 2011, 35–46). Should we define Pentecostalism theologically primarily by its spirituality (Land 1993), its pneumatological focus (Yong 2005), through a central and unique doctrine (Macchia 2006), its passion for encountering God (Warrington 2008), or its theological narrative of the full gospel (Vondey 2017)?

This chapter is concerned with articulating the core commitment and mechanisms underlying the various expressions and modes of articulation of Pentecostal theological identity by taking seriously that “Pentecostal theology is rooted in an experiential, oral, and lived tradition” and is a “theology that is sung, felt and experienced through the Holy Spirit” (Walsh 2006, 199). Pentecostalism, in short, is an affective-experiential Christian tradition (Archer 2007). I suggest that what holds together this approach to Christian theology in a meaningful coherent manner is the Pentecostal story (Archer 2004a). Pentecostal theology is expressed narratively, through story, testimony, songs, and dance. The practices and doctrines of the Pentecostal movement proclaim a hope-filled gospel with a story that brings purpose and meaning as it shapes personal and communal character and conduct.

An approach to Pentecostal theology through story demands that we take seriously Pentecostal history and identity in a manner that has found genuine expression among Pentecostals. On the following pages, I address Pentecostal identity via its formational story that, in turn, expresses a narrative doxological theology. The Pentecostal story is not a historical-critical retelling of an event, and it should not be confused as such; instead, it is more of an informed popular story developed through personal experiences of divine encounter, exegetical appropriations of the Acts of the Apostles and the Gospels, and spiritual

expectations among Pentecostal communities. I begin by explaining the early Pentecostal story as it arises out of North America. Even though the Pentecostal story has global variations and takes on particular emphases in different contexts, I am arguing that a basic story line with its central doxological confessions provides a prominent controlling theological narrative of early Pentecostalism regardless of its origins. Pentecostalism is “a religion made to travel” (Dempster, Klaus, and Petersen 1999). Its story, which is attractive and easy to transmit orally, only facilitates the movement’s growth. Although the story has regional accents, important modifications, and distinctions, with new and original themes being added, the basic story line, the primary characters, and its central narrative convictions remain stable enough to be identifiable and fluid enough to migrate and adapt to new contexts (Ramirez 2015). After I describe the narrative identity of Pentecostals, I tease out the theological significance of story for understanding Pentecostal theology. This analysis is intended to provide critical reflection for a re-visioning of the story for Pentecostal communities today.

### **Narrative identity**

Why is narrative important to personal and communal identity? Narrative, according to Alasdair MacIntyre (1984, 204–25) is the only suitable means that human beings have to make sense of life. He argues that it is impossible to identify any human being apart from his or her own story. An individual’s particular narrative arises out of the wider social stories of the community. MacIntyre (1984, 216) suggests that “there is no way to give us an understanding of any society, including our own, except through the stock of stories which constitute its initial dramatic resources.” These stories shape persons in such a way as to connect events, characters, actions, and intentions into meaningful plots that offer moral direction. Without a personal story, which is dependent upon the larger societal stories, one cannot know what to do, how to act properly, or the roles individuals are to play in the community. One’s life story serves as a means to narrate personal identity produced through temporal and spatial relationships with other human beings as well as one’s sociocultural contextualized surroundings.

From the perspective of narrative psychology, Dan P. McAdams suggest we produce a narrative identity made up of “the internalized and evolving story of the self that a person constructs to make sense and meaning out of his or her life” (McAdams 2011, 99). Used as an interpretive tool,

the story is a selective reconstruction of the autobiographical past and a narrative anticipation of the imagined future that serves to explain, for the self and others, how the person came to be and where his or her life may be going.

(99)

Stories are not predetermined, static identifiers but “the process of narrative identity development continues across the life course” of individuals by drawing “heavily on prevailing cultural norms and the images, metaphors, and themes that run through the many narratives they encounter in social life” (100). What we “see” in a person’s and community’s identity looks like a story: “an internalized and evolving tale with main characters, intersecting plots, key scenes, and an imagined ending, representing how the person reconstructs the personal past (chapters gone by) and anticipates the future (chapters yet to come)” (100). It is our stories drawn from socio-cultural, linguistic, and family systems, including religious experiences

and symbols that allow MacIntyre (1984, 216) to conclude emphatically that “there is no way to give us an understanding of any ‘*person*,’ including ‘*ourselves*,’ except through the stock of stories which constitutes the events of our lives.” Life stories are constructed out of the formative stories in which they are embedded. Life stories are a weaving together of personal, familial, and community identity, which gives meaning and purpose, moral guidance, and perspective, direction and anticipation, to persons-in-community. Therefore, if developing a life story is central for understanding what it means to be human, it is the Christian life story which is formative for understanding the theological identity of the individual and the church.

The Christian life story evolves through an interactive dynamic process for the person-in-community. Yet it should not be understood as a static passive acceptance of the Christian community’s projections of identity upon the individual. For Christians, a life story involves the theological interpretation of one’s life drawn primarily from the beliefs of community. For Pentecostals, these beliefs are rooted in the biblical scriptures (see Chapter 6), which provide the grand story or hermeneutical horizon for interpreting their own story. The telling of this grand story is mediated through preaching, testimonies, and songs, and from these a general foundational narrative is constructed in which one’s own story can be integrated. Individual biblical stories are woven into the person’s relational understanding of Jesus and of becoming a part of the story of the Christian community (Land 1993, 63–67). This foundational narrative serves as the hermeneutical foil and filter for understanding and making sense of a reality that is true for both the person in community and the community of persons. A Pentecostal life story is a particular Christian theological understanding of reality and one’s relationships with God, others, creation, and the self. As a person participates in the community’s foundational narratives and core convictions, the story not only shapes the identity of that person but also affects the identity of the community and thus forms Pentecostal theology.

The Pentecostal community celebrates and reaffirms participation in the grand formational story of Scripture through re-experiencing its central narrative convictions in communal Christian ritual practices, primarily centered in altar worship experiences (see Chapter 16). The central narrative convictions of the community are articulated through praying, preaching, teaching, testifying, singing, acts of mercy, evangelizing, sharing goods, tithing, and other community rituals. Celebrating the Christian story includes sacraments such as water baptism, Eucharist, foot washing, and praying for the sick, not as isolated rituals but as “narrated” and “narrating” practices of the community’s life of faith (Archer 2004b). In these narrative practices, the community’s identity is held in tension with the participants’ numerous life stories as part of the community’s foundational narrative and central narrative convictions. The community affects the identity of the individual as the individual participates in the life of the community.

Although personal testimonies affirm and underscore the central narrative convictions of the Pentecostal community (see Chapter 11) and may challenge certain aspects of a particular understanding of a belief, nevertheless, the general foundational story itself remains stable. For Pentecostals, participating in communal worship is not merely a social encounter but a spiritual event involving the emergence and articulation of one’s own and the community’s narrative identity. As the life stories of individuals and the community intersect, they begin sharing a common perspective, thus allowing the identity and perspective of both to be shaped (“narrating”) and (re)shaped (“narrated”) by the other. From this perspective, theology as story is understood to be a dynamic, porous, and fluid narrative process rather than a static and closed endeavor. For Pentecostals,

the interconnectedness of narrative identity becomes especially significant as individuals corporately participate in the shared mission of Jesus through the means of a liturgical hermeneutic of the full gospel.

### **Pentecostal story as spiritual identity**

The Pentecostal story is a teleological telling of the Christian story with a distinct twist. The foundational story shapes how Pentecostals understand Christianity both theologically and historically. The foundational story (in)forms how Pentecostals fit into the larger scheme of Christian history. The story explains their origins and the importance of their existence as a Pentecostal Christian community. More exactly, it is the story itself that creates the Pentecostal theological identity; the story is not merely a narrative expression of faith or articulation of belief—it is their life story. This identity forming is made possible by a historical framing of a core biblical narrative, the Latter Rain motif reinterpreted through the lens of Pentecost.

The “Latter Rain” provides a broad motif for the development of the Pentecostal worldview, or to remain within the realm of narrative, the Pentecostal imagination (Faupel 1996, 19–43). The Pentecostal story articulates God’s redemptive involvement within human history in a promise–fulfillment pattern, hence providing a hermeneutical lens for making sense out of God’s involvement in human history in general and their communities in particular. The Early and Latter Rain motif frames the story, and for most Pentecostals the fivefold (or full) gospel serves as a primary narrative for articulating the convictions of the community (see Chapter 16). The full gospel is an open theological narrative articulating both a material and spiritual understanding of redemption (see Vondey 2017). The heart of the liberating story is Jesus—who saves, delivers, heals, sanctifies, Spirit baptizes, blesses, restores, changes lives, and is returning soon (Alfaro 2010). These convictions are confessional and are expressed through doxological testimonies borne out of an experiential redemptive relationship with God. The central narrative convictions articulate the redemptive hope of the community and as such, are the very heart of the Pentecostal story (Archer 2009, 136–70).

The Latter Rain motif is a re-appropriation of the Lukan narration of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost (see Acts 1–2). The Lukan Pentecost was the gift of the Father (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4) and the definitive revealing and universal release of the Holy Spirit at the hands of Christ as promised (Archer 2014). Despite the significance of the Latter Rain motif as a model for understanding the Pentecostal movement, the narrative of Pentecost is so formative that the adherents call themselves, and have become known by other Christian traditions predominantly as *Pentecostals* (Jacobsen 2003, 353–64). The central position of the Pentecost event does not diminish the importance of Jesus (as narrated in Gospels and Acts) nor subordinate the cross and resurrection; instead, “the bestowal of the Spirit at Pentecost is the culminating point of Christ’s mission on earth” (Macchia 2018, 2). In Luke’s narrative, Jesus baptizes his followers with the Spirit so they will be able to carry on the mission of God until Jesus returns for his followers. For Pentecostals, this past miraculous story does not end with the participants in the upper room in Jerusalem; rather, they take the words of Peter to heart that “the promise is for you, for your children, and for all who are far away, everyone whom the Lord our God calls” (Acts 2:39). Thus, Pentecostals believe that they, along with every Christian, are recipients of the Father’s promise and should experience a “personal” Pentecost (and thus participate in the Latter Rain).

For early Pentecostals, the Acts 2 narrative was not so much about the birth of the church as it was about the recapitulation of the old covenant into something new, enabling the

followers of Jesus to continue his mission through the powerful presence of the Holy Spirit (Archer 2011, 43–64). The Early and Latter Rain motif provides a promise–fulfillment pattern in which Pentecostals retrieve the Lukan promise of God’s Spirit being poured out upon the confessing community in the last days. Hence, the twentieth-century “Pentecostals” are the people of God’s promise to continue to pour out the Holy Spirit upon followers of Jesus. They understand the Latter Rain outpouring as a sign of the soon-return of Jesus and as God’s means to gather in the end-time harvest. Thus, the Pentecostal story has two purposes: first, to explain who they are and what they are to do as followers of Jesus, and second, to explain how they fit into the story and history of Christianity.

Pentecostals use frequently the Latter Rain story as a polemical explanation for the apparent lack of miraculous signs and wonders in the modern era. The Pentecostals’ story of Christianity reflects a critical and more Anabaptist perspective of Christian history (Archer and Hamilton 2010). The prototype of this critical story suggests that the apostolic community experienced the signs and wonders of God regularly (as described in Acts). However, as time passed, Christianity became corrupted by worldly desires, causing God to withdraw his Spirit (Spurling 1920). Although signs and wonders began to disappear, God always had a victorious, yet persecuted, remnant. The remnant included all Christians who lived authentic holy lives, many of whom did not always conform to the creedal Christianity of their times. Historically, the significant shift that caused the Spirit to be withdrawn occurred when Rome embraced Christianity as an acceptable religion in the fourth century. For Pentecostals, “Constantinianism” had to do with the corruption of the church by institutionalizing the Spirit through the hierarchical clergy and coerced conformity to official creeds (Coulter 2007, 64–67). This corruption led to a loss of the priesthood and prophethood of all believers. For Pentecostals, the Constantinian shift marks the beginning of the middle of the Pentecostal story within the history of Christianity. In spite of the spiritual drought, there remained a sense that God would pour out his Spirit on all “authentic” Christians. The Reformation brought about the rain clouds. The initial sprinkles of the Latter Rain began to fall upon those Christians who were seeking to restore Christianity. The Reformation initiated the “restoration” of the gospel, which culminated in the twentieth-century Latter Rain outpouring understood as a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit (Archer 2009, 65–84).

When the Latter Rain began in the early twentieth century, Pentecostals were confident that they would have more productive results than the initial sprinklings of the Reformation. The baptism in the Holy Spirit signified by tongues would make the gospel complete. The full gospel would restore New Testament lifestyle, practices, polity, power, and doctrines to the church while also fueling within those baptized a passion for God’s Kingdom (Land 1993). With the restoration of the baptism in the Holy Spirit, the Pentecostal movement was the sign that the story was nearing its end (or climax); that is, Jesus was coming for his sanctified bride! Pentecostals saw themselves as living in the last days and were concerned to bring as many as possible into the story. They often attracted other Christians from different traditions, especially those who shared a similar spirited or so-called supernatural worldview. With Spirit baptism restored to the Christian community, the church once again had the full story of the gospel. This central theological narrative articulates God’s redemptive involvement as a formative doxological confession that is deeply personal and testimonial in nature: it is the personal and communal experience that Jesus is savior, sanctifier, Spirit baptizer, healer, and coming king. Through the telling of this story, Pentecostals identify themselves as participants in the redemptive purposes of God, extending the mission of Jesus through the presence of the Spirit. They become the hands and feet of Jesus, being encouraged to

extend the good news through good works, just as Jesus had done. The heart of the Pentecostal story is this doxological confession pertaining to Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit.

This brief overarching retelling of Christian history encouraged Pentecostals to seek the baptism in the Holy Spirit. The experience of Spirit baptism, or an individual's personal Pentecost, marked an intimate relational experience with God and the community. With such an experience came a sense of special importance and dignity, which, in turn, encouraged an ecclesiastical missional fervor. The Pentecostal communities were to be "contrast societies" because they were the family of God existing as the visible embodied witness as the bride of Christ to a lost and dying world. Pentecostal storied-spirituality "seeks to extend its self-understanding as a community of the Spirit *in* the world and *for* the world, but not *of* the world" (Villafañe 1993, 193). As such, holiness, hospitality, and loving kindness were to be their characteristics. The marks of this community are most notably identified by the zealous desire for world evangelism, charismatic worship, holy living according to the New Testament, and concern for the poor, the hurting, the lost, and those in spiritual captivity and physical prisons (Luke 4: 18–19). The Pentecostal story engenders a spirituality that looks to minister to those overlooked by society in general—orphans and children, widows and women, poor and lower income working class (James 1:27). Historically and globally, the story of Pentecostalism is the story of a movement on the margins of society. Yet the Pentecostal story generates anticipation for transformation and brings a sense of hope and meaning to the community and the world.

### **Theological identity emerging from the story**

The Pentecostal story is primarily a grace-initiated and grace-sustained, synergistic soteriological account of God bringing redemption to humanity through the ministry of Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit. As such, rather than a story of doctrine (Fackre 1996), it is a theological story of the people. The story articulates and encourages personal redemptive experiences with God and social participation through Jesus and the Spirit. The Pentecostal story is an experiential, even mystical, form of the Christian story (see Chapter 4). Hence, experience shaped by the biblical stories serves to ground the people in God's inspired story (the Bible) and to encourage individuals to interpret their faith and experience with God by the stories found in Scripture. Soteriology becomes the melting-pot from which all other Pentecostal doctrines are forged (Vondey 2016). Framing Pentecostal soteriology within the Latter Rain motif highlights the importance of the missiological ecclesiological and eschatological experiences of Pentecostals narrated in their stories.

The theological narrative of the full gospel functions as a restoration of the Christian gospel by placing as the story's primary character Jesus Christ who, while sent by the Father, and now at the Father's right hand, is still working by saving, sanctifying, Spirit baptizing, healing, and commissioning people. The Pentecostal communities continue the mission of Christ by joining the mission of his Spirit in the world. As the Spirit of Christ, the Holy Spirit is animating, forming, and empowering the communities as the Spirit leads them in continuing the mission of God. These missiological (see Chapter 26) and ecclesiological perspectives (see Chapter 27) most certainly include some notion of building a counter- or alternative community. However, the polity of ecclesiology is not a focus of the story; it is the purity, power, and charismatic nature of the church that is its chief concern. The testimonies to being saved, sanctified, filled with the Spirit, healed, and commissioned are the narratives for every Christian; hence, all are to become involved in the mission of God. Out of this commitment do Pentecostal communities see themselves as both existing for the world and

yet different and distinct from the world. The charismatic contrast-communities nurture the well-being of the followers of Jesus as they continue the ministry of Jesus to the lost and the hurting. This narrative foundation of the Christian mission finds both its motivation and end in the coming of God's kingdom.

The eschatological perspective of the Pentecostal story fits best with an inaugurated understanding of the coming kingdom (Land 1993, 117–20). The kingdom (or reign) of God has broken into the present world with the ministry of Jesus and is made more evident through the revealing and outpouring of the Holy Spirit (see Archer 2016). Yet the kingdom is also still future—it will come fully and be established completely only with the return of Jesus (Thompson 2010). When this story was formed, the majority of early Pentecostals were premillennial, and this belief encouraged a paradox: Pentecostals were pessimistic in that the world is getting worse, and yet optimistic in that God is working miracles, signs, and wonders. This paradox assisted them in emphasizing the nearness of the return of Jesus while also reinforcing God's approval of their movement. Pentecostal theology often moved from an imminent perspective that Jesus would return at any moment to an immediate understanding—Jesus *is* returning *now* (today, next week, month, or year). In turn, this retelling of the story and its immediacy fueled evangelistic activity, and those identity was shaped by the story were caught up in the missiological fervor. Within this story, everyone had a purpose: to live as God's holy people (Jesus is returning soon for a pure bride) and to share the gospel (evangelize as many as will respond).

Because the Pentecostal story is enmeshed in the story of Jesus, the primary character in the Pentecostal story *is* Jesus, alongside the Spirit and Father. The Pentecostal story is more Jesus-centric than Christocentric or trinitarian, which may explain some of the doctrinal divisions among Pentecostals. The story is Jesus-centric because of the devotional emphasis and missional focus of following Jesus; the story encourages a Spirit-Christology from below more so than a Logos-Christology from above (Bryant 2014). This perspective no doubt added to the early split in Pentecostalism over Oneness and trinitarian doctrines of God (Reed 2008). The majority of Pentecostals re-affirmed a historic trinitarian view of God, and yet a substantial group creatively developed a monotheistic oneness perspective of both the one essence of God and one person of God (see Chapter 18): Jesus is one person with two natures, human and divine. Jesus is the one true God, yet Jesus can simultaneously take on the titles of Father, Son and Holy Spirit (French 1999). If we understand Oneness theology as storied theology, then the Pentecostal story reinforces personal devotion primarily to Jesus who is the bearer of the Holy Spirit as promised by the Father. This Pentecostal story thus implicitly echoes a trinitarian perspective, and yet also undermines the traditional doctrinal articulations of trinitarian doctrine.

These and other theological constructs of the Pentecostal story are drawn primarily from the Bible, which shapes the storied worldview. Yet the Pentecostal story is not the expression of a historical primitivism marked by the return to a pre-modern worldview; rather, the story thrives on the margins of modernity. In this timeless narrative, Pentecostals see continuity between the world narrated by the Bible and the world in which they live and hold to the testimony that throughout their story, Jesus is “the same yesterday, today and forever” (Hebrews 13:8). Thus, Pentecostal story and history are better understood from a para-modern or meta-modern perspective (Archer, 2009, 38–46, 2016). Their para-modern perspective is one which affirms some continuity with the modern age and does so with a modified modern epistemological perspectives and language, while also clearly challenging the closed-universe perspective of the modern age (Yong 2011). A storied Pentecostal identity is marked by a continuing narrative that has not yet come to its conclusion. The



Pentecostal imagination allows the gospel to continue to travel into cultures who have a more heightened spirited perspective of reality and among those persons and communities that have a deep quest for spirituality. The Pentecostal story is open to the encounter with God across history and the world. As a continuing story, it is open to revision, continued surprise, and wonder.

### **The Pentecostal story revised**

One seldom hears the Latter Rain language explicitly today in Pentecostal or charismatic circles. Although Pentecostals, classical and otherwise, continue to sing songs and hymns that are filled with “rain” imagery, the Pentecostal story can appear decentered and fragmented in a global Pentecostal world. In contemporary academic studies, the fivefold, or full gospel has become a primary narrative for understanding the Pentecostal story, explaining the theological roots of the early movement, and for developing a contemporary narrative theology for Pentecostals worldwide (Dayton 1987; Thomas 1998; Alfaro 2010; Archer 2011; Vondey 2017). Yet the narrative does not find its justification in the story itself. That Jesus is experienced as savior, sanctifier, Spirit baptizer, healer, and coming king is not self-evident. It is the Latter Rain motif that offers justification for the theological narrative by situating Pentecostal theology soteriologically, missiologically, and eschatologically: the Latter Rain is filled with a passionate vibrancy for the liberating work of God embedded in a sense of eschatological urgency. Water symbolizes the baptismal font of regeneration and the nurturing concerns associated with the work of the Holy Spirit. Rain emphasizes the outpouring of God’s Spirit, and all that is associated with it in the contexts of the renewing work and mission of God. The Latter Rain motif places this transformation and renewal unambiguously in the context of Pentecost. In short, the story of the Latter Rain *is* the story of Pentecost and, by extension, Pentecostals. Pentecost revisited affirms the availability, viability, and importance of the Pentecostal experience of the Latter Rain motif for the whole Christian story.

By revisiting the Pentecost story, personally and communally, it becomes clear that Pentecostals as persons-in-community readily identify with the Latter Rain promise (Acts 2:39) and early Christianity. In the motif of the Latter Rain, Spirit baptism remains the lynch pin that keeps the story anchored in Pentecost. The Pentecost event and its leading characters (Jesus, Father, and Spirit) manifested in the signs associated with the event become formative for the receiving persons-in-community, because the event includes the outpouring of the Holy Spirit as both a personal Pentecost and ongoing renewal of the church. In this way, the Early and Latter Rains mentioned in Acts 2 remain anchored in the biblical story where they function as a prophetic pattern of promise and fulfillment. In the telling of the story, the imagery of rain and other symbols such as fire and cloud, and signs such as prophecy, tongues, joy, and healing, support the importance of the continuation of Pentecost for each generation of believers. Interpreted *as* Pentecost, the Latter Rain becomes a constant frame of reference for the doctrinal narrative of the Pentecostal story (Vondey 2017, 2–3). Yet, more importantly, this storied approach is a doxological approach to theology (Vondey 2017, 288–94), which allows personal and communal testimony to become the primary mediator of worship and witness. With the story of Pentecost, persons-in-community testify to the redemptive work of God. They, then, are “people of Pentecost,” and as such continue the narration of Luke–Acts. These “Pentecostals” will find more experiential connection to past renewal movements and figures of church history (Burgess 2011). The Pentecostal story signals that the Spirit has been working since Pentecost, and as people of Pentecost, and the

church of Pentecost, the participants too are part of the ongoing work of God. This nuanced change to the story encourages an understanding that Pentecostals are fulfilling the Latter Rain promise, without becoming the fulfillment (past tense) of the promise. More extensive than claiming to be people of the Latter Rain, which is not a false claim, Pentecostals can say that they are a people of Pentecost because their story is the story of Pentecost. This emphasis allows for the argument that Pentecost serves as the theological “symbol” of Pentecostalism (Vondey 2017, 4–5), while the full gospel functions as its theological narrative which is actualized through personal and communal encounters. A revised reading of the Pentecostal story is indispensable to an understanding of Pentecostal theology rooted in Pentecost but aimed at a broad emphasis on renewal and the continuity of God’s redemptive mission throughout history.

### Conclusion

Pentecostal theology exhibits the essential character of story. Experientially, practically, and doctrinally, story serves as the primary means to shape Pentecostal theological imagination and worldview, making reality meaningful as story. In the narrative of this story, Pentecostals are people of Pentecost, testifying to the redemptive experiences associated with the gospel of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit: Pentecost means that Jesus is still working among them through the activity of the Holy Spirit. As people of Pentecost, Pentecostals are living in the last days, awaiting the return of Jesus by actively engaging the mission of God through the leading of the Holy Spirit. Testimonies, songs, Bible reading and hearing, dance, altar times, preaching, service to the poor, prayer, and contemplative experiences are all valid avenues to encounter the living God—all storied opportunities. Pentecostals are encouraged by the story of Pentecost to anticipate that God will work in and through them and will bless them. The Pentecostal life story is one that emphasizes personal dignity and worth, encourages personal responsibility to live a loving and holy life engaged in God’s mission, and continued witness to the story of God.

Theology as story takes on regional accents and personal emphases, yet the foundational character of story keeps Pentecostals grounded in the story of God told in the Scriptures. Seen as story, theology encourages Pentecostals to read the Old Testament as promise and the New Testament as fulfillment, in which they participate. Their own story connects them to the narratives of Scripture as well as early and historic Christianity. God who creates and redeems will glorify creation. God who sent the Son, also promises to send the Spirit, and thus raises Jesus from the dead. Jesus baptizes God’s people with the Spirit, fulfilling the promise of the Father and initiating the Latter Rain. Theology as story is relational, communal, and personal. The story is fluid yet stable, doxological more so than propositional, relationally grounded and not abstract. The growth of Pentecostalism suggests that theology as story is attractive and even intoxicating. Like all hope-filled inspiring redemptive stories, it attracts the marginalized who testify to experiencing hope, peace, healing, joy, deliverance, and redemption as they actively await Jesus’ return by participating in God’s mission.

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