

**Where Pentecostalism and Evangelicalism Part Ways:  
Towards a Theology of Pentecostal Revelatory Experience  
Part 1**

by Tania Harris

**Introduction**

This article is presented in two parts. In Part 1, I introduce the Evangelical and Pentecostal approaches to contemporary revelatory experience. In Part 2, I will focus on the impact of Evangelical theology on that experience and show how the adoption of an Evangelical theology to explain Pentecostal revelatory experience has negative consequences for its ongoing practise. In the final section of Part 2, I will propose the Catholic approach as an appropriate framework for understanding Pentecostal revelatory experience.

The claim to revelatory experience, or in common parlance, the experience of “hearing God’s voice” is frequent among Pentecostals<sup>1</sup> and has been identified by Albrecht and Lee as important to their spirituality.<sup>2</sup> A ten-country survey in 2006 showed that Pentecostals were two to three times more likely than the average Christian to report that they have received a direct revelation from God.<sup>3</sup> Ernest B. Gentile

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<sup>1</sup>As a global and diverse phenomenon, Pentecostalism is notoriously difficult to define. In this paper, “Pentecostal” relates to churches who embrace an experiential spirituality and its practice of charismata, and who are associated with organized Pentecostal groupings or denominations.

<sup>2</sup>Daniel E. Albrecht, *Rites in the Spirit: A Ritual Approach to Pentecostal/Charismatic Spirituality* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 228; Sang-Whan Lee, “Pentecostal Prophecy,” *The Spirit and Church* 3.1 (2001): 147–8.

<sup>3</sup>Paul Alexander, *Signs and Wonders: Why Pentecostalism Is the World’s Fastest Growing Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 117. Further, in a study of America’s largest Pentecostal denominations, 81 percent of adherents reported to have received a revelation directly from God: Margaret M. Poloma and John C. Green, *The Assemblies of God: Godly Love and the Revitalization of American Pentecostalism* (New York and London: NYU Press, 2010), 135. In a 2012 study among Hispanic Catholic Charismatics, 46 percent were reported to having received a direct revelation from God: Pew Research Center, “The Shifting Religious Identity of Latinos in the United States,” May 7, 2014. <http://www.pewforum.org/>

writes that for the Pentecostal, to “hear God’s voice” is to receive the revelation of “God’s thoughts towards humanity” via the Holy Spirit.<sup>4</sup> The ability to hear God’s voice is seen by Roger Stronstad to be a distinctive of the New Covenant whereby the Spirit’s outpouring at Pentecost enabled all believers to receive revelatory messages in the same manner (as dreams and visions) as the Old Covenant prophets (Num 12:6; Acts 2:16-17).<sup>5</sup> Pentecostal scholars generally concur that the Pentecostal experience involves the spontaneous reception of revelation apart from cognitive thought, and comprises a genuine transfer of new and/or previously unknown information.<sup>6</sup> For Pentecostal historian Cecil M. Robeck, prophetic messages include both categories of “forth-telling” (declaring the mind of God) and “fore-telling” (prediction of future events).<sup>7</sup> It is my observation that Pentecostals adopt an approach that assumes phenomenological continuity between their own experience and that of the biblical characters, and therefore view their revelatory experiences as analogous to those in Scripture. This perspective is consistent with the Pentecostal approach to all contemporary spiritual experience as identified by several in the Pentecostal Academy.<sup>8</sup>

Modern Pentecostal churches in Western Christianity have typically aligned themselves with the Protestant tradition, and under the smaller

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2014/05/07/the-shifting-religious-identity-of-latinos-in-the-united-states/ (accessed 21.7.16). As one form of hearing God’s voice, prophecy was found to be extensively practiced among Pentecostals in Asia: Dennis Lum, *The Practice of Prophecy: An Empirical-Theological Study of Pentecostals in Singapore* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2018), Kindle Version, Location 122.

<sup>4</sup>Ernest B. Gentile, *Your Sons and Daughters Will Prophesy* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 1999), 20.

<sup>5</sup>Roger Stronstad, *The Prophethood of All Believers: A Study in Luke’s Charismatic Theology*, Journal Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series 16 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 69.

<sup>6</sup>Mark J. Cartledge, “Charismatic Prophecy: A Definition and Description,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 5 [1994]: 81; Lee, “Pentecostal Prophecy,” 160; Samuel W. Muindi, *Pentecostal-Charismatic Prophecy: Empirical-Theological Analysis* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2017), 255-256.

<sup>7</sup>Cecil M. Robeck Jr., “The Gift of Prophecy” in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, eds. Stanley M. Burgess and Edouard M. Van Der Maas (Rev. edn., 999–1012, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 999; Cartledge, “Charismatic Prophecy: A Definition and Description,” 81.

<sup>8</sup>Stephen E. Parker, *Led by the Spirit: Toward a Practical Theology of Pentecostal Discernment and Decision-Making* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 13; Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 20; Steven J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 15; Mark McLean, “Toward a Pentecostal Hermeneutic,” *Pneuma* 6, no.2 (1984): 35-56; Scott A. Ellington, “Pentecostalism and the Authority of Scripture,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 9 (1996): 17; Kenneth J. Archer, “Pentecostal Hermeneutics: Retrospect and Prospect” In *Pentecostal Hermeneutics: A Reader*, ed. Lee Roy Martin (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 131; John McKay, “When the Veil Is Taken Away: The Impact of Prophetic Experience on Biblical Interpretation,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 5 (1994): 26.

umbrella of Evangelicalism;<sup>9</sup> nearly all Pentecostals consider themselves to be Evangelical.<sup>10</sup> While the two traditions share much in common, the Protestant/Evangelical approach to “hearing God’s voice” represents a clear differentiation from that of the Pentecostals.<sup>11</sup> In the Protestant/Evangelical traditions, the experience of hearing God speak is most often equated with the reading and exposition of Scripture by means of the Spirit’s illumination.<sup>12</sup> Contemporary revelatory experience outside of Scripture may be possible, but is usually deemed to be qualitatively inferior, relatively unreliable, and of minimal authority compared with the inspired experiences of Scripture.<sup>13</sup> This position is derived from the belief that the experiences in Scripture are ‘special’ and therefore unrepeatable, a perspective that seeks to preserve the authority, sufficiency and uniqueness of Scripture.

Although the revelatory experience is important to Pentecostal practise and is prized for its spiritual value, there has been a profound lack of theological reflection in this area by Pentecostals in the Academy.<sup>14</sup> In the absence of an adequate theological framework for their experiences, and in order to maintain the priority of Scripture, Pentecostals have adopted an Evangelical framework to understand their own experience. The result has been disconnection between the theology and practise of revelatory experience by Pentecostal Christians as they espouse a discontinuous theological approach while practising a continuous one. This disparity threatens to dilute the ongoing practise and potency of an experience that is understood by Pentecostals to be a keystone of the Spirit’s work under the New Covenant.

This paper draws on the findings of a study undertaken in preparation for a Ph.D. The study was conducted among Australian Pentecostals to reflect on the theology and practise of revelatory experiences. The Evangelical and Pentecostal approaches to revelatory experiences will be compared and contrasted in order to reveal the inadequacy of the Evangelical framework for Pentecostals, and the need

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<sup>9</sup>Like Pentecostalism, Evangelicalism is also difficult to define because of many divergent strands influencing the movement. Craig Allert argues for a loss of theological framework of the Evangelicals, showing that it developed as a protest movement rather than as a unique theological position: *A High View of Scripture?: The Authority of the Bible and the Formation of the New Testament Canon* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007), 18.

<sup>10</sup>Poloma and Green, *The Assemblies of God*, 3-4.

<sup>11</sup>Sang-Whan Lee, “Pentecostal Prophecy,” 159; S. Fourie, *Prophecy: God’s Gift of Communication to the Church* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1990), 14.

<sup>12</sup>Sang-Whan Lee, “Pentecostal Prophecy,” 160; Jon Ruthven, *On the Cessation of the Charismata: The Protestant Polemic on Postbiblical Miracles* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2007), 31.

<sup>13</sup>This position is best articulated by Wayne Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2000), Kindle Version, Location 962.

<sup>14</sup>Parker, *Led by the Spirit*, 20.

to develop a theological framework that is consistent with the Pentecostal approach. Alignment with the Catholic mystical tradition is proposed as the proper alternative.

### **The Evangelical Approach to Contemporary Revelatory Experience**

In the Protestant Evangelical tradition, two perspectives towards contemporary revelatory experience may be identified. The first perspective, known as cessationism, holds that revelatory experience beyond the canon has ceased. Any claim to contemporary revelation is invalid, dangerous or even heretical.<sup>15</sup> The second perspective, held largely by those of the charismatic stream, is most clearly and substantively represented by the work of Baptist theologian Wayne Grudem.<sup>16</sup> Grudem's study sought to bring validity to extra-biblical revelatory experiences by providing a position that refuted the arguments of cessationism, while preserving the Evangelical priority of Scripture.

According to Grudem, contemporary revelatory experiences are valid, but are phenomenologically inferior to the special experience of the canonical characters. This position is based on his identification of two different categories of prophetic experience in Scripture: (1) the special experience of the (canonical) Old Testament prophets and their equivalents, the New Testament apostles, who speak the "very words of God", and (2) the ordinary experience of the non-prophets of the Old Testament and New Testament congregations who speak only "human words to report something God has brought to mind."<sup>17</sup> For Grudem, there is no access to the "very words of God" as evidenced in the Scriptures—post-apostolic revelatory experiences are possible, but are always qualitatively inferior since they are comprised of human words that require testing.<sup>18</sup> Mallone sums up this position well: "I know of no theologically sound non-cessationist who would suggest that prophecies today are inspired as Scripture is inspired of God."<sup>19</sup>

While Grudem affirms the aspect of "new" revelation as

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<sup>15</sup>Benjamin B. Warfield's *Counterfeit Miracles* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1918) represents a major starting point in the twentieth century. Other cessationists include John F. MacArthur Jr., *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); J. I. Packer, *God's Words* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1981); Richard B. Gaffin, "A Cessationist View" in *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?* (edited by Wayne Grudem, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

<sup>16</sup>Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today* (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2000). Although his study focuses exclusively on the "gift of prophecy" and draws largely from Paul's epistles to the Corinthians, the perspective has bearing on the broader revelatory experience at a number of points.

<sup>17</sup>Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, Location 132, cf. 489.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., Location 962.

<sup>19</sup>George Mallone, *Those Controversial Gifts* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1983), 37.

characteristic of post-apostolic revelatory experiences, he is cautious about their tenuous nature. Messages can be directed towards personal and specific needs, but should not be trusted for guidance, since only God's words in Scripture are reliable.<sup>20</sup> As "human words," contemporary revelatory messages are helpful for building the church, but have minimal authority in the manner of pastoral counselling or advice. For Grudem, to hear God's voice clearly, Christians should prioritize Scripture reading.

Grudem's primary concern is to preserve the authority of Scripture.<sup>21</sup> Pentecostal scholars have noted that this issue lies at the heart of the debate.<sup>22</sup> If God's voice could be heard clearly and accurately in contemporary experience, it follows that it must carry the same potential for authority as the biblical experience, since authority originates in God himself (Isa 45:23; Num 23:19). This is one of the primary reasons cessationists have rejected contemporary experience altogether. The very fact that there is claim to an additional voice "serves to weaken the power of the Word."<sup>23</sup> Grudem's position also seeks to protect the sufficiency of Scripture: "God has not spoken to mankind any more words which he expects us to believe or obey than those we now have in the Bible."<sup>24</sup>

### **The Pentecostal Approach to Contemporary Revelatory Experience**

Grudem's study was well received, and strengthened the Pentecostal cause such that it inadvertently became the default position for both scholars and popular teachers.<sup>25</sup> Like Grudem, Pentecostals are

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<sup>20</sup>Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, Location 3785.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., Location 114.

<sup>22</sup>Ellington, "Pentecostalism and the Authority of Scripture," 16–38; Matthew S. Clark, "An Investigation into the Nature of a Viable Pentecostal Hermeneutic" (Ph.D. thesis, University of Pretoria, 1997), 160–201; Cecil M. Robeck, "Written Prophecies: A Question of Authority," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 2 [1980]: 26–45.

<sup>23</sup>Ruth A. Tucker, *God Talk: Cautions for Those Who Hear God's Voice* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 2005), 64.

<sup>24</sup>Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, Location 3013.

<sup>25</sup>An observation made by Jon Ruthven, "The 'Foundational Gifts' of Ephesians 2:20," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 10, no. 2 [2002]: 31 and Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts: In the New Testament Church and Today*, revised ed. (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1998), 186. As examples, see the work of David Lim, *Spiritual Gifts: A Fresh Look* (Springfield: Gospel, 2003), 105; Gordon D. Fee, *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994); Harold Horton, *The Gifts of the Spirit* (London: 1934, reprinted Springfield: Gospel, 1975), 173. See also Cindy Jacobs, *The Voice of God* (Ventura: Regal Books, 1995), 101; Mike Bickle, *Growing in the Prophetic* (Orlando: Creation House, 1996), 117; Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Voice of God* (Grand

keen to preserve the unique role of the Scriptures. Robeck and others show that the vast majority of Pentecostal and charismatic communities assert that contemporary prophecies are always “subservient to the role filled by Scripture.” Contemporary prophecies, they declare, must never contradict the canon or be “put on par” with it, and they state that this has been the case throughout history.<sup>26</sup> Robeck further details the differences between the two, describing prophetic experience as “particular, temporal and subjective,” whereas the Scriptures are “universal, eternal and objective.”<sup>27</sup> While appearing to present a neat solution to the “Scripture vs. Spirit” dilemma, this position has significant problems for Pentecostals at a foundational level.

#### Disconnect Between Theology and Practise

While Pentecostals are concerned about making a distinction between biblical and extra-biblical revelatory experiences in theory, multiple scholars have noted that this position does not hold in practise. Pentecostals affirm Grudem’s theology of a low level of authority for their experience, while consistently emulating the practises of a ‘higher-level’ experience. For example, Grudem bemoans the frequent use of the phrase, “Thus says the Lord” by Pentecostals, since it assumes a level of inspiration and authority that is equivalent to the experiences in Scripture.<sup>28</sup> Robeck shares a similar concern, showing how the use of prophecies by early Pentecostals gives them a “strongly canonical ring.”<sup>29</sup> He observes, “While there is the *de jure* claim that Scripture holds the ultimate authority, there are *de facto* practises which appear to deny that claim.”<sup>30</sup>

This dynamic was explored in the findings of my 2016 study investigating revelatory experiences among Australian Pentecostals. Using the practical theological method of Mark Cartledge, along with

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Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 278-86.

<sup>26</sup>Robeck, “Written Prophecies,” 28; William K. Kay, “Pentecostals and the Bible,” *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 24 (2004): 71–83, 75. Clark (“Investigation,” 159, 211, 246) shows that this perspective has been associated with Pentecostalism throughout this century, and is echoed among scholars such as Bezuidenhout (1980, in Clark, 1997), Fee (1994), and Schatzmann (1987, 39-40). See also Gentile, *Your Sons and Daughters*, 152; Gerald T. Sheppard, “Prophecy: From Ancient Israel to Pentecostals at the End of the Modern Age,” *The Spirit and Church* 3.1 (2001): 47–70, 55; William K. Kay, *Prophecy!* (Nottingham: Lifestream, 1991), 35-36.

<sup>27</sup>Robeck, “Written Prophecies,” 39, 43.

<sup>28</sup>Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, Location 997, 3669. The Pentecostal theologian Horton (1934, 187-188) also warns against this language.

<sup>29</sup>Robeck, “Written Prophecies,” 43, see also Kay, *Prophecy!*, 95.

<sup>30</sup>Robeck, “Written Prophecies,” 28.

Jeff Astley's concept of "ordinary theology,"<sup>31</sup> individual testimonies of revelatory experience were analysed for their theology and practise. Astley highlights the value of "ordinary theology" in that it takes place in personal learning contexts as individuals reflect on their experience and work out answers to their own theological questions.<sup>32</sup> Cartledge states that, while Pentecostal Christians may not be known for their "exceptional experiences of academic theology", they are known for their "exceptional experiences of religion." The result is that they have built up a "common-sense expertise" in how their experiences should be handled.<sup>33</sup>

My qualitative study involved 54 semi-structured interviews, and seven focus groups from three urban churches, as well as participant observation for four to six weeks in each church. In total, 204 revelatory experiences from 89 individuals were investigated for their content, function and process.

The research findings affirmed the observations of both Grudem and Robeck. Respondents understood their experience to be phenomenologically equivalent, and qualitatively consistent, with the biblical experience in direct and literal ways. The patterns, theological principles and epistemologies embedded in the biblical narratives acted as models from which individuals derived their understandings about their own experience.

Respondents reported that they heard from God via forms that reflected the biblical experience, including dreams and visions, internal verbal messages and sensory impressions. Interviewees affirmed the possibility of accuracy for their experiences as reflected by the free and easy use of the language "God said." Respondents aligned their experiences with those of the canonical characters Ezekiel, Isaiah, Paul and Peter.

At the same time, respondents understood their experience to be subject to human influence, requiring adequate discernment processes. This was achieved through the application of a Christocentric hermeneutic to Scripture—revelatory experiences were deemed to be authentic when they were in keeping with Christ's nature and mission. Discernment was also made possible through the community via the confirmation of secondary revelatory experiences (through another party) and by consultation with family and friends who helped to filter out psychological and physiological obstacles. Once discerned to be

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<sup>31</sup>Mark Cartledge, *Testimony in the Spirit: Rescripting Ordinary Pentecostal Theology* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); Jeff Astley, *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening and Learning in Theology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

<sup>32</sup>Astley, *Ordinary Theology*, 159.

<sup>33</sup>Cartledge, *Testimony in the Spirit*, 16.

from God, respondents treated their experiences as authoritative and acted on them accordingly. Disobedience to revelatory messages was considered an act of rebellion towards God, and aligned with biblical characters such as Jonah or Saul. Revelatory experiences in the Scriptures continually acted as theological reference points for the participants' own encounters. In this way, the foundational role of Scripture was maintained and ongoing revelatory experiences posed no threat to the priority of the canon.

#### A Foundation of Experiential Continuity

The problem with the complaint of Grudem and others is that Pentecostals base their practises on the patterns in Scripture. Pentecostals see themselves as being historically and experientially continuous with the early church. A worldview that is based on the "this is that" dynamic of Acts 2:16 means that Pentecostals assume their contemporary reality to reflect the biblical past. Biblical and contemporary horizons are fused such that there is no phenomenological demarcation between the biblical and the contemporary experience.<sup>34</sup> Thus, Pentecostals write their experiences down because the biblical characters were instructed to (Exod 34:37; Jer 30:2; Hab 2:2, 3). They use the phrase "God said" as patterned after their biblical predecessors (Acts 4:31; 8:29; 11:28; 13:2). They treat their experiences as authoritative in deference to the biblical example (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29, 32-33, 39; 7:51).

For Pentecostals, the approach advocated by Grudem and others is problematic at the deepest level because it arises from a foundation of *discontinuity* with the biblical experience. This should not be surprising given that the Protestant tradition sprung from an ethos that fundamentally opposed revelatory experience.<sup>35</sup> At the same time, there has been a profound lack of theological reflection by Pentecostals in the area of revelatory experiences in spite of their widespread use. While there has been some excellent work in the area of Pentecostal prophecy (particularly in the public context),<sup>36</sup> the broader private revelatory experience that encompasses "voices" and dreams and visions (D/Vs) has been soundly neglected.<sup>37</sup> It is somewhat of an anomaly that the

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<sup>34</sup>Allan Anderson, *Introduction*, 20.

<sup>35</sup>Volken shows that both Luther and Calvin rejected extra-biblical revelations: Laurent Volken, *Visions, Revelations and the Church* (New York: Kenedy, 1963), 88-91.

<sup>36</sup>Eg. Muindi, *Pentecostal-Charismatic Prophecy*; Lum, *The Practice of Prophecy*.

<sup>37</sup>Mark Cartledge's work among British Charismatics ("Charismatic Prophecy," *Journal of Empirical Theology* 8 [1995]: 71-88), is perhaps the most helpful for describing contemporary practice, but he does not examine the theology of revelatory experiences in depth. Stephen Parker, in *Led by the Spirit*, examines Spirit-led experiences, but focusses on the process of discernment. Anna Droll's study on visions and dreams is a recent exception and

second aspect of the Spirit experience in Acts 2:16-17 (“sons and daughters will prophesy”) has been embraced by Pentecostals, while the first “young men will have visions; old men will have dreams”) has been largely ignored. I propose two reasons for this. Firstly, this may be due to the influence of the Evangelical tradition with its preference for the epistolic genre<sup>38</sup> (and the corresponding focus on public prophecy, e.g. 1 Cor 12-14) over the narratives (with their multiple references to private revelatory experiences).<sup>39</sup> Secondly, D/Vs in particular have been viewed with scepticism throughout history, particularly among cultures of the West. Kelsey notes this trend in recent times, identifying enlightenment thinking as the main culprit.<sup>40</sup> Hymes notes a similar trajectory in the early church and again after Aquinas due to Aristotelian influences.<sup>41</sup>

Hence with only a Protestant Evangelical approach to work with, and in order to maintain their position as “people of the Book”, Pentecostals have adopted a discontinuous theological framework, and in doing so have found themselves saying one thing while practising another.<sup>42</sup> While attempts have been made by Pentecostals to fit in with the Evangelical framework via the *rhema/logos* theology,<sup>43</sup> this approach

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provides insight into private revelatory experiences among African Pentecostals, “‘Piercing the Veil’ and African Dreams and Visions: In Quest of the Pneumatological Imagination,” *Pneuma* 40 (2018): 345–65. The preference for prophecy over private revelatory experiences is evident in several biblical works. For example, Aune’s classic study on New Testament prophecy does not refer to revelatory experiences in the narratives, David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 220; Similarly Grudem does not consider private revelatory experiences in *Gift of Prophecy*, or in his study of Protestant perspectives towards the Spirit’s ministry in general, Wayne A. Grudem., ed., *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996).

<sup>38</sup>See Stronstad, *The Prophethood of All Believers*. Ruthven shows that the preference for the Pauline epistles can be traced back to Luther who specifically excluded Acts from the “true and noblest books” of the New Testament, Jon M. Ruthven, *What’s Wrong with Protestant Theology: Tradition vs. Biblical Emphasis* (Tulsa: Word and Spirit, 2013), 16.

<sup>39</sup>John B. F. Miller lists twenty separate revelatory experiences in Acts, *Convinced that God had Called Us: Dreams, Visions and the Perception of God’s Will in Luke-Acts* (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2007, 109-236).

<sup>40</sup>Morton T. Kelsey, *God, Dreams and Revelation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), Kindle Version, Location 187.

<sup>41</sup>David Hymes, “Toward an Old Testament Theology of Dreams and Visions from a Pentecostal-Charismatic Perspective,” *Australasian Pentecostal Studies* 14, 2012, <https://aps-journal.com/index.php/APS/article/view/117> (accessed Dec 21, 2019).

<sup>42</sup>James K. A. Smith, “The Closing of the Book: Pentecostals, Evangelicals, and the Sacred Writings,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 11 [1997]: 59.

<sup>43</sup>For example, refer to the teaching of popular leaders Frank Damazio, *Developing the Prophetic Ministry* (Portland: Trilogy Productions, 1983), 54-55; Joyce Meyer, *How to Hear from God*. (New York: Warner Books, 2003); Bill Hamon, *Prophets and Personal Prophecy: God’s Prophetic Voice Today* (Shippensburg: Destiny Image, 1978), 30-35; Mark Virkler sources the original teaching from the prayer practices of South Korean pastor Paul Yonggi Cho, *Dialogue with God* (South Plainfield: Bridge, 1986), Kindle Version, Location 715.

has been found to be anachronistic and linguistically inaccurate due to the oral nature of early church communities.<sup>44</sup> Pentecostals must grapple with the role of revelatory experience in relation to the Scriptures and adopt an approach that reflects their experientially equivalent perspective.

In Part 1, I have discussed the Evangelical and Pentecostal approaches to contemporary revelatory experience. In Part 2, I will focus on the impact of Evangelical theology on that experience and show how the adoption of an Evangelical theology to explain Pentecostal revelatory experience has negative consequences for its ongoing practise. The Catholic approach to revelatory experience will be proposed as a viable alternative.

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<sup>44</sup>John Walton and Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013), Kindle Version, Location 1951-2068; McLean, "Toward a Pentecostal Hermeneutic," 35–56. See Part 2: "The Impact of Textualisation on Oral Communities."

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**The Impact of Evangelical Theology on Pentecostal Revelatory  
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Here, I will discuss the impact of Evangelical theology on Pentecostal revelatory experience and propose the Catholic approach as a proper alternative.

The adoption of an Evangelical theology to explain Pentecostal revelatory experience has negative consequences for its ongoing practise. Philosopher James K. A. Smith describes how this occurs by contrasting the placement of authority in the oral approach of the Pentecostal community with the textual approach of the Evangelicals. This dynamic has significant implications for both bibliography and epistemology.

**The Impact of Textualization on Oral Communities**

Smith argues that the first-century church was primarily an oral community, with more emphasis on hearing than reading, prophets than scribes and aurality than textuality. This “oral state of being” reflected the broader Greco-Roman culture that valued oral communication above the written, and where access to written texts was limited to the educated elite. Although early church communities inherited the canonical consciousness of their Judaistic predecessors as the “people of the book,” Smith argues that a more appropriate identifier would be the “people of the Spirit” since their primary text was the spoken rather than the written “word.”<sup>1</sup> In the church, prophets spoke and were heard. Faith came from

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<sup>1</sup>John Walton and Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013), Kindle Version, Location 2544. Similarly, in Old Testament usage,

“hearing the Word” (Rom 10:17), but this Word was not only about Christ, but was Christ.<sup>2</sup> Thus the “Word” was recognized as having divine authority, irrespective of whether it was later enshrined in Scripture. This approach did not displace the value or presence of texts in the church, but rather located their status as derivative.<sup>3</sup> Divine authority lay first and foremost with the spoken word.

At the beginning of the second century, a shift occurred whereby literacy began to be favored over orality, and the written word gained authority and credibility over the spoken word. This process of textualization shifted the authority from the people who transmitted the tradition to the words that recorded the tradition.<sup>4</sup> Sacred texts became sites of fact and authority as well as the lens through which life was seen.<sup>5</sup> The result of this process was a growing tension between contemporary prophecies and the canon of Scripture, since “part and parcel of canonical thinking is the restriction of normative revelation to a past period.”<sup>6</sup> In Smith’s words, “A ‘levelling’ takes place whereby the writings themselves become ‘an ersatz presence of God himself’; it is not only that God can be heard in the Scriptures, but that the writings themselves become divine.”<sup>7</sup>

Smith shows how the adoption of a textual approach that locates authority in the written word mitigates against the practise of ongoing revelation. The result is a dilution or even rejection of contemporary revelatory experiences. He argues that this process was evident in the second-century church, and is now being repeated in the adoption of the Evangelical tradition by Pentecostals.<sup>8</sup> As noted by Smith and others,

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Colin Brown, ed., *New Testament Theology*, Vol. 3 (Exeter: Paternoster, 1978), 1087.

<sup>2</sup>James K. A. Smith, “The Closing of the Book: Pentecostals, Evangelicals, and the Sacred Writings,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 11 [1997]: 53.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., 56.

<sup>4</sup>Walton & Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture*, Location 1413.

<sup>5</sup>See also John Goldingay, *Models for Scripture* (Toronto: Clements, 2004), 112.

<sup>6</sup>Smith, “The Closing of the Book,” 64.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 66.

<sup>8</sup>The work of biblical scholar W. M. Schniedewind has highlighted a similar dynamic in the textualization process of Old Testament communities. Schniedewind’s careful analysis reveals a shift in meaning for the “word of God” before and after the exile. Pre-exilic biblical literature indicates the “word of God” to be the living and active word that comes directly from God to the prophet. After the exile, the “word of God” comes to mean the received traditions of Scripture that involved interpretation by inspired teachers and interpreters. This transition saw a replacement of the prophetic office with teachers and scribes and a shift in authority from oral word to the written word (Jer 8:7-9), a move that ultimately favored the literate cultural elites and betrayed the egalitarian nature of the oral tradition. As with Smith, Schniedewind highlights the competing claims of orality and textuality: “Writing locates authority in a text and its reader instead of in a tradition and its community. Writing does not require the living voice,” Schniedewind, *How the Bible Became a Book: The Textualization of Ancient Israel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004): 114.

Evangelicalism is a textual community that “organizes its experience against the horizon of the text.”<sup>9</sup> Authority is seen to lie in the text rather than in the person, and in the written word rather than in the spoken. Thus, revelatory experience always falls *under* the authority of the Scriptures. Smith warns that this threatens the practise of ongoing revelation in Pentecostal communities, and culminates in a distorted doctrine of Scripture that leads to “bibliolatry”, which is defined as a love of the Scriptures more than God.<sup>10</sup>

The tension between textuality and orality described by Smith was evident in my 2016 study among Australian Pentecostals. In a number of cases, conflict existed between the written word of God in Scripture and the spoken word of God in respondents’ lives. “Spirit” and “Scripture” became pitted against each other in a competitive dynamic. When the inspired experiences of Scripture were understood to be more reliable than the potential for contemporary experience, this made the latter unnecessary and redundant. This was also evidenced in the history of one church, where there was a shift in emphasis from the “prophetic word” to the “written word” when new leadership came in. This shift appeared to bear itself out in the disparity between the experiences of the older and younger generations. A significant proportion of the younger people struggled to embrace revelatory encounters, while the older generation reported them with ease. It would seem that as people became “Scripture-oriented,” they became less “Spirit-oriented.”

The conflict was further highlighted in the different meanings subscribed to “the Word of God.” As noted, the primary understanding for the “Word of God” in first-century vernacular was the spoken word, and more specifically the person and message of Jesus, later continued by the Spirit. However, in two of the three churches studied, the primary meaning for the “Word of God” was the written Scriptures, and to a lesser degree, preaching from the Scriptures. These descriptors reflect the Evangelical placement of authority within the text, and the corresponding idea that the entire Bible should be taken as “the Word of God.”<sup>11</sup>

While the designation of Scripture as the “Word of God” may be somewhat helpful in protecting its priority, the descriptor becomes problematic when applied to the practise of revelatory experience. The use of the same phrase for both individual experience and the entirety of Scripture confuses the particular nature of each object with its varying

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<sup>9</sup>Smith, “The Closing of the Book,” 58.

<sup>10</sup>The tendency towards “bibliolatry” among Pentecostals has also been observed by Albrecht, *Rites in the Spirit*, 246.

<sup>11</sup>For example, Evangelical philosopher Nicholas Wolterstorff advocates for this view in *Divine Discourse* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995).

mix of human and divine influence.<sup>12</sup> While Scripture makes the claim to divine inspiration as a whole (2 Tim. 3:16), this clearly does not apply to every word and experience within Scripture. For example, biblical scholar John Goldingay suggests that designating “Word of the Lord” for passages such as the agonising of Job, or the questioning of Ecclesiastes, represents a category mistake. This mistake becomes heightened in the context of contemporary experience. Contemporary Pentecostals do not label their agonising ponderings or doubt-filled prayers as “the Word of the Lord.” When Pentecostals adopted the experiences of the early church without their accompanying language, the result was confusion around the source of authority.

The scenario whereby the “ersatz presence” of God was believed to rest in the text was also observed in my study. In a somewhat magical approach to Scripture, “words from God” were found through a haphazard encounter with texts that carried no meaningful connection to the original setting. For example, the words “Go to the other side (of the lake)” spoken by Jesus to the disciples (Mk 4:35) were taken to mean “go to another workplace.” While the Spirit could be seen to retain the prerogative to select any vehicle of communication, the concern lay in the fact that the experience was unequivocally accepted without a process of discernment simply because it was found “in Scripture.”

This problem, characteristic of Pentecostals, has also been observed by the biblical scholar Craig Keener. He laments the “unrestrained practises” of those who are prone to ignoring the variety of genres in the text and treat the Bible as a “game of biblical Russian roulette: randomly seizing on verses isolated from context in a way that we would never do with other texts.”<sup>13</sup> In particular, Keener argues that experiential appropriations of Scripture require their own criteria, and must not be disconnected from observing the “designed sense” of Scripture.<sup>14</sup> It may well be the issue of textualization that is the cause of this problem. Pentecostals have mixed the oral and textual approach together, such that as authority moves to the words of the page, encounters with the text become “magical” and are thus accepted without discrimination. The danger lies in the assumption of authority because it is “in Scripture”, even when it departs markedly from the original intent of the text. Adopting an Evangelical approach to Pentecostal revelatory experiences is not only counterproductive to the prevalence of the experience, but also to its safe practise.

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<sup>12</sup>John Goldingay, *Models for Scripture*. Toronto: Clements, 2004: 10.

<sup>13</sup>Craig S. Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture in Light of Pentecost* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2016), 269.

<sup>14</sup>Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics*, 19, 99.

To address the problem of textualization, Smith proposes a different understanding of Scripture than the one provided by the Evangelical tradition. According to Smith, the dynamic of revelatory experience can still operate successfully in a textual environment, but only when the text functions in a different genre. He proposes that the Scriptures should not be seen to act as “locations of the divine presence” but rather as “testimonies to the power of God present in the church.”<sup>15</sup> Thus the authority of the text is derived rather than inherent. Authority is not embedded in the text, but lies with the one “to whom the text points.”<sup>16</sup> This resembles the theology of Barth, who advocated for the idea of Scripture as a witness to Christ,<sup>17</sup> (rightly) making an ontological distinction between Scripture and the person of the Word of God.<sup>18</sup> This approach retains the priority of Scripture as the guiding norm, while still allowing for ongoing revelatory experiences that have the potential to be authoritative. It also properly locates authority with the one to whom Scripture points, avoiding the problem of bibliolatry.

This approach allows contemporary testimonies of hearing God speak to play the same role today as they do in the Scriptures. In the same way as testimonies within Scripture point to the power and reality of God, contemporary testimonies continue to affirm the presence of God in the church today.

#### A Distinctive Pentecostal Epistemology

The locating of authority in the person of the Spirit over the written text has further epistemological and theological consequences. Smith highlights the type of knowledge that arises from spiritual experience in his later work, *Thinking in Tongues*.<sup>19</sup> While Evangelicals have criticized the Pentecostal emphasis on experience, Smith outlines its value for spiritual formation.

Smith shows that Pentecostal experience leads to a form of “narrative knowledge” that enables Pentecostals to “know what they know.”<sup>20</sup> Pentecostals use testimony and narrative to make sense of their experience by writing their “micro-story” into God’s “macro-story” of redemption. This approach situates truth in the context of story and in relation to a particular “mode of knowing.” This narrative knowledge is

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<sup>15</sup>Smith, “The Closing of the Book,” 67.

<sup>16</sup>*Ibid.*, 69.

<sup>17</sup>Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. G. W. Bromiley & T. F. Torrance, trans. G. W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1956) I/1, 88-124.

<sup>18</sup>Sang-Whan Lee, “Pentecostal Prophecy,” *The Spirit and Church* 3.1 (2001):165.

<sup>19</sup>James K. A. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 50-72.

<sup>20</sup>*Ibid.*, 50.

“distinct from run-of-the-mill knowledge,” which is usually understood (philosophically) as “justified true belief” where “belief” is understood as assent to propositions or at least characterized by a propositional attitude.<sup>21</sup> Pentecostal faith and practise does not yield merely a “thinking thing” but rather an embodied heart that “understands” the world in ways that are irreducible to the categories and propositions of cognitive reason.<sup>22</sup> This does not devalue the place of propositional or “codeable” knowledge, but rather situates it.<sup>23</sup>

The type of narrative knowledge that arises from experience may be contrasted with the knowledge that arises from an Evangelical scholastic approach. Pentecostal theologian Daniel Castelo outlines the distinction in detail, showing how Pentecostal epistemology is incompatible with an Evangelical epistemology that separates theology and spirituality and draws from a framework of biblical inerrancy.<sup>24</sup> Like Smith, Castelo shows how the Evangelical approach places emphasis on cerebral knowledge, abstraction and theorizing in a way that leaves little room for “mystical sensibility.”<sup>25</sup> The means to divine knowledge for the Evangelical then comes primarily via the study of Scripture and, in particular, a historical-grammatical approach.<sup>26</sup>

The testimonies in my study among Australian Pentecostals strongly affirmed Smith’s observations about the epistemology of Pentecostals. The data revealed that revelatory experiences resulted in a type of experiential knowledge that was “embedded in life” and led to holistic transformation. In the study, narrative knowledge typically preceded propositional knowledge. Reflection on theological themes took place as a result of the experience rather than prior to it. Creeds, propositions and statements became secondary reflections upon the primary stories. For respondents, the primary function of revelatory experiences was their capacity to build “personal relationship” with God. These epistemological processes can be further understood through the work of Pentecostal scholars Jackie Johns and Cheryl Bridges-Johns.<sup>27</sup> They contrast the Hebrew understanding of knowledge that comes via

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., 64.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., 62.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., 64.

<sup>24</sup>Daniel Castelo, *Pentecostalism as a Christian Mystical Tradition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2017), 83-126.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., 89.

<sup>26</sup>Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, Location 3049. Hence, as Matthew Engelke observes, only a literate Christian can “fully enter faith,” *A Problem of Presence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 53.

<sup>27</sup>Jackie David Johns and Cheryl Bridges-Johns, “Yielding to the Spirit: A Pentecostal Approach to Group Bible Study,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 1 (1992): 109–34.

experience (*yada*) to the Greek concept (*ginoskein*), which involves a “standing back from something” in order objectively to know it.<sup>28</sup> Unlike the Greek concept, *yada* has relationship at its core and arises from obedience (1 Jn 2:3). Knowledge is contextual rather than abstract and is measured “not by information, but by how one was living in response to God.”<sup>29</sup> This understanding of *yada* effectively shifts the epistemological emphasis from cerebral knowledge of a book to relational knowledge of a person. Indeed, several respondents contrasted learning from their experience with the Spirit versus learning from the Bible, with the key distinction being the personalized nature of the message: “I mean you have the Scriptures, and they’re awesome, but for me, if I didn’t have it [hearing God’s voice], I’d be very lost. It makes it personal; it brings you face to face with those encounters; it changes you.”

In addition, revelatory experiences were seen to be central to the participants’ spiritual growth. Rather than acting as a lightweight spiritual “add-on,” revelatory encounters represented pivotal moments that triggered significant learning. Here, the Holy Spirit was seen to actively take the role of teacher in directing the learning process and tailoring it to the individual’s particular needs. The individualized nature of learning strengthened its impact. Thus, revelatory experience found its place firmly in the center rather than at the periphery of spiritual formation.

Furthermore, the value and potency of this epistemological process was linked to the authority Pentecostals ascribed to their revelatory experiences. The transformational outcomes of experiences in the study were only effective when accompanied by appropriate responses to them. Participants were keenly aware that their experience carried divine authority and demanded acquiescence to them to be of any value. For the Pentecostal, when God speaks, obedience is required; God’s people recognize his voice and they follow (John 10:27). Learning was therefore dependent upon active participation in the process. It was only then that transformation occurred.

Bridges-Johns and Johns highlight the role of obedience in the development of *yada*. The understanding of *yada* is brought into dialogue with “praxis” defined as “reflection-action” that links knowing to doing.<sup>30</sup> Johns and Bridges-Johns show that praxis epistemology is useful for understanding the learning processes encapsulated by the notion of *yada*, but with one essential difference. Without the input of a higher authority, praxis is an insufficient means of knowing God and

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., 112.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., 119.

achieving human transformation.<sup>31</sup> It is because respondents in the study saw their experiences as divinely authoritative that they were motivated to act. Without this authority, “knowing” the truth may not translate into *yada*.

The attribution of divine authority for revelatory experiences is therefore the key to the development of narrative knowledge and its transformative power. This is in contrast to the Evangelical approach advocated by Grudem, who argues for contemporary prophetic experience to have minimal authority over the recipient, as with other forms of church activity like leadership, counselling and teaching.<sup>32</sup> The textual approach of the Evangelical conflicts with the oral approach of the Pentecostal by its placement of authority.

The Pentecostal emphasis on experiences in the Spirit contributes to a unique theological epistemology, a pattern which Pentecostals see as originating from the Scriptures themselves.<sup>33</sup> The Pentecostal approach positions revelatory experiences at the center of spiritual growth and faith. Participants identified the revelatory experience as the trigger that brought transformation and personal knowledge of God. Because the experience was personal, and embodied in their own life, it tended to foster knowledge of a *person* ahead of knowledge of a *book*. This reorients the mode of learning from the Evangelical emphasis on Bible study, and points to the priority and legitimacy of the revelatory experience. Spiritual formation is related to obedience and action rather than mere belief. The result is narrative knowledge or *yada* that does not reject the value of propositional knowledge, but rather gives it secondary status. As Smith states, this is not “antirational, but antirationalist; it is not a critique or rejection of reason, but rather a commentary on a particularly reductionist model of reason and rationality, a limited and stunted version of what counts as ‘knowledge.’”<sup>34</sup>

### **An Alternative Framework: The Catholic Approach to Revelatory Experience**

The Evangelical approach to Pentecostal revelatory experiences has been found to be problematic at the foundational level. Adoption of an Evangelical approach acts to mitigate against the experience, thwart appropriate discernment practises and undermine the value of narrative knowledge that arises from revelatory experience. In order to maintain

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., 122.

<sup>32</sup>Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, Location 660-663.

<sup>33</sup>Mark Cartledge, *Practical Theology: Charismatic and Empirical Perspectives* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2003), 25.

<sup>34</sup>Smith, *Thinking in Tongues*, 53.

the practise of revelatory experience in Pentecostal churches, a theological approach that reflects the experientially continuous worldview of the Pentecostals is proposed. This can be found in the Catholic tradition.

The Pentecostal emphasis on supernatural experience has led Castelo and others to argue that Pentecostalism finds its place most comfortably in the Catholic mystical tradition. For Castelo, the Pentecostal stress on “encountering God” finds convergence with the Catholic mystical stress on movement towards “union” with God: “What primarily makes Pentecostalism a mystical tradition of the Church catholic is its persistent, passionate, and widespread emphasis on encounter.”<sup>35</sup> This form of mysticism is definitively Christian in that experience is seen to be revelatory rather than investigative. Through Pentecostal experience, the God of mystery self-reveals.<sup>36</sup> As for Catholic mystics, this knowledge of God is both relational and intellectual and has transformation as its ultimate goal.<sup>37</sup>

Castelo’s perspective has found agreement with several scholars who have linked Pentecostalism to the mystical tradition, or implied it in their work.<sup>38</sup> For example, theologian Simon Chan has sought to establish links between Pentecostalism and Catholic mysticism in the area of prayer practises and spirituality.<sup>39</sup> Coulter has identified parallels with the hermeneutical approaches of Pentecostals and medieval mystical thinkers.<sup>40</sup> Sociologist Poloma labels Pentecostals as “Main Street Mystics.”<sup>41</sup> In his review of Castelo’s work, theologian Sammy Alfaro suggests that Castelo affirms the theological hunches of several in the Pentecostal academy about the mystical component of Pentecostalism.<sup>42</sup>

Recent ecumenical dialogues between Catholic and Pentecostal theologians focussing on the shared experiences of the Spirit have further revealed the synergy between the two traditions.<sup>43</sup> Five years of

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<sup>35</sup>Castelo, *Pentecostalism as a Christian Mystical Tradition*, 80.

<sup>36</sup>*Ibid.*, 54.

<sup>37</sup>*Ibid.*, 44, 55-57, 80-82.

<sup>38</sup>Castelo (*ibid.*, 39) identifies Harvey Cox, Daniel Albrecht, James Smith, Margaret Poloma and Simon Chan.

<sup>39</sup>Simon Chan, *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition* (Eugene: Wipf & Stock, 2000).

<sup>40</sup>Dale Coulter, “What Meaneth This? Pentecostals and Theological Inquiry,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 10, no. 1 [2001]: 38–64.

<sup>41</sup>Margaret Poloma, *Main Street Mystics: The Toronto Blessing and Reviving Pentecostalism* (Walnut Creek, CA: AltaMira Press, 2003).

<sup>42</sup>Kyle Smith, Leah Payne and Sammy Alfaro, “Author Meets Critics: Responding to Daniel Castelo’s Pentecostalism as a Christian Mystical Tradition,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 40 [2018]: 547.

<sup>43</sup>Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, ““Do Not Quench the Spirit”:

reflection and scholarly discussion on the experiential and theological dimensions of charisms revealed a significant overlap in understandings. Catholic and Pentecostals shared common perspectives on the nature, function and importance of prophecy, discernment criteria and the need for ecclesial and pastoral oversight in the discernment process. Robeck describes the practise of prophetic gifts among Classical Pentecostals and Catholic Charismatics as a place where “bridges may be built.”<sup>44</sup>

With a shared emphasis on spiritual experience, the Catholic approach to revelatory experiences acts as an appropriate dialogue partner for Pentecostals seeking to reflect on their experience. As an example, Niels Hvidt’s multi-disciplinary study *Christian Prophecy* reflects an experientially continuous approach that is consistent with the Pentecostal paradigm. Hvidt is clear that there is no justification for a different treatment of contemporary and biblical experience from a phenomenological point of view, and that Old Testament prophecy and Christian prophecy share many common traits.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, he argues for a dismissal of the idea of any “end” to revelation.<sup>46</sup> Revelation neither ends with Christ, the apostles or with the canon. Further, Hvidt gives attention to the individual revelatory experience as well as to prophecy, and unlike Grudem, who eschews the value of reflecting on actual experience,<sup>47</sup> Hvidt reflects on insights from the actual experience of prophetic figures in history.<sup>48</sup>

### Conclusion

Pentecostal tradition testifies to the power of revelatory encounters to enhance spirituality and to build the church (1 Cor 14:3). In order to maintain such practises, it is essential that Pentecostals reflect adequately on their experience from their own experiential worldview. Attempting to fit a Pentecostal theology into a Protestant Evangelical framework has proven inadequate and ultimately leads to dilution, if not rejection, of the

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Charisms in the Life and Mission of the Church: Report of the Sixth Phase of the International Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue (2011-2015),” <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/dialoghi/sezione-occidentale/pentecostali/dialogo/documenti-di-dialogo/2015-non-spegnete-lo-spirito/testo-del-documento-in-inglese.html> (accessed December 9, 2019), 2016.

<sup>44</sup>Robeck, Cecil M. Jr., “A Pentecostal Perspective on Prophetic Gifts” (The International Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue, Round 6, Sierra Madre, CA, 2014), 30.

<sup>45</sup>Niels C. Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy: The Post-Biblical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 6-7.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., 209-216.

<sup>47</sup>Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy*, Location 130.

<sup>48</sup>For example, the experiences of Hildegard of Bingen, Birgitta of Sweden and Teresa of Avila.

experience. Multiple scholars have noted this tendency towards the so-called “evangelicalization” of Pentecostalism.<sup>49</sup>

Without a well-developed theology, Pentecostals are in danger of losing the distinctive of the revelatory phenomenon, as either the experience or the theology collapses under the contradiction. Smith describes it well: “The gradual evangelicalization of Pentecostalism is an attempt to adopt a framework that at the same time destroys the foundation. A Pentecostal evangelical theology is a house divided against itself.”<sup>50</sup> The Catholic tradition offers an appropriate solution to the theological problem as well as providing historical legitimacy and consistent links to the early church itself.

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<sup>49</sup>Matthew S. Clark, “An Investigation into the Nature of a Viable Pentecostal Hermeneutic” (Ph.D. thesis, University of Pretoria, 1997), 59; Garry B. McGee, “‘More than Evangelical’: The Challenge of Evolving Identity in the Assemblies of God”, in D. A. Roozen and J. R. Nieman, eds, *Church, Identity and Change* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2005), 40-41; Robeck in Scott A. Ellington, “Pentecostalism and the Authority of Scripture,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 9 [1996]: 19; Veli-Matti Karkkainen, *Towards a Pneumatological Theology: Pentecostal and Ecumenical Perspectives on Ecclesiology, Soteriology, and Theology of Mission*, ed. Amos Yong (Lanham: University Press of America, 2002), 7; Paul W. Lewis, “Towards a Pentecostal Epistemology: The Role of Experience in Pentecostal Hermeneutics,” *The Spirit and Church* 2, no. 1 (May 2000): 95–125; Angelo U. Cettolin, *Spirit, Freedom and Power* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2016), 45.

<sup>50</sup>Smith, “The Closing of the Book,” 59.

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