



BRILL

*Pneuma* 29 (2007) 5-23

Pneuma  
  
[www.brill.nl/pneu](http://www.brill.nl/pneu)

# The Spirit and Doctrinal Development: A Functional Analysis of the Traditional Pentecostal Doctrine of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit

**Shane Clifton**

Southern Cross College  
40 Hector Street  
Chester Hill NSW 2162  
Australia  
[shane.clifton@sc.edu.au](mailto:shane.clifton@sc.edu.au)

---

## Abstract

The traditional Pentecostal doctrine of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, especially understood as subsequent to conversion/initiation and evidenced by speaking in tongues, has been debated of recent times, largely on biblical and hermeneutical grounds. Shifting the debate to discussions concerning the development of doctrine might add some fresh insights into how the doctrine is to be debated and possibly reshaped. While not denying the need to see the biblical canon as the standard referent of theological formulations, we can use authors such as George Lindbeck, Kevin J. Vanhoozer, and Bernard Lonergan to shift the discussion of Spirit baptism from its biblical warrant to its function to effectively guide the community of faith's discernment of truth in various ecclesial and cultural contexts.

## Keywords

Spirit baptism, speaking in tongues, development of doctrine

## Introduction

The traditional Pentecostal doctrine of baptism in the Spirit, with its declaration that Spirit baptism is distinct from and subsequent to salvation and evidenced by the gift of tongues, is coming under increasing pressure. There have been a plethora of responses by Pentecostal leaders and scholars, attempting to defend and/or reframe the Pentecostal position. Much of the debate surrounds the interpretation of biblical texts; the comparison between the theology of Paul and Luke; the use of biblical narrative for the formation of doctrine, and the role of communal experiences of the Spirit in the task of biblical hermeneutics.

Without wishing to reignite these debates, my goal in this paper is to see whether consideration of the nature and purpose of “doctrine” itself helps clarify the meaning and function of baptism in the Spirit for Pentecostals and, further, provide the basis for deciding whether or not reformulation of the doctrine might be necessary or helpful. This paper, therefore, begins with the insights of George Lindbeck, Kevin Vanhoozer and Bernard Lonergan on the nature of doctrine, and goes on to consider the implications for the doctrine of baptism in the Spirit.

### **The Nature and Function of Doctrine**

In what is a well-known taxonomy, George Lindbeck suggests that there are three types of approaches to doctrine, which he describes as either propositionalist, experientially expressive, or culturally linguistic. The first category, propositionalism, conceives of doctrine as “propositions or truth claims about objective realities.”<sup>1</sup> Lindbeck argues that propositionalism is pre-modern, although, at least in its current incarnation, it is as much a response to modernity as it is premodernity, since doctrinal propositions are understood as objective (scientific) truths. These truths are based either on the certain foundation of scripture, the inspired, infallible and inerrant bible of protestant fundamentalists and some evangelicals, or the authoritative foundation of the church magisterium for certain conservative Catholics.<sup>2</sup> While this model rightly affirms the importance of Scripture and church dogma, as Avery Dulles observes, it has been largely rejected within contemporary theology due to its hermeneutical naiveté and its questionable objectifying theory of knowledge.<sup>3</sup> Understood in this manner, doctrine cannot account for contextuality or conceptual development, and tends to be used to set boundaries, and hence divide the church. Indeed, it could be said that the problem with the debate about the Pentecostal doctrine of baptism in the Spirit is that doctrine is generally understood in this propositionalist manner. Discussion surrounding the doctrine too often fails to get beyond black and white debates surrounding the one true interpretation

---

<sup>1</sup> George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984), 16.

<sup>2</sup> See Stanley J. Grenz and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Post-modern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Know Press, 2001), 23 and; Richard Heyduck, *The Recovery of Doctrine in the Contemporary Church* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2002), 24.

<sup>3</sup> Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (New York: Doubleday, 1983), 49. See also Neil Ormerod, *Method, Meaning and Revelation* (New York: University Press of America, 2000), 8.

of Scriptures used by Pentecostals to justify their doctrine, even though the narrational nature of Luke/Acts belies dogmatic interpretation. Internally, the doctrine is sometimes used as a marker for Pentecostal orthodoxy. Externally, the doctrine can be understood as being an elite claim by Pentecostals to spiritual superiority.<sup>4</sup> The irony is that a doctrine about the Spirit seems to generate dogmatism and disharmony rather than freedom and unity.

Lindbeck's second category, experiential expressivists, which includes theologians such as Friedrich Schleiermacher and the liberal tradition, states that doctrines are "noninformative and nondiscursive symbols of inner feelings, attitudes, or existential orientations."<sup>5</sup> This might easily be said of the Pentecostal doctrine of baptism in the Spirit, which attempts to encapsulate and promulgate an experience of the Spirit which transforms inner feelings and attitudes, and symbolically frames worldview. Yet this approach to doctrine is also foundationalist, since it refers to the universal religious experience, and the consequence is the marginalisation of doctrine altogether. As Lindbeck notes, "there is thus at least the logical possibility that a Buddhist and a Christian might have basically the same faith, although expressed differently."<sup>6</sup> While the Pentecostal doctrine is attempting to describe an experience of the Spirit that is universally available, it is, nonetheless, a "particular" experience. As Harvey Cox has observed, Pentecostals maintain a dialectic tension between an experientialist and a fundamentalist impulse,<sup>7</sup> and this latter orientation rejects any notion of spiritual experience which fails to affirm that the baptising Spirit is the Spirit of Christ.

Lindbeck's own proposal, the cultural-linguistic model, responds to post-modern critiques of foundationalism, and argues that religion *is* culture and language, that religious doctrines are:

... a kind of cultural and/or linguistic framework or medium that shapes the entirety of life and thought. It is not primarily an array of beliefs about the true and the good [contrary to the propositional view], or a symbolism expressive of basic attitudes, feelings, or

---

<sup>4</sup> Lim suggests that the doctrine "necessarily leads to a two-tiered system, with a 'spiritual elite' (glossolalics) and the rest as 'second class citizens' of God's kingdom." David S. Lim, "An Evangelical Critique of 'Initial Evidence' Doctrine," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 1, no. 2 (1998): 219-229.

<sup>5</sup> Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 16.

<sup>6</sup> Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 17.

<sup>7</sup> Harvey Cox, *Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty First Century* (Massachusetts: Perseus, 1995), 310.

sentiments [contrary to experiential expressivism]. Like a culture or language, it is a communal phenomenon that shapes the subjectivities of individuals rather than being primarily a manifestation of those subjectivities.

For Lindbeck, doctrines are “communally authoritative rules of discourse, attitude and action,”<sup>8</sup> or similarly, “communally authoritative teachings regarding beliefs and practices that are considered essential to the identity or welfare of the group in question.”<sup>9</sup> The strength of this position is that it highlights the communal and contextual nature of doctrine, which is significant if doctrine is going to be understood as ecclesially constitutive for a unified and diverse church.

This summary of Lindbeck suggests that the place to start when contemplating baptism in the Spirit is with an analysis of the “function” of the doctrine within the Pentecostal community. I shall return to this analysis later, but for now it is important to observe that the dilemma is that Lindbeck’s critique of foundationalism leads him to conclude that doctrine has no real reference, that, as cultural linguistic speech, doctrine cannot say anything about external, objective reality, and hence what matters is merely how that doctrine functions in the church. But, for doctrinal language to function, it requires real reference, since the function of doctrine relates to faith, and faith, while infinitely more than rational reflection upon data and ideas, nonetheless should not preclude the latter. As Douglas Hall suggests, Christian approaches to the faith that focus entirely on relational knowledge are essentially irrational. He goes on to claim that “Christian spiritualism, from Montanism to present-day charismatic movements, manifests a tendency to eliminate rationality from belief, or even to court the irrational.”<sup>10</sup> More importantly, for doctrinal development to occur, particularly in contexts where tradition can be said to have become unauthentic, it is essential for communities to transcend the cultural linguistic confines of their particular location and tradition, and this is only possible if doctrine can be seen to have real (or, negatively, unreal) reference.<sup>11</sup> Otherwise, as Kevin J. Vanhoozer observes, Lindbeck’s theory leads to the conclusion that “doctrine does not direct the community but is directed by it.”<sup>12</sup>

<sup>8</sup> Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 18.

<sup>9</sup> Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*, 74.

<sup>10</sup> Douglas Hall, *Thinking the Faith: Christian Theology in a North American Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991), 384.

<sup>11</sup> Ormerod, *Method, Meaning and Revelation*, 203.

<sup>12</sup> Kevin J. Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 2005), 97.

Various commentators have sought to find ways of appropriating the cultural linguistic framework of doctrine outlined by Lindbeck, while avoiding the pitfalls and retaining the importance of grounding doctrine in the objective reality of divine revelation. Stanley Grenz and John Franke, for example, assert that “the Spirit appropriates the biblical text so as to fashion a community that lives the paradigmatic biblical narrative in the contemporary context”<sup>13</sup> and, consequently, that doctrine functions to describe that biblical paradigm in the diverse situations of church life. Richard Heyduck, in his book on doctrine responding to Lindbeck conceives of the function of doctrine as framing the narrative of church life, a narrative in which the “first acts” are set out in the Scriptures, and in which the “subsequent acts” of the church through to the present day are required to be worked out based on the authority of the early acts.<sup>14</sup> More recently, Kevin Vanhoozer describes a canonical linguistic approach, which further develops this dramatic understanding of the nature of doctrine. According to Vanhoozer, “doctrine proceeds from an authoritative script and gives direction as to how individuals and the church can participate fittingly in the drama of redemption.”<sup>15</sup> He goes on to note that if doctrine is to provide fitting direction, it does so by drawing on the foundational priority of the biblical text, as well as the continued experience of the Spirit in the tradition of the church, for the sake of directing the drama of Christian mission in the contemporary situation.<sup>16</sup>

In the light of these proposals, it can be seen that doctrinal development arises due to changes in the historical situation, and the concomitant recognition of the ongoing experience and voice of the Spirit (of the Triune God) in these different historical, geographical, cultural and ecclesial contexts. This difference gives rise to ecclesial diversity, yet in all these different situations, church doctrine, while drawing on the experience of the Spirit in diverse contexts, should privilege the canonical Scriptures.<sup>17</sup> It is beyond our scope to show how this might be done (given the complexities of biblical hermeneutics), but we should at least note that such privileging is not propositionalist, dogmatic or

<sup>13</sup> Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*, 91.

<sup>14</sup> Heyduck, *Recovery of Doctrine*. Heyduck draws heavily on an analogy set out by N. T. Wright, which describes this process of community formation using the analogy of a Shakespearian play in which the actors are required to create a missing fifth act for a five-act play. See N. T. Wright, “How Can the Bible be Authoritative,” *Vox Evangelica* 21 (1991): 7-32.

<sup>15</sup> Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 78.

<sup>16</sup> Vanhoozer, *The Drama of Doctrine*, 112.

<sup>17</sup> It is this point that frames Vanhoozer’s canonical linguistic approach to doctrine.

fundamentalist, since the Scripture itself is a diverse and dramatic text, and its interpretation cannot be divorced from the Spirit empowered and culturally embedded community of believers.<sup>18</sup>

Since our concern in this paper is to consider developments in the Pentecostal doctrine of baptism in the Spirit, the brief analysis of doctrine set out above can be further complemented by the insight of Catholic theologian, Bernard Lonergan. Lonergan categorises a variety of types of doctrine, from church doctrines to theological doctrines to methodological doctrine, and while he is especially focused on the latter, our primary interest in this paper is with the former. Like Lindbeck, Lonergan is concerned to highlight the function of doctrine in the church community. He distinguishes four functions of meaning conveyed by doctrine. Its effective function is the way in which it counsels and dissuades, commands and prohibits. Its cognitive function relates to its explanatory capacity (and hence its “truthfulness”), and the symbolic meaning it conveys in a world mediated by meaning.<sup>19</sup> Its constitutive function is derived from its capacity, as a shared set of meanings, to establish and sustain community. Its communicative function derives from its ability to describe communally constitutive ideas across generations and cultures.<sup>20</sup>

Lonergan goes on to describe the development of doctrines, which can occur for various reasons. Thus, for example, developments in human knowledge, described by Lonergan as the “ongoing development of mind,” can lead to discoveries that require doctrines to be recast.<sup>21</sup> Similarly, changing contexts (and the interaction between different contexts) gives rise to new data, fresh questions, and new insights (and, we might add, new moves of the Spirit), and hence the need to readdress doctrines in the light of their capacity to continue to function for the mission of the church. Also, changing contexts (temporal and spatial) give rise to cultural and linguistic differentiations which require doctrinal development. Finally doctrinal change is sometimes dialectical, occurring due to the discovery of error (by way of commission or omission). Of course some doctrine is permanent and universal (dogma), although this permanence should not be fideistic but, rather, the result of the universal truthfulness and relevance (i.e. functionality) of revealed mysteries. On the whole, however, the affirmation of

---

<sup>18</sup> For my own analysis of Pentecostal hermeneutics, see Shane Clifton, “Pentecostal Hermeneutics: An Open and Creative Approach,” *eOkonomia: Sydney College of Divinity eJournal of Theology* 1, no. 1 (2006): <http://oikon.webjournals.org>.

<sup>19</sup> Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1972), 77.

<sup>20</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 298-299.

<sup>21</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 305-312.

the importance of the functions of meaning enables Lonergan to recognise the need for doctrinal diversity—for “pluralism in the unity of faith.”<sup>22</sup>

What is thus apparent is that doctrine does not arise out of propositional statements (in the Scripture or the church magisterium), but out of ecclesially constitutive experiences of the Spirit of Christ, reflected upon firstly in the Scriptures and also other texts of various sorts,<sup>23</sup> judged and developed in specific historical contexts (spatial and geographical). While doctrines are thus contextual, since “each is a product of its place and time and each meets the questions of the day for the people of the day,”<sup>24</sup> they are not simply the product of cultural and linguistic social categories, since they have “real reference,” arising as they do out of divine revelation, first in the canonical Scripture, and second in the ongoing revelation of God in the life and history of the church.<sup>25</sup>

This relatively brief discussion of the complex issues surrounding the nature and development of doctrine has been necessary to enable us to move beyond the propositionalist understanding that generally frames doctrinal debate, and that results in the restriction of doctrinal discussion to exegetical analysis of Scripture. We have instead sought to highlight the way in which doctrine, grounded in the narrative of Scripture, functions in and through the linguistic and cultural context of the church, and thereby develops as the location and situation of the church changes. Given this brief summation of Lindbeck, Vanhoozer and Lonergan, how does this description of the nature, meaning, function and development of doctrine help us to understand and judge the traditional Pentecostal doctrine of baptism in the Spirit?

### **The Development of the Pentecostal Doctrine of Baptism in the Spirit**

In the first place, it reminds us that our focal point is not just exegetical analysis or comparative doctrinal debates but, rather, an examination of the experiences and texts which gave rise (over time) to the Pentecostal doctrine. It is not within our scope to fully document the historical circumstances

---

<sup>22</sup> Ormerod, *Method, Meaning and Revelation*, 117.

<sup>23</sup> I.e. the various texts that comprise the theological tradition of the church.

<sup>24</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 296.

<sup>25</sup> While Catholic theologians might not privilege the biblical canon over church tradition, it is possible for Protestants to appropriate Lonergan’s insight into the development of doctrine while affirming the priority of Scripture, by arguing that the revelation of God in church history is discerned by its contiguity with the biblical narrative. This is the essential argument of Vanhoozer’s canonical linguistic approach—even if Vanhoozer makes no reference to Lonergan.

surrounding the development of the doctrine, but it is noteworthy that the experience of the Spirit which the doctrine is seeking to encapsulate arose in a specific cultural and linguistic context. This included, for example, the holiness orientation derived from the Wesleyan tradition, in which the phrase “baptism in the Holy Ghost” was used to denote the work of the Spirit in achieving entire sanctification and imbuing the believer with spiritual and moral power.<sup>26</sup> It also included an emphasis on healing ministry, with its affirmation of the in-breaking supernatural power of God. These orientations were derived from the voluntarist, democratic context of nineteenth century Christianity,<sup>27</sup> which rejected clerical hierarchies and encouraged a universal conception of Spirit empowering for ministry, as well as from a restorationist impulse, which sought to recreate the ideals of “pure” New Testament Christianity, “free from the accretions of church history and tradition.”<sup>28</sup> In the broader context of early twentieth century Western society, the priority given to scientific explanation can also be said to frame the language of tongues as “evidence.”

While the cultural and linguistic context of the development of the doctrine of baptism in the Spirit are thus readily apparent, this is not to say that the doctrine is “merely” a product of language and culture. While framed by the linguistic parameters of nineteenth century voluntarism, the doctrine arose in response to concrete historical situations and experiences, judged by Pentecostals to be revelatory events of the manifest presence of God contiguous with the biblical narrative (especially the charismatic narrative of Acts), and this belies any critique that the doctrine has no real reference (even if one disagrees with the Pentecostal judgment). It is sometimes argued that Pentecostalism finds its origins in the 1st January 1901 outpouring of the Spirit at Charles Fox Parham’s Bible institute in Topeka Kansas or, alternatively, in the 1906 revival under William J. Seymour at Azusa Street Los Angeles. Yet the reality is much more complex and, as Mark Hutchinson observes, the story of Pentecostalism “is far from uni-linear, . . . it is not one thing spreading out, but many mutually-recognisable things coalescing.”<sup>29</sup> However its history is understood, the dawn of the twentieth century saw the coalescing of the disparate streams of global

<sup>26</sup> Donald Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow, 1987), 65.

<sup>27</sup> See Nathan O. Hatch, *The Democratization of American Christianity* (London: Yale University Press, 1989), David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).

<sup>28</sup> Edith Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith: The Assemblies of God, Pentecostalism, and American Culture* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1993), 12.

<sup>29</sup> Mark Hutchinson, “The Power to Grasp,” Unpublished paper, Southern Cross College, Sydney, 2003.

voluntarist religion, around a shared experience of the Spirit, associated with the gift of tongues. The fact that the spiritual events of early Pentecostalism are experiential and subjective is not to undermine their significance for doctrine since, as Lonergan argues, “genuine objectivity is the fruit of authentic subjectivity.”<sup>30</sup>

It is instructive to consider how this shared experience ultimately gave rise to the traditional Pentecostal doctrine. According to Parham, it was analysis of the Scriptures (specifically, the book of Acts) which led to the conclusion that tongues constituted the biblical evidence of baptism in the Spirit.<sup>31</sup> While this may seem to support the propositionalist view that doctrine is derived simply on the sure foundation of Scripture, in fact, it is not so simple. Parham and his students initially concluded that tongues were missionary languages and, according to Parham, the first outpouring of the gift of tongues on Agnes Ozman entailed her speaking in the Chinese language.<sup>32</sup> While imminent eschatological fervour encouraged the view that the missionary task would be facilitated by miraculous languages, experience soon brought about a re-evaluation (as missionaries discovered that they could not be understood).<sup>33</sup> Indeed, it was shared experience which led to the key elements of the Pentecostal doctrine. Most Pentecostals were Christian prior to receiving the baptism in the Spirit with the evidence of tongues, and this led to the conclusion that the event was distinct from and subsequent to salvation. Further, the shared experience of the gift of tongues led to the notion of evidential tongues. It is also readily apparent that the eventual wording of the doctrine reflects this experience. As set out in the constitutive documents of the Assemblies of God in Australia:

We believe that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is the bestowing of the believer with power to be an effective witness for Christ. This experience is distinct from, and subsequent to, the new birth; is received by faith, and is accompanied by the manifestation of speaking in tongues as the Spirit gives utterance, as the initial physical evidence—Luke 24:49; Acts 1:4, 5, 8; 2:1-4; 8:16-19; 11:14-17; 19:1-7.<sup>34</sup>

The importance of the Pentecostal experience of the Spirit is further apparent in that acceptance of the doctrine generally followed the Spirit baptism, not the other way around. As Barry Chant notes, “the person with an

<sup>30</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 292.

<sup>31</sup> D. William Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel: The Significance of Eschatology in the Development of Pentecostal Thought* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 171.

<sup>32</sup> Faupel, *Everlasting Gospel*, 172.

<sup>33</sup> Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (London: Harvard University Press, 2001), 44-51.

<sup>34</sup> Assemblies of God in Australia Ministers Manual, 5.1. Articles of Faith.

experience, Pentecostals have argued over and again, is never at the mercy of one who has only an argument.”<sup>35</sup>

Of course there are various experiences and theologies which do not attain the status of church doctrine and, indeed, it has been argued that Pentecostals should embrace their experience without elevating it, as they do, to such a level of importance.<sup>36</sup> Yet the reason for indoctrination arose out of the functions of the meaning of baptism in the Spirit within Pentecostal communities. First, it functioned to constitute Pentecostal community. What is remarkable is that Pentecostal unity developed and persisted in the face of the fissiparity that marked nineteenth century voluntarism.<sup>37</sup> Even though Pentecostals continued to be subject to the sort of institutional division that plagued denominational Christianity, there developed a sense of “movement” which transcended institutional boundaries, and which was associated with the shared experience and theology of baptism in the Spirit.<sup>38</sup> This theology and experience thereby shaped Pentecostal ecclesiology,<sup>39</sup> which is noteworthy, since Pentecostals have often conceived of baptism in the Spirit individually, as gifting and empowering the individual for service. In fact, however, baptism in the Spirit is experienced in the church for the mission of the church. As Simon Chan observes, this “means the primary focus of Spirit-baptism is to actualize our communal life,” even if Pentecostalism itself has been hardly aware of this fact.<sup>40</sup> Second, the doctrine’s effective function derived from its capacity to frame the Pentecostal experience in both a structured and unstructured manner. There is a mystical dimension to Pentecostal spirituality, but this mysticism has been framed for the Pentecostal community by way of a doctrine that directs this experience toward a shared (yet infinitely varied) form, and that establishes its purpose: personal holiness/transformation and empowerment for mission. Third, its cognitive function was located in its capacity to symbolically encapsulate Pentecostal identity and worldview. Baptism in the Spirit is about much

---

<sup>35</sup> Barry Chant, “The Spirit of Pentecost: Origins and Development of the Pentecostal movement in Australia, 1870-1939,” PhD dissertation, Sydney: Macquarie University, 1999) 41.

<sup>36</sup> See, for example, Lim, “Evangelical Critique,”.

<sup>37</sup> Geoffrey Wainwright, “Methodism’s Ecclesial Location and Ecumenical Vocation,” *One in Christ* 19, no. 2 (1982): 104-134 116.

<sup>38</sup> See Shane Clifton, “An Analysis of the Developing Ecclesiology of the Assemblies of God in Australia,” Sydney: Australian Catholic University, 2005), 131-132.

<sup>39</sup> Frank Macchia has argued persuasively that Spirit baptism is the organizing principle of Pentecostal ecclesiology. See Frank D. Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2006), 155- 256.

<sup>40</sup> Simon Chan, “Mother Church: Toward a Pentecostal Ecclesiology,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 22, no. 2 (2000): 177-208.

more than just the gift of tongues, but functions to establish and enrich Pentecostal understanding and cultural values. The notion of baptism in the Spirit as universally available, and universally empowering for people of all genders, all races, all classes, and all intelligences, was a vital symbol of unity and empowerment. At the same time, since the Spirit was understood as a sign of the end-times, as facilitating personal holiness, and as empowering for mission, it also acted as a transcendent force for cultural and social change. Fourth, its communicative function was apparent in the way in which the doctrine found global explanatory power, and became the foundation of the remarkable growth of Pentecostalism throughout the twentieth century.

It is readily apparent that the traditional doctrine helped direct communal beliefs and practices central to Pentecostal identity, but what about the grounding of the doctrine in revelation; what can we say about the relationship between this doctrine and the Scriptures? As has already been noted, the Pentecostal doctrine does not arise from a completely objective, propositionalist reading of the biblical text. Nonetheless, the Scriptures are central to its formation. There has been substantial discussion of the nature of Pentecostal hermeneutics, which has highlighted the extent to which Pentecostals read the Scriptures, not as an historical document, but in the search for continuity between the experience of the charismatic characters of the biblical narrative and their own.<sup>41</sup> Thus, concomitant with the development of the experience and theology of baptism in the Spirit, which can be said to arise from the biblical text and then inform the reading of that same text (in a circular fashion), is an understanding of the biblical narrative which locates the Pentecostal distinctive in the life of the early church. Thus, the alignment of Pentecostal experience with their particular reading of the biblical narrative was sufficient to sustain the authority of the Pentecostal doctrine — to provide it with “real reference,” and thus to enable it to function cognitively (in the words of Lonergan), and to fittingly direct the theo-drama of the redemptive mission of the church (in the words of Vanhoozer).

### **Contemplating Doctrinal Development in the Contemporary Context of Global Pentecostalism**

The summary of Lindbeck, Vanhoozer and Lonergan has provided a means of explaining (and defending) the development of the traditional Pentecostal

---

<sup>41</sup> See Shane Clifton, “Pentecostal Theological Method: A Colourful and Creative Approach,” BTh Honours Thesis, Sydney: Sydney College of Divinity, 2001).

doctrine of baptism in the Spirit. It only remains to consider whether or not the doctrine, as it is currently worded, continues to be relevant and meaningful in contemporary global society. As has already been observed, doctrine will inevitably be subject to development and change (excluding doctrine which is considered dogma, but few pentecostals would include baptism in the Spirit in that category). Pentecostalism was birthed in the critique of “dead traditionalism,”<sup>42</sup> and this openness to the new things of the Spirit should stimulate Pentecostal reflection, even (and especially) on matters as central as its distinctive doctrine. Thus, what follows is not a dogmatic defence of the status quo, or a call for radical change. Rather, my intention is simply to raise questions for discussion, and provide some parameters around which Pentecostal analysis of its doctrine might be framed. Given that analysis of the biblical grounding of baptism in the Spirit has been widely debated elsewhere, our focus in the remainder of this paper will be the functions of meaning that give rise to the significance of doctrines as rules of discourse within religious communities.

Returning again to the constitutive function of the doctrine, it is noteworthy that baptism in the Spirit continues to be foundational to traditional Pentecostal identity, and this remains the primary reason that denominational leaders continue to insist upon adherence (through institutional mechanisms such as the requirements of ordination). Even so, the rise of the charismatic movement during the 1970s and 80s, and increasing openness to ecumenical endeavours,<sup>43</sup> has raised the question about whether or not the Pentecostal doctrine serves to prevent a broader unity in the church? We need to respond with the initial observation that church unity is not uniformity, and what is required is the affirmation of what Lonergan calls “pluralism in the unity of faith.”<sup>44</sup> Ecumenical unity actually involves the affirmation of both commonality and difference, and entails “reciprocal relationships, and the “experiencing” of one another,” in such a manner that differences are not undermined but, rather, create space for relationship.<sup>45</sup>

Having said this, the problem is that the Pentecostal doctrine is sometimes seen to deny the Spirit to non-Pentecostals (or, rather, to those who don't

---

<sup>42</sup> Which it perhaps confused with “tradition” *per se*.

<sup>43</sup> Such as the long running Roman Catholic/pentecostal Dialogue, published in *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 12: 2 (1990) and *Pneuma* 21 (1999).

<sup>44</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 326.

<sup>45</sup> Paul D. Lee, *Pneumatological Ecclesiology in the Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue: A Catholic Reading of the Third Quinquennium (1985-1989)* (Rome: Dissertatio ad Doctoratum in Facultate S. Theologiae apud Pontificiam Universitatem S. Thomae in Urbe, Angelicum, 1994), I.1.5.4.

speak in tongues), and this is not merely a matter of “difference,” but represents a denial of the inherent spirituality of other Christians. As Lim suggests, the doctrine is sometimes considered to be elitist,<sup>46</sup> and it might be argued that this works against the constitution of a broader Christian unity. This point is, however, debatable. The universal expectation of baptism in the Spirit for people of all genders, races, classes, and intelligences actually makes the Pentecostal position thoroughly opposed to any elitism. Further, it can be argued that the distinctive doctrine does not deny the Spirit to non-Pentecostals. In fact, the specific declaration that the baptism in the Spirit is distinct from and subsequent to salvation can be read as an affirmation of the spirituality of all Christians, since salvation is a work of the Spirit. Further, there is nothing in the Pentecostal doctrine that denies the ongoing ministry of the Spirit or the operation of the gifts of the Spirit to those who don't speak in tongues, even though it is sometimes interpreted as such (by Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals alike). All the doctrine is saying is that there is another dimension of the Spirit available, labelled by Pentecostals as baptism in the Spirit in appropriation of the biblical language of John and Luke/Acts, associated with (or evidenced by) the gift of tongues. I would thus suggest that it should not be considered elitist or anti-ecumenical for Pentecostals to continue to encourage the broader church to embrace this gift and this spiritual orientation. Having said this, the issue remains whether doctrinal development might help in further cementing relationships with charismatics and the ecumenical movement as a whole?

In respect to the effective function of the doctrine, much could be said. Ian Jagelman suggests that Pentecostal churches are in danger of adopting the charismatic movement's understanding of tongues, which (he says) separates tongues from the baptism in the Spirit, and denies its universal normativity. He goes on to warn that:

If Pentecostal churches allow “Third Wavers” (i.e. charismatics) to penetrate their leadership structures, then the emphasis on the need for a baptism in the Spirit will be subtly undermined, and the spiritual gifts are likely to disappear gradually, as they did in many sectors of the early church.<sup>47</sup>

Jagelman's comments might be surprising to some who have critiqued Pentecostals for a focus on tongues, since critics have assumed that this focus under-

<sup>46</sup> Lim, “Evangelical Critique.”

<sup>47</sup> Ian Jagelman, “Church Growth: Its Problems and Promise for Australian Pentecostalism,” *Australasian Pentecostal Studies* 1, no. 1 (1998): 27-40 36.

mines the affirmation of the variety of other gifts of the Spirit, and the seemingly more important fruits of the Spirit, especially love.<sup>48</sup> For most Pentecostals, however, the notion of baptism in the Spirit incorporates and thereby emphasizes an orientation to the range of spiritual gifts established in the Scriptures. The reference to tongues as the “initial physical evidence” actually implies that there is a whole realm to Spiritual life that is embraced by the doctrine. Having said this, there may be other ways, apart from affirmation of the Pentecostal doctrine as it is currently worded, of maintaining an emphasis on the experience of the Spirit, spiritual gifts and missionary empowerment. The dilemma is that these emphases are sometimes lost in debates about evidential tongues. As Frank Macchia has suggested, “the doctrine of tongues as initial evidence attempts to give a literal and scientific explanation of tongues in a way that distances Pentecostals from the ongoing vibrancy of the experience.”<sup>49</sup> The result is that the intended effect of doctrine is at least potentially diminished.

As we have observed, the cognitive function of meaning relates to the way in which human society is structured by the cultural symbols that mediate meaning.<sup>50</sup> We have already identified the extent that baptism in the Spirit has framed Pentecostal theology and culture in the past. The question is whether or not developments in Pentecostal theology in recent decades require a reframing of the Spirit baptism doctrine? An illustrative example can be seen in the recent contribution of Amos Yong to global Pentecostal theology.<sup>51</sup> He suggests that the problem in the debate about the Pentecostal position arises from the now outdated division between conceptions of salvation/conversion and sanctification. Arguing that salvation is better understood as “a dynamic process of experiencing the ‘increasing fullness’ of the Spirit,”<sup>52</sup> he thus concludes that Spirit-baptism should be associated with the whole dynamic process of salvation. Seeking to incorporate the notion of Spirit fullness at conversion, as well as the classical Pentecostal emphasis on empowerment for witness, Yong thus proposes:

---

<sup>48</sup> See Lim, “Evangelical Critique.”

<sup>49</sup> Frank D. Macchia, “Groans Too Deep for Words: Towards a Theology of Tongues as Initial Evidence,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 1, no. 2 (1998): available online, <http://www.apts.edu/ajps/98-2/98-2-macchia-frames.htm>, accessed 27 March 2004. Similar views are expressed by other Pentecostal scholars. See, for example, Jean-Daniel Plüss, “Azusa and Other Myths: The Long and Winding Road from Experience to Stated Belief and Back Again,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 15 (1993), pp. 189-201.

<sup>50</sup> Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 76-77.

<sup>51</sup> Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 2005).

<sup>52</sup> Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out*, 99.

that we retrieve this metaphor of baptism of the Holy Spirit to capture the dynamic and full experience of Christians salvation not only in terms of dying with Christ but also in terms of being raised with him to do the things that he did.<sup>53</sup>

Yong's proposal would require movements away from language such as "distinct from" and "subsequent to," which delineate the sort of distinctions he is critiquing. Whether or not this is necessary or helpful is for wider debate, but whatever one concludes, suffice to note that cultural and theological developments necessitate reflection upon existing doctrines and, potentially, doctrinal change. Since so much of the early Pentecostal worldview has undergone revision in the course of the century (such as methodological, eschatological and ecclesiological perspectives), it is likely that the time is ripe to rethink the doctrine.

Since the cognitive function of doctrine also relates to its sustainability in the light of the dominant rationalities of the contemporary context, one of the challenges for the traditional Pentecostal doctrine is the increasing sophistication of Pentecostal approaches to biblical hermeneutics and theological method. Pentecostals cannot go back in time and read the Scriptures using the ahistorical and literalist approaches that supported the development of the doctrine in previous generations, nor would they want to do so. It is thus questionable whether the traditional biblical rationale given by early Pentecostals to support their doctrine (including a normative application of the few references to tongues in the narrative of Luke/Acts) still carries cognitive force. While some scholars, such as William Menzies, argue that it does,<sup>54</sup> others, such as Gordon Fee and Amos Yong, are preferring to retain the essence of the Pentecostal orientation toward spiritual experience and missionary empowering, while moving away from dogmatic references to "subsequence and "evidence."<sup>55</sup> Still others, such as Frank Macchia, seek to find a mediating position. Macchia affirms the traditional view that "Spirit baptism is a powerful experience received with or at a moment distinct from Christian initiation"<sup>56</sup> but argues against legalistic insistence on evidential tongues<sup>57</sup> and for an expanding

---

<sup>53</sup> Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out*, 101.

<sup>54</sup> See William Menzies and Robert Menzies, *Spirit and Power: Foundations of Pentecostal Experience* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2000).

<sup>55</sup> Gordon Fee, *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1991). See descriptions of Yong's position above.

<sup>56</sup> Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, 153—at this point, Macchia's theology can easily be reconciled with the idea that Baptism in the Spirit is "distinct from" Christian initiation.

<sup>57</sup> Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, 35-37 & 281.

of the boundaries of Spirit baptism, which he describes “as an eschatological participation in the kingdom of God.”<sup>58</sup> In each case, scholars are responding to the need for doctrinal development (or defence) on cognitive grounds.

The final, communicative function of meaning, is dependent on the continued ability of the doctrine to explain the constitutive, effective and cognitive functions set out above. I have already indicated some of the challenges of communicating the doctrine (in its present form) in the contemporary context, even though I do believe it is possible to do so. The fact that the traditional doctrine is losing some of its communicative capacity is evident in the number of churches and Pentecostal movements that are seeking to change its wording (and hence its meaning). An example can be found in Australia, where the 20,000 member Hillsong church, pastored by Brian Houston, the national president of the Assemblies of God in Australia, has replaced the traditional wording of the doctrine in its “what we believe” statement as follows:

We believe that in order to live the holy and fruitful lives that God intends for us, we need to be baptised in water and be filled with the power of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit enables us to use spiritual gifts, including speaking in tongues.<sup>59</sup>

While it might not be readily apparent to the casual observer, this statement is in fact a clear example of the move away from the traditional language of “subsequence” and “evidential tongues.” The challenge in the Australian situation is that this change has not been the subject of denominational discussion or debate. Nor does it express the range of meaning inherent in our analysis of the function of the traditional doctrine of the baptism in the Spirit. Be that as it may, the likely explanation for the change is that Hillsong church does not believe the traditional doctrine appropriately communicates its intended meaning in the contemporary church context. For many, the traditional doctrine communicates a limited focus on tongues, and an exclusivity which fails to affirm diverse spirituality. This paper argued earlier that the doctrine need not be interpreted in this manner, but nevertheless, if this is what the doctrine communicates, then perhaps it is time for change.

## **Conclusion (and proposed amendment)**

This paper has sought to understand the traditional Pentecostal doctrine of the baptism in the Spirit by way of categories provided by George Lindbeck, Kevin

---

<sup>58</sup> Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, 61-88.

<sup>59</sup> Cited in Clifton, “Ecclesiology of the AGA,” 228.

Vanhoozer, and Bernard Lonergan. In the context of the rise of Pentecostalism in the early twentieth century, the doctrine developed in response to the experience of the Spirit understood to be contiguous with the narrative (theodrama) of the charismatic characters of the Scriptures, particularly the story of the church set out in the book of Acts. In the cultural and linguistic context of early Pentecostalism, the doctrine functioned to encourage and direct the nature and purpose of Pentecostal spiritual experience. It also facilitated the creation of uniquely unifying social structures, at a time when the church as a whole was subject to major division. Further, it framed Pentecostal culture and worldview, sustaining an emphasis upon universal priesthood, confronting racial, social and gender divides, and orienting a movement of people toward increasing holiness and passionate missionary endeavours. Whether it is still able to perform these functions, especially in the light of developments in Pentecostal hermeneutics, theology, and praxis, is a matter for further debate, although I have suggested that it is time for change. Unless this occurs, it is likely instead that the increasingly problematic phraseology of the existing doctrine will lead to its alienation, since redundancy is the usual alternative to change. Doctrinal development is the responsibility of communities of faith, but it would not be inappropriate to conclude this paper by suggesting a rewording of the doctrine which might form the basis for broader discussion. In the light of the historical and contemporary Pentecostal experience outlined above, and drawing particularly from the work of Yong and Macchia, a potential rewording might be along the following lines:

We believe that the baptism in the Holy Spirit, experienced with or at a moment distinct from Christian initiation, is the ongoing orientation of the believer to the leading of the Spirit for the sake of personal transformation into the likeness of Christ, generating unity in the church, and empowering the community of faith for the mission of proclaiming the Kingdom of God. This experience of the Spirit is accompanied by the universally available gifts of the Spirit (including tongues), and manifests the fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22-26).

Whether or not this proposed rewording of the Pentecostal doctrine is adequate or acceptable is moot. My goal is, rather, to understand and appropriate that which has been handed down and, at the same time, to encourage an openness to change. It would be ironic if a doctrine that was developed by Pentecostals as a means of describing their experience of the liberative power of the Spirit, and which accompanied their rejection of traditional dogmatism, was itself to become dogmatically entrenched! Pentecostals have always affirmed that the Spirit should renew, revive and transform the

church, and for this reason, as Amos Yong observes, “Pentecostals should be open to the development of doctrine.”<sup>60</sup> To develop the doctrine of baptism in the Spirit is not to undermine the experience and insight of our forebears but, rather, to continue their legacy.

## Bibliography

- Blumhofer, Edith, *Restoring the Faith: The Assemblies of God, Pentecostalism, and American Culture* (Chicago: University of Illinois, 1993).
- Cox, Harvey, *Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty First Century* (Massachusetts: Perseus, 1995).
- Chan, Simon, “Mother Church: Toward a Pentecostal Ecclesiology,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 22, no. 2 (2000): 177-208.
- Chant, Barry, “The Spirit of Pentecost: Origins and Development of the Pentecostal movement in Australia, 1870-1939,” PhD dissertation, Sydney: Macquarie University, 1999).
- Clifton, Shane, “An Analysis of the Developing Ecclesiology of the Assemblies of God in Australia,” Sydney: Australian Catholic University, 2005), 131-132.
- Dulles, Avery, *Models of Revelation* (New York: Doubleday, 1983).
- Faupel, D. William, *The Everlasting Gospel: The Significance of Eschatology in the Development of Pentecostal Thought* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996).
- Grenz, Stanley J. and John R. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: Westminster John Know Press, 2001).
- Dayton, Donald, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Metuchen, New Jersey: Scarecrow, 1987).
- Fee, Gordon, *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics* (Massachusetts: Hendrickson, 1991).
- Hall, Douglas, *Thinking the Faith: Christian Theology in a North American Context* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1991).
- Hatch, Nathan O., *The Democratization of American Christianity* (London: Yale University Press, 1989).
- Heyduck, Richard, *The Recovery of Doctrine in the Contemporary Church* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2002).
- Hutchinson, Mark, “The Power to Grasp,” Unpublished paper, Southern Cross College, Sydney, 2003.
- Jagelman, Ian, “Church Growth: Its Problems and Promise for Australian Pentecostalism,” *Australasian Pentecostal Studies* 1, no. 1 (1998): 27-40 36.
- Lee, Paul D., *Pneumatological Ecclesiology in the Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue: A Catholic Reading of the Third Quinquennium (1985-1989)* (Rome: Dissertatio ad Doctoratum in Facultate S. Theologiae apud Pontificiam Universitatem S. Thomae in Urbe, Angelicum, 1994), I.1.5.4.
- Lim, David S., “An Evangelical Critique of ‘Initial Evidence’ Doctrine,” [\*Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies\* 1, no. 2 \(1998\): 219-229.](#)
- Lindbeck, George, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in a Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1984).

---

<sup>60</sup> Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out*, 117.

- Loneragan, Bernard, *Method in Theology* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1972).
- Macchia, Frank D., *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2006).
- , “Groans Too Deep for Words: Towards a Theology of Tongues as Initial Evidence,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 1, no. 2 (1998): available online, <http://www.apts.edu/ajps/98-2/98-2-macchia-frames.htm>, accessed 27 March 2004.
- Martin, David, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002).
- Menzies, William and Robert Menzies, *Spirit and Power: Foundations of Pentecostal Experience* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan, 2000).
- Ormerod, Neil, *Method, Meaning and Revelation* (New York: University Press of America, 2000).
- Plüss, Jean-Daniel, “Azusa and Other Myths: The Long and Winding Road from Experience to Stated Belief and Back Again,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 15 (1993), pp. 189-201.
- Vanhoozer, Kevin J., *The Drama of Doctrine: A Canonical Linguistic Approach to Christian Theology* (Louisville, Kentucky: Westminster John Knox, 2005).
- Wainwright, Geoffrey, “Methodism’s Ecclesial Location and Ecumenical Vocation,” *One in Christ* 19, no. 2 (1982): 104-134 116.
- Wright, N. T., “How Can the Bible be Authoritative,” *Vox Evangelica* 21 (1991): 7-32.
- Yong, Amos, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker, 2005).