



HEARING GOD’S VOICE: TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF PENTECOSTAL REVELATORY EXPERIENCE

A thesis submitted for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

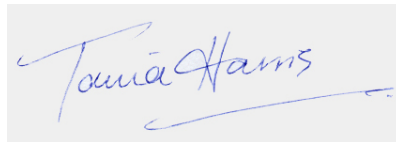
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Declaration of Originality

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person no material which to a substantial extent has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma of a university or other institution of higher learning, except where due acknowledgement is made in the acknowledgments.”

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Tania Harris". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long horizontal flourish at the end.

14 September 2020

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Dedicated to

My mum who lost her dream to become a teacher at the age of thirteen
and instead passed the baton onto her children.

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The following scholars have provided contribution to the thesis through their anecdotal feedback:

Phillip Hughes, Mark Cartledge, Mark Hutchinson, Craig Keener, Scott Ellington, Mel Robeck, Frank Macchia, DJ. Konz.

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ABSTRACT

The revelatory experience, or in common parlance, the experience of “hearing God’s voice” is central to Pentecostal practice. As the revelation of “God’s thoughts” via the Holy Spirit, this experience is understood by Pentecostals to involve direct contact with a supernatural being and includes the possibility of extra-biblical, future-oriented and/or previously unknown information. This ability is understood to be a distinctive of the New Covenant whereby the Spirit was poured out on all on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:16-17). The approach to revelatory experience stems from a worldview that views contemporary experience to be continuous with and phenomenologically equivalent to the biblical characters.

While the revelatory experience is valued by Pentecostals for its contribution to spirituality, it is also known for its volatile and disruptive nature. Two main areas of concern have been identified: the *theological* problem of relationship to Scripture (primarily the concern of Evangelical theologians) and the *ministry* problems of pastoral fallout and institutional stability (primarily the concern of Pentecostal pastors). An inability to reconcile these issues has contributed to periodic rejection of the revelatory experience throughout history.

Using the methodology of Mark Cartledge’s “Testimony in the Spirit” and Jeff Astley’s concept of “ordinary theology”, this study closely examines the theology and practice of revelatory experience among Pentecostals in three Australian churches. Qualitative data is brought into dialogue with four theological frameworks arising from different ecclesial traditions in order to ascertain the framework that best reflects the experiential perspective of the Pentecostals. This process allows for a close examination of the phenomenological dynamics of the contemporary experience in Pentecostal contexts compared to the experience of the biblical characters.

The study indicates that the Pentecostal alignment to the theological framework of the Protestant Evangelical tradition has led to a disconnect in the theology and practice of Pentecostal revelatory experience and mitigates against its ongoing use. Instead, Pentecostal practice finds its best alignment with the Catholic tradition. However, this requires the revision of certain doctrines of Scripture that have arisen because of the superimposition of theological categories from *outside* the text rather than the experiential dynamics *within* the text.

The project includes a sociological analysis of the three churches using Glock and Stark’s taxonomy of religious experience and Peter Berger’s theory of social worlds. This allows sociological theory to explain how revelatory experience is facilitated and regulated within the context of the local church community. Ultimately, the study shows *how* a theological framework that reflects the

phenomenologically equivalent perspective of Pentecostals can be used to address the theological problem of the relationship of revelatory experience to Scripture and the ministry problems of pastoral fallout and institutional instability.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The claim to revelatory experience or in common parlance, the experience of “hearing God’s voice,” is frequent among Pentecostals. Pentecostals speak of God “talking” to them regularly and personally. To “hear God’s voice” is to receive the revelation of “God’s thoughts towards humanity” through the Holy Spirit.¹ For Pentecostals, this experience is understood to involve direct contact with a supernatural being and includes the possibility of extra-biblical, future-oriented and previously unknown information.² Global surveys indicate that Pentecostals are two to three more times likely than the average Christian to report that they have received a direct revelation from God.³ The Pentecostal approach to revelatory experience arises from a worldview that anticipates the contemporary experience to be continuous with and phenomenologically equivalent to the biblical characters.⁴ Access to revelatory encounters is understood to be made possible to all believers via the outpouring of the Spirit under the New Covenant (Acts 2:16-17).

Pentecostals prize the revelatory experience as a key component of their spirituality,⁵ and sociological studies indicate the effectiveness of the experience in fulfilling ecclesial goals.⁶ However, the experience that is so valued by Pentecostals has also proven to be volatile and disruptive. This is the particular burden of Pentecostal experience with its distinctive of new and previously unknown

¹ Ernest B. Gentile, *Your Sons and Daughters Shall Prophesy* (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 1999), 20.

² Charles Y. Glock and Rodney Stark, *Religion and Society in Tension* (Chicago: Rand McNally, 1965), 41.

³ (From a 10-country survey in 2006), Paul Alexander, *Signs and Wonders: Why Pentecostalism Is the World’s Fastest Growing Faith* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009), 117. 81% of adherents in American Assemblies of God (AG) reported revelatory experiences, Margaret M. Poloma, and John C. Green, *The Assemblies of God: Godly Love and the Revitalization of American Pentecostalism* (New York: New York University Press, 2010), 135; 46% of Hispanic Catholic Charismatics reported revelatory experiences in 2012, Pew Research Center, “The Shifting Religious Identity of Latinos in the United States,” May 7, 2014, <http://www.pewforum.org/2014/05/07/the-shifting-religious-identity-of-latinos-in-the-united-states> [accessed Dec 21, 2019]. Prophecy was found to be extensively practised among Pentecostals in Asia, Dennis Lum, *The Practice of Prophecy: An Empirical-Theological Study of Pentecostals in Singapore* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2018), 1.

⁴ Ch. 1.3.2.

⁵ 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): 147-71.

⁶ Ch. 4.2.1.

information.⁷ Two main areas of concern have been identified: the *theological* problem of relationship to Scripture and the *ministry* problems of pastoral fallout and institutional stability.⁸ These problems have been associated with the revelatory experience throughout history.⁹

Although ubiquitous in practice, the contemporary revelatory experience has not been fully reflected upon in the Pentecostal academy. The result has been that Pentecostals have applied the theological framework accessible to them via the Protestant Evangelical tradition. Because this framework stems from the premise that contemporary experience is phenomenologically *discontinuous* with biblical experience, a disconnect has arisen between the theology and practice of revelatory experience among Pentecostals. As a result, Pentecostals have been unable to adequately address the theological and ministry problems at the core of their experience.

1.1 AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study is to investigate the theology and practice of revelatory experiences among a sample of Australian Pentecostals in the context of their local church. Of particular concern are the extra-biblical revelatory experiences that pose the greatest threat to theological orthodoxy and ministry effectiveness. Specifically, the thesis seeks to answer the question: How does a position of phenomenological equivalency with biblical revelatory experience inform and shape the contemporary Pentecostal experience so that the place of Scripture is maintained and ministry outcomes are facilitated?

The following aspects of revelatory experience are examined:

1. Content: What content do experiences include? How is it revelatory?
2. Function: What is the function of revelatory experience for the individual?
3. Process (by phase):
 - a. “*Hearing God’s Voice*” – In what modes are divine messages received?
 - b. “*Recognising God’s Voice*” – How is God’s “voice” discerned? Is epistemological reliability deemed possible? Who is responsible for discernment?
 - c. “*Responding to God’s Voice*” – How are revelatory experiences responded to? What expectations are there for divine fulfilment?

The study embraces both theological and ministry aims. From a theological perspective, the findings contribute to a theology for contemporary revelatory experience that reflects the phenomenologically

⁷ Glock and Stark, 56.

⁸ Ch. 1.4.

⁹ Ibid.

equivalent perspective of the Pentecostals. From a ministry perspective, the study shows how churches manage revelatory experience in order to maintain theological orthodoxy and facilitate ministry goals. This enables recommendations to be made for praxis that address the two problems and provide mechanisms for its ongoing and proper use.

1.2 METHODOLOGY

This study draws on the tools and theories of practical theology to reflect biblically and empirically on contemporary revelatory experience. It allows the voices of theology and social science to be brought into dialogue. More specifically, the study employs the methodology of *Testimony in the Spirit* and Jeff Astley's concept of "ordinary theology."¹⁰ This approach draws on the testimonies and theological reflections of individuals as the primary source of data.

Data was gathered through qualitative methods (semi-structured interviews, focus groups and participant observation) with a sample from three local Pentecostal churches. The three churches were all located within a twenty-kilometre radius of the city of Sydney and hailed from the Pentecostal tradition – two from the *Australian Christian Churches* (ACC) (formerly *Australian Assemblies of God*) and the third from an independent Pentecostal "apostolic" network. All shared an urban, multi-cultural demographic and were planted within the previous fifty years, but varied in terms of their ecclesial style and expression.

The study includes a sociological analysis of the revelatory experience from both individual and communal perspectives. Findings are analysed in dialogue with Charles Glock and Rodney Stark's taxonomy of religious experience and Peter Berger's theory of social worlds (the "sacred canopy").¹¹ This allows sociological theory to illumine the process by which revelatory experience is facilitated and managed within the local church community.

From a theological perspective, the testimonial data is analysed in dialogue with Scripture and the work of Charles Kraft, James K. A Smith, Niels Hvidt and Wayne Grudem. This provides insights into the ordinary theology and practice of Pentecostal revelatory experience in light of existing theological frameworks.

¹⁰ Mark J. Cartledge, *Testimony in the Spirit: Rescripting Ordinary Pentecostal Theology, Explorations in Practical, Pastoral and Empirical Theology* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2010); Jeff Astley, *Ordinary Theology: Looking, Listening and Learning in Theology* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002).

¹¹ Glock and Stark, *Religion and Society*; Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy: Elements of a Sociological Theory of Religion* (New York: Doubleday, 1967).

1.3 THE NATURE OF CONTEMPORARY PENTECOSTAL REVELATORY EXPERIENCE

As a revealed religion, the Christian faith is built on the presupposition that God has revealed himself to people throughout history and continues to do so. However, there are vastly different beliefs about how this revelation occurs today. Some traditions equate hearing God's voice solely with the reading and exposition of Scripture by the Spirit's illumination. Although these activities remain valid for the Pentecostal, their perspective allows for Spirit experiences *beyond* the canon. Pentecostal experiences (in the West) are distinguishable by their unmediated, extra-biblical and high-level revelatory nature, phenomenological alignment with the biblical experience and universal accessibility.¹²

1.3.1 Unmediated, Extra-Biblical and “High-Level” Revelation

For Pentecostals, “hearing God's voice” involves the possibility of direct contact with God apart from Scripture or human intermediaries. The revelatory encounter represents an invasive *theophanic* encounter of divine self-disclosure,¹³ where God is experienced in ways that are palpably felt and observed.¹⁴ As dreams, visions, voices and the like, they arise spontaneously in ways that are distinguishable from cognitive reflection.¹⁵ Experiences are understood to be expressions of the divine will – they are imbued with supernatural authority and power to fulfil their intended purpose.¹⁶

These inspired experiences are best understood as a form of divine *revelation*. The Pentecostal literature links prophetic experiences to the New Testament concept of ἀποκάλυψις/ἀποκαλυφθῆ (apokálypsis) normally translated as “to reveal/revelation,” whereby God “discloses” or “unveils” something that was previously secret or unknown (1 Cor 14:26).¹⁷ Pentecostal encounters – termed “high-level” by sociologists Glock and Stark – include the likelihood of previously unknown, future-oriented and extra-biblical information.¹⁸ Pentecostals are comfortable with *new* revelation, regarding

¹² This understanding of Pentecostal revelatory experience is generally limited to Western literature from North America, UK and Australia. See Ch. 3.1.1.1.

¹³ Compare with Frank D. Macchia's idea of “theophany” to describe glossolalia, “Sighs Too Deep for Words: Toward a Theology of Glossolalia,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 1 (1992): 47–73.

¹⁴ Peter D. Neumann, “Experience: The Mediated Immediacy of Encounter with the Spirit,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology* (London, New York: Routledge, 2020), 84–92.

¹⁵ Mark J. Cartledge, “Charismatic Prophecy: A Definition and Description,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 5 (1994), 88; Lee, “Pentecostal Prophecy,” 160; Lum, 92.

¹⁶ Bruce Reekie, *Prophesying for a Release of Faith* (Lancaster: Sovereign World, 1993), 37.

¹⁷ Lum, 67, 212, 93. Also Walter Bauer, Frederick W. Danker and F. W. Gingrich, *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Early Christian Literature*, 3rd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2000), 112.

¹⁸ Glock and Stark, 54-61.

it as one of the most important sources of their spirituality.¹⁹ Messages typically include reference to personal and specific situations²⁰ and are frequently described using the categories of “forth-telling” (declaring the mind of God) and “fore-telling” (prediction of future events).²¹

1.3.2 Phenomenological Equivalency with the Biblical Experience

The Pentecostal concept of revelatory experience is grounded in a worldview that sees itself as being in *historic continuity* with the biblical characters. In their origins Pentecostals saw themselves as a restorationist movement, whereby the Spirit was reviving the “full gospel” of the early church with all its fervour, charismata and miracles.²² For Pentecostals, the present experience of the Spirit is “historically primitivist,” in that it is based on the prophecy of Joel in Acts 2:16-17, the legitimising text for the events of the original Day of Pentecost.²³ Biblical and contemporary horizons are fused such that there is no phenomenological demarcation between biblical and contemporary experience.²⁴ Thus, Pentecostals affirm the phenomena described in Acts (including glossolalia, healing, miracles, prophecy, dreams and visions etc) as repeatable and strive to emulate them in their own practice. These experiences are held to be analogous to and even *identical* to those of the first century church.²⁵

In this thesis, I show that the Pentecostal expectation of experiential and phenomenological continuity forms the basis for contemporary revelatory experiences. While no claim can be made that contemporary experiences are the *same* as the first century, Pentecostals anticipate clear and literal

¹⁹ Lee, 171.

²⁰ Lee, 162; David Pytches, *Some Said it Thundered: A Personal Encounter with the Kansas City Prophets* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1990), 61.

²¹ 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. ed., Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 999; Cartledge, “Definition and Description,” 81.

²² Land, 15.

²³ *Ibid.*, 72.

²⁴ Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 20.

²⁵ Land, 15; Kenneth J. Archer, “Pentecostal Hermeneutics: Retrospect and Prospect” In *Pentecostal Hermeneutics: A Reader*, ed. Lee Roy Martin (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 131; Roger Stronstad, *Spirit, Scripture and Theology: A Pentecostal Perspective* (Baguio City: Asia Pacific Theological Seminary Press, 1995), 13; Lee, “Pentecostal Prophecy,” 159; David Cartledge, *The Apostolic Revolution: The Restoration of Apostles and Prophets in the Assemblies of God in Australia* (Chester Hill: Paraclete Institute, 2000), 16.

correlations between them.²⁶ This study investigates the entire *process* of revelatory experience beyond the initial encounter to the broader outcomes as the inspired message is discerned and responded to. The process comprises three constituent phases (although in practice they overlap), firstly relating to how God's messages are *heard* (received); secondly, to how divine messages are *recognised* (discerned) as divine and thirdly, to how revelatory messages are *responded to* including expectations for divine fulfilment.

1.3.3 Universal Accessibility distinct from Specialist "Gift" of Prophecy

Pentecostals generally understand that unlike the specialist "gift" of prophecy that is limited to a few, God's revelatory voice is available to all. Pentecostals view this universal access as the "first level" of operation of the prophetic Spirit. From there, one moves towards increasing levels of expertise in the "gift of prophecy" and/or the "office of the prophet."²⁷

This thesis views the basis for universal access to revelatory experience in the events of Pentecost, although this link is rarely made in either the popular or scholarly literature. The outpouring of the Spirit on "sons and daughters" and "young" and "old" (Acts 2:16,17) fulfilled Old Covenant expectations for the New Covenant (Num 11:29; Jer 31:33-34; Is 59:21; Ezek 36:26-27; Joel 2:28-29).²⁸ Unlike the Old Covenant, where revelation was only accessed via the prophets, the Spirit's voice under the New Covenant is made available to *all* believers. Since "dreams and visions" were the "accredited media of prophetic revelation" from the time of Moses,²⁹ the significance of Peter's proclamation was that with the outpouring of the Spirit, all believers are able "hear God's voice" in the same phenomenological manner as the Old Covenant prophets (Num 12:6; Hos 12:10).³⁰ In other

²⁶ Timothy B. Cargal, "Beyond the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy: Pentecostals and Hermeneutics in a Postmodern Age," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*, no.15 (1993): 180.

²⁷ Margaret Poloma, *Main Street Mystics: The Toronto Blessing and Reviving Pentecostalism* (Walnut Creek: AltaMira, 2003), 123, 128; David Petts, *Body Builders: Gifts to Make God's People Grow* (Mattersey: Mattersey Hall, 2002), 43-45.

²⁸ Oss notes the general agreement among scholars for the hope of the Spirit's outpouring in the Old Testament, "A Pentecostal/Charismatic View," 244-249.

²⁹ Stronstad, *The Prophethood of All Believers*, 69; Max Turner, *The Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts: In the New Testament Church and Today*, Revised (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2012), 8, 194.

³⁰ Revelatory experiences were largely conceived as "D/Vs" under both the Old and New Covenants and no definitive dividing-line was drawn between visions, auditions and inspired ideas in general (eg. Amos 1.1, Isa. 2.1; Jer. 38.21), Johannes Lindblom, *Prophecy in Ancient Israel*. (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1962): 108. In the New Testament, aural experiences continued to be subsumed under the language of D/Vs (e.g. Acts 9:10; 10:19; 13:2), John B. F. Miller *Convinced that God had Called*

words, the entire church community can now receive revelation without the use of an intermediary. It is this shift from *limited and mediated* access via the prophets to *universal and direct* access to individual believers that marks the New Covenant and reflects the rhetorical intent of Peter's speech.³¹ As Turner shows, the use of Joel 2 at Pentecost is programmatic and reflects the essential nature of the "Spirit of prophecy" at the turn of the eras as the "organ of communication of God's revelation to a man." This communication primarily involves charismatic revelation and guidance.³²

After Pentecost, this universal access to charismatic revelation is demonstrated by Luke in Acts as the church responds to Spirit-inspired dreams, visions and oracular words in its mission. Miller lists twenty-one separate incidences of D/Vs in Acts, including those of the established "apostles" and "prophets" (Stephen, Philip, Barnabas, Agabus, Peter, Paul)³³ and several "minor" characters (Cornelius, Ananias, the disciples of Tyre and the Antioch church leaders).³⁴

The revelatory experience of Acts 2:16,17 is distinct from the phenomenon of prophecy referred to in 1 Corinthians 12-14. Unlike the direct and private nature of revelatory experience, Pentecostal (and New Testament) prophecy is typically understood to require a human intermediary who delivers an inspired message to another person under divine commission.³⁵ Hence, with regard to Acts 2:17,18, D/Vs are the *means* to revelation and prophecy is the *report* of that revelation to others.³⁶ (Hence,

Us: Dreams, Visions and the Perception of God's Will in Luke-Acts (Leiden, Boston: Brill, 2007): 11-13; Brittany E. Wilson, "Hearing the Word and Seeing the Light: Voice and Vision in Acts," *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 38, no. 4 (2016): 460. Further, angels primarily appear in "visions", Morton T. Kelsey *God, Dreams and Revelation* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1991), 32-34, 87.

³¹ Jon M. Ruthven, *What's Wrong with Protestant Theology: Tradition vs. Biblical Emphasis* (Tulsa: Word and Spirit, 2013), 4; Jon Mark Ruthven, "On the Quest for Authentic Christianity: Protestant Tradition and the Mission of Jesus," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 25 (2016): 248.

³² Turner, *Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts*, 7-14, 43-45. Also, Rickie D. Moore, "Revelation: The Light and Fire of Pentecost," in *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology*, ed. Wolfgang Vondey (London, New York: Routledge, 2020), 54-5.

³³ Stronstad, *Prophethood*, 85-102.

³⁴ Miller, *Convinced*, 167-233.

³⁵ David E. Aune, *Prophecy in Early Christianity and the Ancient Mediterranean World* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 338; *Prophecy and Inspired Speech: in Early Christianity and Its Hellenistic Environment* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997), 219; Turner, *Holy Spirit*, 184. Albrecht, 229.

³⁶ Turner, *Holy Spirit*, 194.

prophecy is most often associated by Pentecostals with the congregational setting).³⁷ However, divine messages can also be received and not *passed on*. Private experience *does not* require public proclamation. Although this was true of Old Covenant experiences (eg. Gen 12:1-3; Gen 28:12-15; Is 6:1-8), it becomes even more significant under the New Covenant where all are given access to God's voice. Indeed, the New Testament writers highlight the unequivocal advantage of the New Covenant schema over the Old for its unmediated access to revelation (eg. Heb 8:10-11 quoting Jer 31:33-34; 1 Jn 2:27). Prophecy may be a desirable gift (1 Cor 14:1), but it is no substitute for revelatory access to all.

This distinction between revelatory experience and prophecy is an essential one since the vast majority of P-C literature focusses on the gift of prophecy rather than the broader revelatory experience. This limits the discussion, since there is general consensus among scholarship that "prophecy" although technically available to all, remains the domain of *specialists* in accordance with the wording of Paul's rhetorical question to the Corinthian church (1 Cor 12:29) and the fact that the Acts narrative only designates a few to be "prophets."³⁸ Even where there is disagreement with this position, such as by Stronstad who advocates strongly for the "prophethood of all believers," New Covenant status is predominantly linked to the *vocational mission* and "prophetic witness" of the church rather than direct and personal access to revelation.³⁹ So for Stronstad, "everyone who preaches the good news about Jesus is a prophet."⁴⁰ Penney is even more emphatic about the meaning of Acts 2:17; "The Spirit of prophecy in Luke, then, is not to be understood as a universal capacity for receipt and delivery of revelations, but of participation in a prophetic community in which missionary proclamation is the paramount activity."⁴¹ Though the concept of universal access to revelatory

³⁷ Samuel W. Muindi, *Pentecostal-Charismatic Prophecy: Empirical-Theological Analysis* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2017), 110; Cartledge, "Definition and Description," 73; Cecil M. Robeck Jr., "The Gift of Prophecy in Acts and Paul Part 2," *Studia Biblica et Theologica* 5, no. 2 (1975): 37-54.

³⁸ John Penney lists several scholars in support; "The Testing of New Testament Prophecy," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 10 (1997): 58. Also Max Turner, "Spiritual Gifts Then and Now," *Vox Evangelica* 15 (1985): 14; Yongan Jeon Ahn, "Prophecy in the Pauline Communities," *The Spirit and Church* 3 no. 1 (2001): 90-95.

³⁹ Roger Stronstad, "The Rebirth of Prophecy: Trajectories from Moses to Jesus and His Followers," *Journal of Biblical & Pneumatological Research* 5, no. Fall (2013): 13; Petts, *Body Builders*, 43-45. Max Turner's work is an exception, but he does not consider the implications of his position, "Does Luke Believe Reception of the 'Spirit of Prophecy' makes all 'Prophets'? Inviting Dialogue with Roger Stronstad." *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 20, no. 1 (2000): 3-24.

⁴⁰ Stronstad, "Rebirth of Prophecy," 14.

⁴¹ Penney, "Testing," 58.

experience is widely held in Pentecostal practice, it is rarely reflected in the literature (apart from its relationship to hermeneutics).

This oversight means that theological reflection on revelatory experience has been confined to the experience of prophetic intermediaries in the public gathering, where the aspect of discernment and response by the intended audience of revelation are rarely explored. The emphasis on prophecy has also limited discussion to the Pauline epistles over the Lukan narratives and a subsequent neglect of D/Vs and auditions as vehicles of revelation. It is somewhat of an anomaly that the second aspect of the Spirit experience in Acts 2:16-17 has been embraced (“sons and daughters will prophesy”), while the first has been ignored (“young men will have visions; old men will have dreams”).

In P-C practice, Cartledge shows that the term “prophecy” is often (mistakenly) used as an umbrella term to describe any revelatory experience.⁴² In the Catholic tradition, the distinction from prophecy has been marked by the term “private revelations.”⁴³ In this study, the term “revelatory experience” is preferred, and “prophecy” is understood to be a *subset* of the broader revelatory experience. This does not mean that the insights gained from research in contemporary prophecy are irrelevant. Indeed, such studies provide insights into the broader revelatory experience (particularly in terms of their content and function) and in the absence of more relevant studies, will be used in the discussion.

1.4 THE PROBLEMS OF PENTECOSTAL REVELATORY EXPERIENCE

While revelatory experiences are valued for their contribution to Pentecostal spirituality, they are also known for their volatility. This is primarily due to their high-level revelatory and extra-biblical content. Two areas of concern have been identified:

1.4.1 The Theological Problem of Relationship to Scripture

The first issue concerns the relationship of Pentecostal revelatory experience to Scripture. The Pentecostal claim to phenomenological equivalency with the biblical characters poses a challenge to Evangelicals who see it as a threat to the authority, uniqueness and sufficiency of the canon. It is argued that the Pentecostal approach to ongoing revelatory experience threatens to diminish the place

⁴² Cartledge, “Definition and Description,” 81.

⁴³ Niels C. Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy: The Post-Biblical Tradition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 10-12.

of Scripture. As Ash states, “Spirit versus Scripture” has always been a central problem in Protestant theology.⁴⁴

To resolve the problem, Evangelicals have either argued for a complete abandonment of contemporary revelatory experience (Cessationism) or for an experience that is phenomenologically inferior. This latter position holds that the inspired experience of the canonical characters is “special” and unrepeatable, and that this uniqueness of inspiration guarantees its divine authority.

Contemporary experience on the other hand is epistemologically unreliable, fallible and bears minimal authority. North American charismatic theologian Wayne Grudem is the leading proponent of this position.⁴⁵

Pentecostals (and Charismatics) have largely adopted this “two-tier” framework to understand their experience.⁴⁶ However, this position is not followed in practice as Pentecostals *act* as though their experiences are equivalent to the biblical experience and model their practices after them.⁴⁷ The underlying problem is that the Evangelical framework is incongruent with the Pentecostal worldview since it is grounded in phenomenological *discontinuity* with the biblical experience. Yet, since the publication of Grudem’s study in 1988, no other P-C voice has proposed an alternative that reflects the phenomenologically equivalent perspective of the Pentecostals.

The primary concern here is the maintenance of a “high view” of Scripture as the ultimate source of theological orthodoxy. History testifies to the dangers of new movements whose claims to revelation have led to extra-biblical documents being accorded canonical status with a subsequent departure from theological orthodoxy (eg. Mormonism or Seventh Day Adventism).⁴⁸ While Pentecostals share the evangelical view of Scripture as the basis for faith and standard for all revelation,⁴⁹ they maintain

⁴⁴ James L. Ash Jr., “The Decline of Ecstatic Prophecy in the Early Church,” *Theological Studies* 37, no. 2 (1976): 251.

⁴⁵ Wayne A. Grudem, *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*. rev. ed. (Wheaton: Crossway Books, 2000).

⁴⁶ Jon M. Ruthven, “The ‘Foundational Gifts’ of Ephesians 2:20,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 10, no. 2 (2002): 31; Turner, *Holy Spirit*, 183.

⁴⁷ Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., “Written Prophecies: A Question of Authority,” *Pneuma* 2 (1980): 28; Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, Location 997, 3669. Also, Ch. 3.2.2.1.

⁴⁸ Cecil M. Robeck Jr., “‘Canon, Regulae Fidei, and Continuing Revelation in the Early Church,’” in *Church, Word and Spirit: Historical and Theological Essays in Honour of Geoffrey W. Bromiley*, eds. J. E. Bradley and R. A. Muller (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 65-92.

⁴⁹ Kenneth J. Archer and Aaron Gabriel Ross, “The Bible in Pentecostal Traditions,” in *Your Word Is Truth: The Bible in Ten Christian Traditions*, eds. Michael J. West and Gunnar Mägi (Geneva: United

a position of phenomenological equivalency for their revelatory experience. How this occurs without undermining the critical role of Scripture is unclear and requires further investigation.

1.4.2 The Ministry Problems of Pastoral Fallout and Institutional Instability

The second area of concern relates to the threat revelatory experiences poses to ministry outcomes. This is largely the concern of Pentecostal practitioners who attend to the day-to-day problems arising from the experience.

The revelatory experience is valued by Pentecostals for its ability to facilitate effective ministry outcomes.⁵⁰ Individually, the experience bears potential to foster spiritual transformation and growth (eg. Acts 9:1-19; 2 Cor 12:9; 1 Cor 14:3-5) and corporately, to build and strengthen the church (eg. Ac 11:28-29, 1 Cor 14:3-4). These dynamics have been observed in contemporary P-C contexts, with several sociological studies making strong links between charismatic experience and church growth, outreach and evangelism.⁵¹ Revelatory experience provides a unique act of empowerment for all individuals. Harvey Cox has identified the so-called “democratisation of the Spirit” as one of the major explanations for the rise of Pentecostalism.⁵² However, in spite of this effectiveness in facilitating ecclesial goals, revelatory experience is also known for its propensity to cause pastoral fallout and institutional instability.

Pastoral Fallout

Contemporary revelatory experience bears potential to produce significant pastoral damage. This reality is compounded by its universal access. As in the Corinthian church (1 Cor 4:6,18; 5:2,6), revelatory experience can lead to spiritual shipwreck, disappointment and dysfunction, manipulative behaviours and power struggles.⁵³ Claims to “God told me” are difficult to dispute and carry widespread potential for pastoral fallout. American pastor John Bevere labels current prophetic ministry as a “church-wide crisis” and details a torrid list of counterfeit prophecy’s effects: “broken marriages, dashed hopes, divided congregations, unrealizable promises, terrorized [sic.] pastors,

Bible Societies and World Council of Churches Publications, 2018), 143; Walter J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1972), 291.

⁵⁰ Keith Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology: A Theology of Encounter* (London: T and T Clark, 2008), 26.

⁵¹ See Ch. 4.2.1.

⁵² Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and The Reshaping of Religion in the 21st Century* (London: Cassell, 1996).

⁵³ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).

rebellion, despair, guilt and discouragement.”⁵⁴ Oliver highlights the abuse that has plagued prophetic experience throughout history.⁵⁵

These problems further reveal a general confusion about the theological purpose of revelatory experience. Wenk for example, observes that Pentecostals favour “personal oracles” and “newly revealed insights” above their biblical “identity-forming” purpose.⁵⁶ Bevere echoes this observation in prophetic experiences often reflecting a “pandering to human desires” and the “idols of the heart,” rather than its “biblical emphasis” of repentance and ministry.⁵⁷ Too often the focus is on the *emotion* of the experience rather than its true vocational purpose.⁵⁸

The risk of pastoral fallout from revelatory experiences has frequently led to its dilution and rejection – particularly in the area of personal prophecy where potential for abuse is even greater. In recent decades, denominational leaders in Australia, Canada and the United Kingdom have all actively minimised or prohibited the “supernatural” and “foretelling” components of prophecy.⁵⁹ Personal revelation in decision-making has been actively discouraged in preference to the use of “sanctified common sense.”⁶⁰

Attempts have been made to address the pastoral problems of revelatory experience by emphasising the process of discernment. For Bevere, this is brought about by greater “skill in the Scriptures.”⁶¹ North American leader Michael Brown argues for higher levels of accountability and a more careful use of language such as “The Lord says.”⁶² It is clear that the solution lies in part with the process of discernment. A theological framework that provides adequate discernment mechanisms for these high-risk experiences is a focus of this study.

⁵⁴ John Bevere, *Thus Saith the Lord?* (Lake Mary: Creation House, 1999), 15.

⁵⁵ Jeff Oliver, *Pentecost to the Present. Book 1: Early Prophetic and Spiritual Gifts Movements* (Newberry: Bridge-Logos, 2017), 97.

⁵⁶ Matthias Wenk, “What Is Prophetic about Prophecies: Inspiration or Critical Memory?” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, no. 26 (2017), 194-5.

⁵⁷ Bevere, 59.

⁵⁸ Roger Stronstad, *The Prophethood of All Believers: A Study in Luke’s Charismatic Theology*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999, 123.

⁵⁹ Cartledge, *Apostolic Revolution*, 47-48; Gavin Wakefield, *Alexander Boddy: Pentecostal Anglican Pioneer* (Milton Keynes: Authentic Media, 2007), 170-171; Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, 345; The Assemblies of God USA, “Prophets and Personal Prophecies” <https://ag.org/Beliefs/Topics-Index/Prophets-and-Personal-Prophecies> [accessed Dec 21, 2019].

⁶⁰ Donald Gee, *Concerning Spiritual Gifts* (Springfield: Gospel, 1980), 51-52.

⁶¹ Bevere, 20.

⁶² Michael L. Brown, *Playing with Holy Fire* (Lake Mary: Charisma House, 2018), 20, 80-83.

Institutional Instability

Revelatory experience is also characterised by the threat it poses to institutional stability. While revelatory experiences are intended to build up a community, they equally have potential to divide (eg. 1 Cor 14:20-40, Rev 2:20). Sociologists have long recognised the power of high-level revelatory experiences to disrupt a religious institution.⁶³ Glock and Stark have shown such experiences are actively *discouraged* by most churches because of this dynamic.⁶⁴ The core issue is the power tussle between the “voice of God” and the “voice” of institutional leadership. The concept of direct accessibility to God unwittingly invites conflict between leader and follower.⁶⁵ Poloma and Green have identified this tension in the American *Assemblies of God* (AG):

Though direct experience of the divine is valued within Pentecostalism, it is also challenging from an institutional standpoint because it keeps significant power in the hands of individuals rather than with religious leaders and established doctrine. Thus, as we will see, some pastors and denominational leaders find it difficult to accept ongoing revival and experience of the divine among AG congregants even though they say this is needed.⁶⁶

The outcome of this conflict is a gradual pulling away from revelatory experiences, a process coined by Max Weber as the “routinization of charisma.”⁶⁷ Here, the spiritual experiences that accompany the establishment of new movements eventually become eclipsed by institutional needs and the maintenance of core beliefs.

⁶³ Peter L. Berger, *The Social Reality of Religion* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1967), 46; Glock and Stark, 60; Margaret M. Poloma, *The Assemblies of God at the Crossroads: Charisma and Institutional Dilemmas* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1989), 30; Poloma and Green, 122; Meredith B. McGuire, *Pentecostal Catholics: Power, Charisma, and Order in a Religious Movement* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), 93; James S. Coleman “Social Cleavage and Social Change,” *Journal of Social Issues*, no. XII (1956): 49-60.

⁶⁴ Glock and Stark, 60.

⁶⁵ Coleman, 56.

⁶⁶ Poloma and Green, 10; Poloma, *Assemblies of God at the Crossroads*.

⁶⁷ Max Weber, *The Theory of Social and Economic Organization*, trans by A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons (New York: The Free Press, 1947), Ch. 3.

The process of routinization has been observed throughout the Pentecostal movement – including the US, South Africa and Australia.⁶⁸ Indeed, the problem has been an ongoing one in history, beginning with the early church. Both Robeck and Ash cite the power struggle between the Episcopate and non-episcopal voices as a key reason for the restriction and expulsion of prophecy in the 2nd - 3rd Century and the subsequent rejection of post-biblical revelation for centuries.⁶⁹ This tension has also meant that the democratic intent of the experience has suffered as leadership takes steps to limit its use. As McGuire observes, “There are strong conflicting strains running through the ideals of the movement: egalitarianism versus appeals to authority, spontaneity versus order, freedom versus control.”⁷⁰

An inability to manage the potent but volatile revelatory experience in the Pentecostal community has dire consequences for its continuing practice. At the core of these issues is the lack of an adequate theological framework for revelatory experiences by which these problems can be addressed.

1.5 SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

Although the revelatory experience plays a vital role in the Pentecostal community, it has rarely been the focus for careful study. This project seeks to bridge the gap between theory and practice by providing a close examination of the contemporary experience in light of the biblical experience. It gives particular attention to the high-level, extra-biblical revelatory experiences that present the greatest threat to theologians and practitioners alike. As an interdisciplinary work, it has significance for Pentecostal theology, empirical theology and ministry praxis.

1.5.1 Pentecostal Theology

To date, Pentecostals have not produced a comprehensive theology on revelatory experiences. Yet as Thompson notes, the Pentecostal emphasis on Spirit experience with its attendant subjectivity and diverse range of manifestations presents one of the greatest challenges in the 21st Century – both for individuals as well as the Pentecostal movement as a whole.⁷¹ This certainly applies to the area of revelatory experience which is characterised by volatility. Yet, when it comes to Spirit encounters, the bulk of attention in the academy has been given to glossolalia as a sign of Spirit baptism, the

⁶⁸ Matthew S. Clark, “An Investigation into the Nature of a Viable Pentecostal Hermeneutic” (PhD thesis, University of Pretoria, 1997), 218; Angelo U. Cettolin, *Spirit, Freedom and Power* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2016), 76, 97-98.

⁶⁹ Cecil M. Robeck Jr., “Montanism and Present Day ‘Prophets,’” *Pneuma* 32 (2010): 417-420; Ash, 252.

⁷⁰ McGuire, 90.

⁷¹ Thompson, Phyllis, ed., *Challenges of Pentecostal Theology in the 21st Century* (London: SPCK, 2020), 13.

operation of prophecy in the public gathering and the impact of experience on readings of the Bible (Pentecostal hermeneutics).

This study provides a contribution to Pentecostal theology by highlighting *how* revelatory experience acts as a source of theology and a vehicle for spiritual transformation. In examining the outworking of experience in detail, it also reveals the functional value of an experience-based epistemology.

Ultimately, the findings call for renewed understandings of Acts 2:16-17 and challenge the emphasis on tongues as the central evidential feature of Spirit baptism. As Simon Chan has asked, why is the manifestation of the Spirit particularly associated with inspired speech (as glossolalia) “rather than some other phenomena, like visions and dreams?”⁷² The “prophethood of all believers” may not make all “prophets”, but it does allow them to receive revelation without the mediation of one.

The study also explores the ramifications of universal access to revelation and in doing so, provides a needful contribution to the debates surrounding the Spirit’s work in the Pauline and Lukan literature. The relational aspect of Spirit experience provides the context for sanctification, ministry and mission and provides a missing link between the seemingly incompatible emphases of Luke and Paul highlighted by Stronstad, Menzies and Turner.⁷³ This perspective also highlights the pivotal role of the narratives in Pentecostal theology.

Finally, the thesis contributes to current debates on bibliology and highlights the damaging effects caused by the adoption of conservative evangelical doctrines of Scripture that are inconsistent with the Pentecostal worldview. Overall, these themes serve to highlight the distinctives of the Pentecostal tradition, as well as providing a clearer mechanism for ecumenical discussion with the Catholic and Evangelical traditions.

1.5.2 Empirical Theology

The field of practical theology and its subsidiary, empirical theology, is well suited to Pentecostal theology with its emphasis on lived experience. Cartledge shows that Pentecostals make a unique contribution to the field by their pneumatological orientation.⁷⁴ In his critical overview of the field of

⁷² Simon Chan, *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition* (Eugene: Eerdmans, 2017), 45.

⁷³ Turner, “Does Luke Believe?”; Robert P. Menzies, “The Spirit of Prophecy, Luke-Acts and Pentecostal Theology: A Response to Max Turner.” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 15 (1999): 49-74.

⁷⁴ Mark J. Cartledge, “Practical Theology: Attending to Pneumatologically-Driven Praxis,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology* (London, New York: Routledge, 2020).

practical theology as it pertains to Pentecostals, Cartledge points to the criticisms plied at Pentecostals by conservative Evangelicals for their focus on experience and subsequent marginalisation of doctrine and the role of Scripture.⁷⁵ Through the lens of revelatory experience, this thesis unpacks in detail the role of Scripture in the experiential approach of the Pentecostals.

1.5.3 Ministry Praxis

It is against the theological background of revelatory experience that the significance of this study for praxis can be fully realised. An inability to address the pastoral problems of contemporary revelatory experience has led to increasing reticence towards the experience and in some cases, outright rejection. Warrington has expressed concern over the diminishing expectation of experience in contemporary Pentecostalism given its place in Pentecostal spirituality.⁷⁶ If theological understandings of revelatory experience are unclear, cessationist doctrines form. If practices are poorly managed, personal faith and communities risk pastoral damage. For Pentecostals, this means that the potential for revelatory experience is lost and ecclesial goals are compromised. Without a robust theology and protocols for operation, the experience that is understood by Pentecostals to be a distinctive of the Spirit's work in the church is at risk.

Yet Pentecostal tradition also testifies to the power of revelatory encounters to enhance church growth and development. This project offers a pathway to harness the fullness of revelatory experience in ways that are theologically orthodox and pastorally effective. Findings will offer a distinctively Pentecostal perspective that will incorporate emphasis on lived experience. For Evangelicals, it addresses the concern that phenomenologically equivalent revelation poses to the place of the canon. For Pentecostals, it demonstrates how proper regulation of the experience can bring benefits to the spiritual life of individuals and the community. For the broader Christian church, it provides practical guidelines so that all followers of Christ can embrace the dynamic of revelatory experience today.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 166.

⁷⁶ Warrington, Keith, "The Quest for a Pentecostal Theology: A Theology of Encounter," in *Challenges of Pentecostal Theology in the 21st Century*, ed. Thompson, Phyllis (London: SPCK, 2020), 18-20.

2. METHODOLOGY

This project employs a practical theological methodology to investigate revelatory experiences among Australian Pentecostals. This methodology allows the voices of tradition, theology and Scripture to be brought into conversation with Pentecostal practice so that the findings can inform theological understandings about contemporary revelatory experience. In this chapter, I present the methodology and methods used.

2.1 METHODOLOGY: CARTLEDGE'S "TESTIMONY IN THE SPIRIT"

The study employs the methodology outlined by Mark Cartledge in *Testimony in the Spirit*.¹ Cartledge's model draws on the concepts of practical theology as "dialectics in the Spirit," Jeff Astley's "ordinary theology" and David Martin's "rescripting." It also makes use of testimony as an epistemological source of theology. This section provides an overview of Cartledge's methodology and the epistemological assumptions underlying his approach.

2.1.1 Cartledge's Concept of Dialectic

Cartledge's model draws on the concept of dialectic developed in his earlier works.² "Dialectic" is based on the notion of dialogue and is modelled on the interaction between creature and Creator through the response of faith. A P-C perspective highlights the pneumatological dimension in this process as the Spirit works to lead humanity into truth. This truth is wholistic in that it embraces belief (orthodoxy), action (orthopraxy) and affection (orthopathy), ultimately leading to transformation of the person.

Cartledge shows how the concept of dialectic underlies all action-reflection models in practical theology. The well-known methodology of the pastoral cycle as envisioned by Emmanuel Larty³ begins with the experience itself at the first phase. This experience is investigated and analysed at the second phase. A third phase of theological reflection follows and allows for engagement with the broader theological conversation. At the final phase, new understandings are used to make

¹ Cartledge, *Testimony*.

² Mark Cartledge, *Practical Theology: Charismatic and Empirical Perspectives* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2003); Mark Cartledge, "Practical Theology and Charismatic Spirituality: Dialectics in the Spirit," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 10, no.2 (2002): 93-109.

³ Emmanuel Larty, 'Practical Theology as a Theological Form', in D. Willows and J. Swinton, ed., *Spiritual Dimensions of Pastoral Care: Practical Theology in a Multidisciplinary Context* (London: Jessica Kingsley, 2000), 73-74.

recommendations for renewed praxis. Cartledge extends this model to a process that can be visualised as a spiral, beginning with practice and moving creatively between theory to practice and back again.⁴

In the model, the starting point is the people involved in the investigation. These individuals bring a certain spirituality that springs from their tradition and is expressed in narratives, stories and experiences. For P-C individuals who see themselves as characters in the continuing biblical story, this involves charismatic experience. As investigator, the practical theologian is able to bring the knowledge of academic theology into dialogue with the spirituality and theology of those in the sample so that both can be described and critiqued in constructive ways.⁵

The work of the practical theologian thus involves engagement with two realities – the “life-world” of the people under examination – and the “theological system” they are a part of. The first reality, the *life-world*, is a concept based on the language of Jurgen Habermas via the pastoral theological hermeneutic of Anthony Thiselton.⁶ It comprises the concrete reality of people’s beliefs, practices and understandings. The second reality – the *system* – includes the overarching theological metanarrative that is informed by critical theories in the academic literature.⁷ It comprises the beliefs and values comprising a theological position within a particular denominational and ecclesial tradition.⁸ The theories informing this system are primarily theological, but also draw on disciplines from the social sciences. Hence, the model is *inter-disciplinary* rather than *multi-disciplinary* as it allows for a number of “cooperative parallel dialogues” rather than a “series of monologues.”⁹

Cartledge suggests that in the field of practical theology, the focus has previously been on the examination of the lifeworld at the expense of the theological system. His model (Fig. 1) seeks to address the lack by enabling interaction between the two poles while still allowing a clear separation so that “fictions” can be detected. Only then can the dialectic act to integrate both and lead to a new and transformed whole (2 Cor 5:17; Gal 3:28).¹⁰ The model is depicted as follows:

⁴ Cartledge’s approach also emulates the looping cyclical nature of Johannes van der Ven’s model, but without the two stages of empirical investigation, *Practical Theology*, 20-21.

⁵ Ibid., 101-105.

⁶ Anthony Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics* (London: HarperCollins, 1992), 388, 608-14; Mark Cartledge, “Empirical Theology: Towards an Evangelical-Charismatic Hermeneutic,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 9 (1996): 115-26.

⁷ Cartledge, *Practical Theology*, 15.

⁸ Cartledge, “Practical Theology and Charismatic Spirituality,” 94.

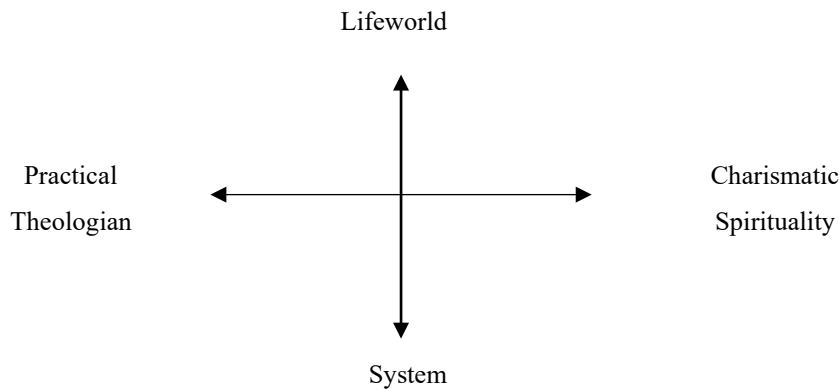
⁹ Cartledge, *Practical Theology*, 15.

¹⁰ Cartledge, “Practical Theology and Charismatic Spirituality,” 100.

Figure 1: Model for Dialectics in the Spirit

LIFEWORLD

- (1) Questions from the lifeworld
- (3) Engagement with ecclesial belief and practice in the lifeworld
- (5) Re-engagement with ecclesial belief and practice in the lifeworld
- (7) Recommendations for renewed ecclesial belief and practice.



SYSTEM

- (2) Questions from the system: articulation of issues and project
- (4) Analysis of data, literature review, engagement of theology with social science, hypotheses
- (6) Analysis of data, renewed understanding, critical and constructive theology.¹¹

Questions can arise from both the life-world (1) and the theological system (2). Reflecting the praxis-oriented approach of practical theology, investigation proceeds first with the life-world (3). Attention is given to the experiences and narratives of the people and major themes and patterns are highlighted. From there, the dialectic moves to analysis and engagement between the lifeworld and the theological system and includes interaction with academic literature in theology, Scripture and other disciplines (4), (5), (6). Each voice “interrogates” the other in a way that enables movement towards renewal and transformation of both. The entire process leads to insights and recommendations for both renewed theory *and* practice (7).¹²

The model of dialectic allows for meaningful interaction of the issues in a way that includes the voices of Scripture, theology and practice. In the case of Pentecostal revelatory experience, the

¹¹ Ibid., 107-8.

¹² Cartledge, *Practical Theology*, 27-30.

questions arising from the Pentecostal lifeworld and the theological system are interconnected and need to be brought into dialogue with one another in order to be properly addressed. For example, the theological problem of relationship to Scripture concerns theological understandings about the “authority of Scripture” and the “authority of experience” and how the two relate in practice. Similarly, the ministry problems of pastoral fallout and institutional stability are connected to theological questions about discernment as well as understandings about the function of experience.

In addition, the questions of revelatory experience in Pentecostalism can only be fully understood in the context of the broader ecclesial traditions – particularly the Protestant-Evangelical stream, a key influence in modern Pentecostalism’s development.¹³ Contemporary revelatory experience is viewed in considerably different ways across the ecclesial traditions with each shedding light on the issues at hand. Thus, this project begins with an outline of the relevant ecclesial traditions and the theological frameworks that arise from them (Ch. 3). These theological perspectives are later used to engage with the data (Ch. 7, 8) and the voices of social science (Ch. 6) at the third stage. At the fourth and final stage, the data is used to inform new theological understandings and recommendations for practice (Ch. 9).

2.1.2 Astley’s “Ordinary Theology”

Cartledge’s study utilises the concept of “ordinary theology” proposed by Jeff Astley.¹⁴ Astley seeks to place value on the theology and theologising of “ordinary” Christians who live out their faith in everyday settings. This “God talk,” which Astley argues is often ignored by the academic elite, is distinct from doctrine and dogma and includes the “content, patterns and processes of people’s articulation of their own theological understandings.”¹⁵ Astley takes his perspective from the idea that theology is a “fundamental dimension of piety” and is an inherent part of every Christian’s vocation.¹⁶

The value of ordinary theology is that it takes place in personal learning contexts as individuals reflect on their experience and work out answers to their own theological questions.¹⁷ It is distinct from academic theology in that it arises from faith communities as part of individual stories rather than from professionals who tend to deal in context-free abstractions that are separate from the

¹³ See Ch. 3.1.2.

¹⁴ Astley, *Ordinary Theology*.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 53, 56.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, vii.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 159.

community.¹⁸ As such, ordinary theology tends to be “more universal, more personal and more spiritual.”¹⁹

Like Astley, practical theologian Pete Ward affirms the value of the theologising of “ordinary” people. For Ward, “everyone’s a theologian” since all come to their experience with a level of theological understanding.²⁰ As people engage in church life, they further learn from the ways of the community and their understandings of what it means to be Christian. This process makes them “wise, skilled and highly accomplished theologians.”²¹ Thus their insights should be valued and incorporated into the theological process. As Cartledge has observed, Pentecostal Christians may not be known for their “exceptional experiences of academic theology”, but they are known for their “exceptional experiences of religion.”²² The result is that they have built up a “common-sense expertise” in how their experiences should be handled. Pentecostals must deal with the practical outworking of their experiences even while theoreticians may neglect or minimise them. For example, Pentecostals engage in revelatory experience that is held to be phenomenologically equivalent with the biblical characters without feeling they are compromising the role of Scripture. Investigating the ordinary theology of Pentecostals allows the question of how this is achieved to be answered.

This approach also allows for a closer investigation into the dynamics of *theological reflection* among Pentecostals. Helen Cameron et al’s typology of the “four voices of theology” is helpful here.²³ Cameron and her team identified four different voices that become apparent in theological communication: 1. *normative theology* that typically arises from the Scriptures, the creeds, official church teaching and liturgies, 2. *formal theology* which is expressed by theologians, 3. *espoused theology* found within a group’s articulation of its beliefs and 4. *operant theology* which is embedded within the actual practices of a group. These four voices are understood to interact and overlap with each other and represent a “working tool” by which to examine practice.²⁴

Cameron’s distinctions are important in this study as significant disparities have been identified between the voices of normative, espoused and operant theology in contemporary revelatory

¹⁸ Ibid., 59.

¹⁹ Ibid., 55.

²⁰ Pete Ward, *Introducing Practical Theology: Mission, Ministry, and the Life of the Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Press, 2017).

²¹ Ibid., 16.

²² Cartledge, *Testimony*, 16.

²³ Helen Cameron et al., *Talking about God in Practice: Theological Action Research and Practical Theology* (London: SCM, 2010), 53-55.

²⁴ Ibid., 54.

experience. While *espousing* one approach to revelatory experience (that generally reflects the *normative* voice), Pentecostals have been accused of practising another (*operant*). The study allows for this disconnect to be explored and the operant theology in revelatory experience to be articulated. This enables the insights from the phenomenological equivalent practices of Pentecostals to be incorporated into theology.

2.1.3 Martin's Concept of "Rescripting"

Cartledge parallels Astley's ordinary theology with sociologist David Martin's concept of "subterranean theology" and his metaphor of "rescription" in the third stage of the methodological process.²⁵ In this understanding, ordinary theology forms a kind of script, and scholarly engagement with the script forms a process of "rescripting." This approach allows the insights of personal stories to be brought into dialogue with the academic voices of various theological traditions as well as the insights of social science. Cartledge describes the rescripting process: "Rescription in this practical-theological orientation aims to be careful in its representation, sensitive towards the denominational tradition, sympathetic towards Pentecostal spirituality, yet also critical in its analysis and constructive in its proposals."²⁶ The process thus allows for any dissonance between the script and the voices of the academy to be articulated and then properly addressed against the "script" of Scripture and the various theologies available from the Christian tradition. From there, recommendations can be made for praxis.

2.1.4 Epistemological Assumptions

By its nature, experience is disparate and dynamic, varying widely across different contexts. The nature of empirical research is that we cannot verify the authenticity of revelatory experiences. Instead we must rely on the perceptions and memories of the participants as they recount them. Like all experiences, religious experience is distinctive for each subject and qualified by placement, perspective, capacity and consciousness.²⁷ The use of testimonies and the experiences at the centre of them in the study therefore requires a clear articulation of the underlying epistemological assumptions present.

²⁵ David Martin, "Undermining Old Paradigms: Rescripting Pentecostal Accounts," *PentecoStudies* 5, no.1 (2006): 18-38; David Martin, *A Sociology of English Religion* (London: Heinemann, 1967), 70-75.

²⁶ Cartledge, *Testimony*, 18.

²⁷ Luke Timothy Johnson, *Religious Experience in Earliest Christianity* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1998), 54.

2.1.4.1 The Use of Testimonies

In this project, the testimonies of respondents are used as the primary research vehicle by which to explore the ordinary theology of Pentecostals. Cartledge shows how this is consistent with Pentecostal spirituality which has long been characterised by the use of testimony as an epistemological source.²⁸ As Cartledge explains, the kind of rationality in Pentecostalism “is more likely to be narrative in shape: a story about what happened and its consequences, rather than a set of abstract propositions.”²⁹

Cartledge outlines the epistemological theories embedded in the use of testimony by drawing on the work of Robert Audi and C. A. J. Coady.³⁰ Audi and Coady highlight five sources of knowledge; perception, memory, consciousness, reason and testimony. “Perception” relates to how the five senses perceive an experience and the beliefs that are made about it as a consequence. “Memory” preserves what is known about those beliefs and how the experience is relayed to others. “Consciousness” is a person’s perception of an experience that arises from within. “Reason” enables interpretations and inferences about the sensory information to be made and “testimony” acknowledges the influence of beliefs and knowledge from the social world on the experience.³¹ Indeed, testimony brings all these factors together as individuals interpret and recount their experience in the context of the broader community.

Cartledge shows how these epistemological features can be integrated into theological structures through the example of Scripture.³² Scripture itself is strongly characterised by the retelling of testimonies based on encounters between the biblical characters and God.³³ These testimonies act as a form of evidence and the basis for revelation. The use of Scripture within church communities reveals God’s testimonies of salvation and provides a framework by which Pentecostals interpret their own accounts. Here, Cartledge sees the correspondence theory of truth in operation. This theory – which views truth simply as being as the “world describes it to be” – is applicable because experiences in contemporary times are seen to *correspond* to experiences in the early church.³⁴ For Pentecostals, this

²⁸ Cartledge demonstrates this at length in *Practical Theology*, 41-62.

²⁹ Cartledge, *Testimony*, 17.

³⁰ Cartledge, *Practical Theology*, 52; Robert Audi, *Epistemology: A Contemporary Introduction to the Theory of Knowledge* (London: Routledge, 1998); C. A. J. Coady, *Testimony: A Philosophical Study* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1992).

³¹ Coady, *Testimony*, 317-320.

³² Cartledge, *Practical Theology*, 53-55.

³³ *Ibid.*, 57-60.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 52-56.

truth is grounded in the belief that the testimony of Scripture is accurate and therefore the experiences it depicts can be reliably correlated to their own.

Cartledge further reflects on the use of testimony using Coady's understandings of a speech act.³⁵ He shows how Coady's categories of "formal", "informal" and "extended" testimonies can be applied to the context of a worshipping community through the sharing of testimonies in public services, casual conversations and printed publications. The value of these testimonies as evidence depends on the reliability of the witness in question. Since the Scriptures are deemed eminently reliable by Pentecostals, the biblical narrative provides the "conceptual apparatus" for the community as to what is considered believable. He concludes that this approach to testimony has a sound basis in the epistemology of Scripture itself.

2.1.4.2 A Critical Realist Epistemology

At the same time, Cartledge acknowledges the limitations of correspondence theory in epistemology. It has been widely recognised that this approach reflects a modernist foundationalism that is naïve. Instead, Cartledge advocates for a *critical realist* position that acknowledges the inherent ambiguity and subjectivity of personal experience as well the influences of the tradition in which it is located.³⁶

A critical realist epistemology acknowledges Spirit encounters as a valid source of truth while also recognising their embeddedness in linguistic-historical contexts and the need for evaluation. Andrew Root explicates the nature of a critical realist epistemology in his practical theology work, *Christopraxis*.³⁷ He shows that since transcendent experiences are experienced as concrete, they have practical consequences and can therefore be claimed as *real*. A realist approach acknowledges that there are ontological entities in the world that exist *outside* of humanity (ontology), while still allowing for the fact that they can be partially *known* through experience (epistemology).³⁸ While experiences cannot be empirically measured, it is possible to explore the human actions *resulting* from the experience. As Root states, "practical theology as Christopraxis, like other sciences, asserts that through our concrete experience we begin to make epistemological assertions about reality that can be rationally judged as true."³⁹ At the same time, the claim to reality is *critical* in that it recognises the potential for error and misjudgement in human experience. Even while there is

³⁵ Ibid., 55-57.

³⁶ Ibid., 45.

³⁷ Andrew Root, *Christopraxis: A Practical Theology of the Cross* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2014).

³⁸ Ibid., 191-241.

³⁹ Ibid., 199.

something in reality that is ontologically objective, the reality experienced by the person is also constructed. In the same way, this thesis assumes that Pentecostals may encounter divine action in their lived experience, while yet adopting a position of epistemic humility about its validity.

Neumann provides a further way to conceptualise the epistemological process underlying Pentecostal experience. He shows that divine encounter is best understood as a “mediated immediacy.”⁴⁰ Experience – even *unmediated* experience that occurs without third-party ecclesial intermediaries – is always *mediated* by the cultural and linguistic framework of the recipient. This may be seen as either “correlational,” in that it emphasises consistency with existing Christian traditions, reflecting a foundationalist epistemology, or “non-correlational” in that it emphasises discontinuity with tradition, in a manner that is more akin to postmodern thinking. Neumann draws on James Smith’s work to argue for a position that recognises the faith horizons of common human experience, but also allows for divine disruption and divergence from it. As in Cartledge’s observations, Neumann shows that in the past, Pentecostals have not given due recognition to the influence of the communal reality in experience. However, this naïveté is changing as scholars increasingly acknowledge the faith horizons through which personal experience is mediated.

The testimonies of revelatory experiences in this project provide the means through which the ordinary theology of Pentecostals can be explored. Interview questions are designed to focus on the story of specific revelatory experiences; how they are perceived, remembered and understood through consciousness and reason. Individual testimonies are investigated and compared with the testimonies depicted in Scripture according to their content, function and process. This methodology conceives experience in terms of “mediated immediacy” and adopts a critical realist epistemology that corresponds truth to the biblical experience, while recognising the influence of the Pentecostal cultural-linguistic horizon and humanity’s frailty in perception and interpretation.

2.1.5 Reflexivity: An Insider Perspective

No researcher approaches their project without bias or prejudice. Practical theologians Swinton and Mowat emphasise the importance of the researcher being thoroughly aware of their prejudices so that they can be mindful of how their interpretations influence texts, objects, people and events.⁴¹ This reflexivity is necessary throughout the research process.

⁴⁰ Neumann, 85-86.

⁴¹ John Swinton and Mowat, Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM Press, 2006), Kindle Electronic Edition, Location 2074.

As a Pentecostal church member and leader, I came to the study as an insider, with the project being birthed out of the questions arising from my own revelatory experiences. As Ward notes, research often begins with individual reflection.⁴² I have personally engaged with the theological approaches discussed in this study, beginning with a Cessationist perspective and moving to a Pentecostal view of “phenomenological equivalency.” During that process, personal revelatory experiences were tested against the theological constructs that were available at the time. I found that these frameworks consistently floundered when addressing the questions of revelatory experience. There was also a significant discrepancy between the work of practitioners who experienced “high-level” revelation, but had inadequate resources for theological reflection and the work of academics who offered theological reflection but did not engage with the practical realities of high-level experience.

In addition to personal experience, I have spent twenty years in observation and careful listening to thousands of testimonies in a professional capacity, leading a church as a credentialed *Australian Christian Churches* minister, teaching in two Pentecostal Bible Colleges and in my current ministry as founding director of *God Conversations*. The latter includes ministry to a wide range of Christians from P-C and Protestant-mainline churches largely throughout Europe, Australia, New Zealand, Asia and the United States. Insights have been gained from conversations with church members actively engaged in revelatory experiences as well as from pastors seeking to manage them.

Thus, I began my research with a series of well-established presuppositions that had developed anecdotally for a long period of time. These related to the application of a phenomenological equivalent perspective in practice and included such ideas as the attribution of authority to revelatory experiences, the impact of experiential knowledge, the use of biblical narratives as models and the tension between the spoken “word of God” and the written. The motivation for this project was to test those ideas more thoroughly and formally in a controlled setting.

As an insider, my background acts as both a threat and an asset to the research. To avoid bias, the project called for discipline in maintaining an open mind at all times and allowing participants to speak for themselves. It was also essential that I came to the study as an unknown researcher and not as an “expert” to avoid any power imbalances. This was taken into consideration in the selection of the sample and throughout the research process. Even though I am based out of a local church in Sydney, my ministry is (ironically) unknown within the state of New South Wales and to the three churches in particular. At the time of research, interviewees had no previous contact with me as a religious practitioner either directly or by reputation. While I was acquainted with the lead pastors of

⁴² Ward, 55.

two of the churches, they knew very little about the nature of my ministry. In addition, when formally introduced to the congregations at the commencement of the project, I was careful to present myself as a “researcher” not as a “pastor” or the “director of God Conversations.” This stance was upheld throughout the research, particularly during data collection.

While there are threats to having an insider perspective, there are also advantages. Gadamer suggests that since the researcher can never truly detach from bias, a better approach is to be aware of the influence of our own historical situatedness and bring any pre-understandings into dialogue with the study.⁴³ This extends to the epistemological assumptions underlying the project. Swinton and Mowat show that qualitative enquiry assumes that the researcher influences and is influenced by the process of research more than quantitative research.⁴⁴ As a Pentecostal, I share the epistemological paradigm of study participants in seeing experience as a potentially valid encounter with God and making direct correspondence to the biblical experience, albeit with the far more cautious stance of critical realism. This enabled me to take an emic view throughout the process and allowed for shared understandings and perspectives. It also allowed for the meaning of experiences for participants to be fully explored and for my own assumptions to be challenged and deepened.

2.2 STUDY DESIGN

This section outlines the data collection methods, presentation and the analysis design.

2.2.1 Data Collection

The project employed qualitative research methods as a means of obtaining data. Astley suggests that qualitative methods are most suited to providing a description of ordinary theology as they provide an “inner perspective” of the phenomena rather than the “outer perspective” provided by quantitative data.⁴⁵ Qualitative research allows experiences and reflections on experience to be examined in detail. It is particularly suited for examining the “why” behind the “what” – in this case the theology behind the narrative. It also allows for the study of people and their experiences within their own setting and an examination of the narrative in a way that cannot be isolated in statistics. Although questions such as the frequency of revelatory experiences are important, this study is more concerned with the processes and thinking behind them, particularly as they pertain to formal theological understandings. A qualitative approach also allows for careful examination of any differences in espoused and operant theology, a process that requires time and thorough questioning.

⁴³ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Sheed and Ward, 1981), 358.

⁴⁴ Swinton and Mowat, Location 1201.

⁴⁵ Astley, 98.

Swinton and Mowat show that qualitative research is best suited for discovering “ideographic knowledge.” This type of knowledge differs from “nomothetic” knowledge that is “falsifiable, replicable and generalizable” and gained through the scientific method.⁴⁶ In contrast, ideographic knowledge is discovered through the examination of unique and non-replicable experiences. The goal of qualitative research is not objectivity as much as a deeper understanding of knowledge through a rich and thick exploration of particular situations.

This approach recognises that two individuals will not experience the same event in the same way and there are thus limits to generalisation and transferability. However there still remains a degree of shared experience that may resonate across different contexts. Qualitative research seeks to identify the issues that extend beyond the specifics of the individual situation. Hence it draws on the language of *themes* and *patterns* and then relates them to wider systems of theological knowledge.⁴⁷

Creswell further defines the characteristics of qualitative study. He shows how qualitative research begins with “assumptions, a worldview, the possible use of a theoretical lens and the study of research problems inquiring into the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem.”⁴⁸ Exploration of the problem begins with allowing the data to speak for itself – data is collected from the “bottom up” as researchers collect information in the participants’ natural setting. Meanings must derive from *participants* and not the researcher. Researchers themselves become the tool as they respond sensitively to the direction and themes of respondents’ answers. Data includes the behaviours, language and responses of participants. Here, the reflexive researcher must be cognisant of their own influence on the interpretation of data. For example, I had a basic knowledge of existing theological frameworks prior to data collection. This knowledge was present as I reviewed the data and made sense of it. However, I was careful to maintain epistemic distance and avoid placing my own suppositions on the reflections of interviewees since it was essential to allow the data to speak for itself.

The project involved three methods for data collection: semi-structured interviews, focus groups and participant observation.

⁴⁶ Swinton and Mowat, Location 839-974.

⁴⁷ Ibid., Location 326.

⁴⁸ John W. Creswell, *Qualitative Inquiry and Research Design: Choosing Among Five Approaches*, 2nd ed. (Thousand Oaks: Sage, 2007), 37-39.

2.2.1.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

In-depth semi-structured interviews were the primary method used to examine the ordinary theology and practice of revelatory experiences in the study. The interviews were “semi-structured” in that they included pre-prepared questions while allowing for innovation and exploration as interviews progressed. Swinton and Mowat have highlighted the ambiguous nature of experience reports and their impact on validity – individuals may give varying responses on any given day compared to another – hence the opportunity for supplemental questions when clarification and elaboration is needed. The interview is seen as a “journey” and the researcher must be a “skilled voyager” that analyses the data as the interview proceeds.⁴⁹

Interviews were conducted one-on-one with a sample of congregation members. The set questions provided a guideline for the interview and reflected the central question and sub-questions in the project (App. 5). For each interview, there were two sets of questions; the first set pertained to *general* ideas about the experience (e.g. “How do you normally hear God speak?”). The second set invited the interviewee to share from their *specific* experiences in more detail (e.g. “Tell me about a time you heard God’s voice.”). These questions explored the content and function of the experience and the participants’ theological reflections on the experience. The experiences that contained extra-biblical and previously unknown information were given particular focus. A number of introductory questions were designed to relax the interviewee and were not explored in the analysis (e.g. “How did you become a Christian?”). These same interview schedules were used in interviews with the Senior/Lead pastors, along with a few additional questions relating to their leadership strategies for facilitating and regulating the revelatory experience in their congregation (App. 7).

Swinton and Mowat show that in research pertaining to “ideographic” knowledge, more importance is placed on the *nature* of the sample than the *size* of the sample.⁵⁰ In this project, it was estimated that a sample of 50 individuals would provide a variety of revelatory experiences that would address the focus of the project – and particularly encounters that included the element of extra-biblical and previously unknown information. The sample was also intended to ensure a good spread of subjects across age-groups, genders, educational backgrounds and levels of Christian affiliation so that common patterns could be identified. Further, the sample was gathered evenly from the three Pentecostal churches to allow communal aspects of the experience to be investigated.

⁴⁹ Swinton and Mowat, Location 3,872.

⁵⁰ Ibid., Location 3,722.

Participants were recruited through the local communication channels of each church and the lead pastor who presented the study on my behalf. Announcements about the project were made during Sunday services and/or on email through the small group networks. This provided credibility for the project and allowed invitees the freedom to say “no.” Potential interviewees were provided with written information about the project, so they were able to make an informed decision about their participation (App. 3). To ensure that the benefits of the research outweighed the costs for participants, the aim of the project (to help people engage with revelatory experience) was made clear from the outset. Anecdotal observations had indicated that most Christians are eager to learn more about revelatory encounters, so a copy of the results was offered to the participants after the thesis was completed. The sample was then checked to ensure there was adequate representation across ages and gender. Individual interviews took approximately 45-60 minutes and were conducted at each church site or via Skype. Afterwards each interview was recorded, transcribed and coded using NVIVO software.

2.2.1.2 Focus Groups

In addition to the interviews, two focus groups were conducted in each church. Krueger notes the value of focus groups in enabling people with a common spirituality to share their reflections in a non-threatening environment.⁵¹ Focus groups were used in this project for two reasons – to capture the experiences of those who were reluctant to volunteer for interviews (particularly if they felt they have nothing to share or if experiences have caused problems in the past)⁵² – and to provide a means of observing the group’s interaction with each other.⁵³ This allowed for the communal aspects of revelatory experience in discernment to be observed.

In this project, the existing small groups of the three churches were used for the focus groups as this represented the environment where revelatory experience might normally be reflected upon. Interview questions were adapted from the original schedule to suit the group setting with some further questions added to explore interaction within the group (App. 6). Groups were recruited through the Senior Pastor who communicated with group leaders. Focus groups took one hour.

⁵¹ Richard A. Krueger, *Focus Groups: A Practical Guide for Applied Research* (London: Sage, 1988), 18, 27-30.

⁵² Creswell, 133.

⁵³ Alan Bryman, *Social Research Methods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 348.

2.2.1.3 Participant Observation

The study also involved participant observation in each of the three churches. Creswell shows that participant observation involves a wide array of procedures as the researcher builds an in-depth picture of the case.⁵⁴ In this study, data included sermon content, liturgies, song lyrics, prayers and conversations before and after the service. Beyond the public worship service, data included prayer meetings, prayer ministries and the content of training courses as well as protocols and policies related to the revelatory experience.

The primary criterion for selection of the three churches was that they were all Pentecostal in name and affiliation. This was to maximise the likelihood that participants would hold to a position of phenomenological equivalency and that high-level revelatory experiences would be present for investigation. The churches were further selected for their ability to represent different styles and expressions of the contemporary Australian Pentecostal movement; in this case, an independent church with revivalist expression, a Classical Pentecostal church⁵⁵ and a Pentecostal church with “seeker-sensitive” tendencies.⁵⁶ Although this sample is too small to represent the theology and practice of wider Pentecostalism in Australia, it enables the possibility of exploring the themes common to revelatory experience.

Upon consent (App. 1, 2), six weeks were spent in participant observation in each of the churches. This focused primarily on the Sunday service as a “window” to understanding Pentecostal spirituality and practice,⁵⁷ but also incorporated visits to special events, ministry times and small group meetings. Observations were made as to how the community acted to shape, interpret and contribute to understandings of revelatory experiences through its language and rites. During this period, I was both an insider and an outsider, retaining a certain distance to enable a level of objectivity in my observations while still participating in the activities. I typically sat in the middle of the congregation

⁵⁴ Creswell, 132.

⁵⁵ Amos Yong shows how the designation “classical” arose in the 1970s in response to the Charismatic movement in mainline Protestant and Catholic denominations and refers to churches and denominations which have their origins in the U.S. during the 1910s and 20s. The central feature is glossolalia as the initial evidence of the baptism of the Holy Spirit, *Discerning the Spirit(s)* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 151; also Cettolin, 15-16, 45.

⁵⁶ This term was coined to describe the strategy of the widely influential Willow Creek Church in Chicago, USA as they sought to reach out to the “unchurched.” Weekend Sunday services are designed specifically to appeal to the visitor or “seeker” as a form of evangelism, Gregory A. Pritchard, *Willow Creek Seeker Services: Evaluating a New Way of Doing Church* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1996).

⁵⁷ Albrecht, 88, 198.

to meld in and varied my seating each time to allow for informal conversations before and after services with different attendees. During the public gatherings, I was able to easily keep a record of my observations since it was normal for congregants to take notes in services.

2.2.1.4 Presentation of the Data

The study findings are presented in two sections (Ch. 5). Firstly, the interview data relating to the *individual experience* from all three churches was collated and summarised (Ch. 5.1). This allowed common patterns and themes to be identified across a large and diverse group of Pentecostals in relation to the content, function and process of revelatory experience. Secondly, the findings of the revelatory experience *in community* is presented for each church (A, B and C) (largely derived from the participant observation and focus groups). This includes the church's background, their general approach to revelatory experiences and facilitation, training and regulatory processes (Ch. 5.2).

2.2.2 Data Analysis

Analysis proceeds on a number of levels, with the starting point being the testimonies of participants and the ordinary theology embedded in them. The data from the semi-structured interviews, focus groups and participant observation (Ch. 5) is analysed in dialogue with a number of social science and theological voices in order to examine the theology and practice of revelatory experience of study participants.

2.2.2.1 Sociological Analysis

The data is first analysed from a sociological perspective (Ch. 6). Sociological tools are used to examine the “human” forces at work in revelatory experience. Although it is not possible to pass judgement on metaphysical sources, sociological tools enable observations to be made about the nature and outcomes of revelatory experience, its context in community and how individual experience impacts the social world. The stance of “methodological agnosticism” rather than “methodological atheism” described by Margaret Poloma is adopted: “Rather than deny their reality, we explore how a defined reality is maintained within a community of people who attempt to live it out.”⁵⁸ As Poloma notes, it is impossible to either prove or disprove the authenticity of a claim to revelatory experience. Rather, it is possible to show that the experience has *real* social consequences and that these can be explored.⁵⁹

⁵⁸ Margaret Poloma and Ralph W. Hood Jr, *Blood and Fire: Godly Love in a Pentecostal Emerging Church* (New York: New York University, 2008), 8.

⁵⁹ Poloma, *Main Street Mystics*, 133.

The analysis begins with an exploration of the individual revelatory experience (Ch. 6.1). The testimonies from the sample are collated and examined for common themes and patterns. The revelatory nature of Spirit encounters are then explored in dialogue with sociologists Charles Glock and Rodney Stark and their “taxonomy of religious experience.”

From there, the analysis proceeds to the revelatory experience in community (Ch. 6.2). As noted, individual testimonies are best understood in the cultural-linguistic context of their local communities and the ecclesial tradition from which they arise. Respondents’ language about their experience and the process of outworking will be shaped by both the life-world and the broader theological system. This means that, two individuals may have comparable experiences, but label them quite differently according to their social and theological contexts.⁶⁰

To investigate the communal dynamic involved in revelatory experience, the project employed a “collective case study” approach. The case study is one of five approaches to qualitative research identified by Creswell (along with narrative research, phenomenological research, grounded theory and ethnographic research). It involves the study of an issue through one or more cases within a bounded system.⁶¹ Case studies are distinguished from ethnographic studies in that they focus on one particular concern. In a collective case study, multiple cases are selected to allow for different perspectives on the issue.

As noted, the three churches or “cases” were selected because they all identify with the Pentecostal tradition, yet exhibit a different style of expression. Swinton and Mowat highlight the importance of including different expressions in research to gain a fuller picture: “Each story described reveals a different perspective on the particular reality that is being examined. Taken together these stories and experiences lead us closer and closer to an approximation of what reality might look like.”⁶² This does not mean that *generalisation* across the cases is possible due to their different contexts. Instead a “wholistic” or “embedded” analysis process is applied, whereby the research proceeds first with a description of themes in one case (a “*within-case* analysis”) and is followed by a thematic analysis across the cases (a “*cross-case* analysis”).⁶³ The cross-case analysis is undertaken via the work of

⁶⁰ John Swinton and Harriet Mowat, *Practical Theology and Qualitative Research* (London: SCM, 2006), Kindle Electronic Edition: Location 743.

⁶¹ Creswell, 1, 73.

⁶² Swinton and Mowat, Location 757.

⁶³ Creswell, 75.

Peter Berger. Berger's theory of "the sacred canopy" provides an appropriate framework by which to explore how the experience is facilitated and regulated in Pentecostal communities.

2.2.2.2 Theological Analysis

Following on from the sociological analysis, the testimony data is explored in light of the theological frameworks arising from the different ecclesial traditions and the voice of Scripture. Two theorists are engaged to investigate the relationship of the experience to Scripture as a whole: the communication theory of anthropologist Charles Kraft and the work of philosopher James K.A. Smith on textuality in oral communities and the epistemology of spiritual experience and Scripture (Ch. 7). At a closer level, the work of Catholic theologian Niels Hvidt is engaged (Ch. 8). Various P-C authors including Wayne Grudem are also incorporated into the discussion. In each section, the analysis begins with a summary of each theorist's work. From there, key themes from the empirical data in Ch. 5 are brought into discussion with the relevant theorists, such that areas of continuity and discontinuity can be highlighted and rescription can occur.

2.3 RESEARCH ETHICS

A number of ethical issues were given consideration in the study. Conversations about revelatory experiences have the potential to raise sensitive personal issues, including past trauma, loss and grief, so participants were advised that they were always free to refuse a question or withdraw from the study at any time prior to approval of interview transcripts (App. 3, 5). No participant opted to withdraw from the interviews or focus groups.

Interviewees were also advised that their identity and that of their church would be kept anonymous. Consent was given on the basis that codes and pseudonyms would be used and minor details would be adapted in the thesis and subsequent publications (App. 4). Transcriptions will be held securely in a password-protected computer for five years in accordance with Alphacrucis College regulations. Names and contact details of individuals were kept separate from the results so that matching cannot occur. These procedures were all detailed and accepted by the College Research Committee prior to the commencement of data collection.

2.4 FEEDBACK TO THE CHURCHES

A final step in the data collection process involved providing feedback to churches. All three churches opted to receive a report outlining the results of the study. This involved a face-to-face meeting with the lead pastors of each church. The feedback was well received and generated discussion regarding future strategies and approaches. Opportunity to query the findings was also offered, but not taken up.

In Church A, further clarifying questions were asked as part of the meeting and issues regarding the role of prophets and the regulation of experience were discussed.

2.5 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The elusive and ambiguous nature of Spirit experience has been noted. While recognising the underlying epistemological assumptions, it is also pragmatic to acknowledge that any study of personal experiences is not without its limitations. Humans have often found it profitable to fake, embellish and exaggerate religious experiences. Johnson highlights the special problems of religious experience and its potential for fraud and deception.⁶⁴ This is particularly the case in the Pentecostal context, where more sensational revelatory experiences are socially desirable and may be lauded as pointers to spirituality. Pentecostals keen to participate in the experience may use the phrase “God spoke to me” in ways that are potentially over-reaching. Subjects are likely to give the answer that is expected or desired. The work of phenomenologists reminds us that all experiences are interpreted and that people fashion their memory in light of new learnings or preferred outcomes. The goal therefore, is to observe and describe behaviour and its discernible functions rather than to draw ontological conclusions about spiritual realities that cannot be easily measured.⁶⁵

A further limitation relates to the voluntary nature of the sample. Although it was made clear in the recruitment process that people of all abilities and experience were invited, it was evident that those who found the experience easier to access were more likely to volunteer, providing a potentially uneven sample. In one church, the pastor began asking volunteers directly because they had “good stories” to share and I had to reinforce the need for a representative sample.

Finally, in the study, data relating to the educational level, length of time in the community and the “ministry status” of individuals were collected. However, patterns relating to these variables were not generally apparent and analysis of these variables was deemed too ambitious for this study.

⁶⁴ Johnson, *Religious Experience*, 53-60.

⁶⁵ Hans-Günter Heimbrock, “From Data to Theory: Elements of Methodology in Empirical Phenomenological Research in Practical Theology,” *International Journal of Practical Theology* 9, no. 2 (2005): 273-99.

3. THE ECCLESIAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT OF CONTEMPORARY REVELATORY EXPERIENCE

The Pentecostal revelatory experience is most clearly understood against the backdrop of its ecclesial tradition. This chapter provides the ecclesial and theological context for contemporary revelatory experience. It also allows the questions from the “life-world” and the “theological system” to be highlighted as in Cartledge’s dialectical model.

The first section begins with a broad overview of the Pentecostal tradition, giving attention to its approach to Spirit experience. These themes are then explored in conjunction with the Protestant Evangelical tradition within which Pentecostalism is most commonly aligned. In the second section, I provide four different theological frameworks for understanding revelatory experience and locate them in their ecclesial traditions. Attention is given to the framework that is most commonly adopted by Pentecostals (and Charismatics), yet for several reasons is shown to be inadequate. A framework that reflects the Pentecostal worldview and is informed by the Catholic tradition is proposed. This sets up the context for discussion and analysis of the empirical findings in the study.

3.1 ECCLESIAL TRADITIONS

This section provides an introduction to the Pentecostal tradition and its relationship to the Evangelical tradition with regard to Spirit experience.

3.1.1 The Pentecostal Tradition

The Australian context is best understood in the broader perspective of global Pentecostalism and its general distinctives.

3.1.1.1 Pentecostalism in Global Perspective

As a global and diverse phenomenon, Pentecostalism is notoriously difficult to define.¹ Some scholars prefer to speak of many *pentecostalisms* existing under a single umbrella.² The birth of the contemporary Pentecostal movement is usually traced to the Asuza Street revival in 1906 in North

¹ Giovanni Maltese, Judith Backmann and Katja Rakow, “Negotiating Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism: Global Entanglements, Identity Politics and the Future of Pentecostal Studies,” *PentecoStudies: Online Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* 18, no.1 (2019): 8.

² Poloma and Green, 3-4; Warrington, 12; Allan Anderson, “Varieties, Taxonomies, and Definitions” in *Studying Global Pentecostalism: Theories and Methods*, ed. Allan Anderson and E. Tang (Berkeley: University of California, 2010).

America. However more recently, scholars have acknowledged the global origins of the movement, citing several “beginnings” that have sprung up independently of one another.³ David Martin argues that it does not make much sense to regard Pentecostalism as an “imported package” from America (to Europe, Asia and Australia), but rather that the processes of globalisation have allowed transnational development to occur in ways that are multi-centred, indigenised and autonomic.⁴ One of the challenges in the discussion is that much of the P-C literature is limited to North America and Europe.

In Australia, the Pentecostal movement has benefitted from North American and European influences, yet has always maintained its own autonomy and uniqueness. Hutchinson et al describe Australian P-C movements as a space that has been intrinsically “caught up in the flows” of globalisation and migration.⁵ These “flows” have contributed to the development of Australian Pentecostalism as well as allowing for a level of global influence that has extended beyond the nation’s assumed “peripheral” place. At its roots, Hutchinson et al also show that Australian Pentecostalism has retained the same elements as the American kind, but with different emphases.⁶ Similarly, Chant has observed that the largest Australian Pentecostal denomination, the *Australian Christian Churches (ACC)*⁷ (from which two of the sample churches in this study belong), has been “basically indigenous” since its inception. Although the movement benefitted from overseas visitors from America, England and other nations, these helped to “shape the movement, but not to make it.”⁸

In Australia today, Pentecostals comprise 1.1% of the population.⁹ The movement includes the ACC as well as several other independent networks (eg. “C3”, International Network of Churches (INC), CRC Churches International and Hillsong Church). Sociologist Andrew Singleton notes that

³ Cettolin, 22.

⁴ David Martin, *Pentecostalism: The World Their Parish* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2002), 169-170.

⁵ Mark P. Hutchinson, Cristina Rocha and Kathleen Openshaw, “Introduction: Australian Charismatic Movements as a Space of Flows,” in *Australian Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements: Arguments from the Margins*, ed. Cristina Rocha, Mark P. Hutchinson, and Kathleen Openshaw, (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 3-5.

⁶ Ibid., 5-6.

⁷ Assemblies of God website, “About Us”, <http://www.acc.org.au/about-us>, cited 26/8/20 [accessed Aug 26, 2020].

⁸ Barry Chant, “The Spirit of Pentecost: Origins and Development of the Pentecostal Movement in Australia, 1870-1939” (PhD, Sydney, Macquarie University, 1999), 204-5.

⁹ According to 2016 Census data, Andrew Singleton, “Strong Church or Niche Market? The Demography of the Pentecostal Church in Australia,” in *Australian Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements: Arguments from the Margins*, ed. Cristina Rocha, Mark P. Hutchinson, and Kathleen Openshaw, (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 94-95.

Australian Pentecostalism is characterised by a “pronounced vitality” in comparison to other mainline Christian denominations and groups. This is accompanied by a stronger relationship between religious identity, practice and salience and is expressed in higher levels of participation and attendance in worship services.¹⁰

3.1.1.2 Pentecostal Distinctives

Various designations have been used to describe Pentecostalism. Some distinguish Pentecostalism by its association with organised groupings or denominations.¹¹ Others highlight doctrinal positions, specifically the teaching of the Baptism of Holy Spirit with the “initial” and subsequent “evidence” of speaking in tongues.¹² More recently, scholars have extended their descriptions beyond theological distinctives and argued for a characterisation based on a certain type of *spirituality*.¹³ As the earliest advocate of this approach, Hollenweger showed that Pentecostalism is primarily concerned with the *experience* of the Holy Spirit and the practice of spiritual gifts,¹⁴ a perspective echoed more recently by Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen.¹⁵ Spittler describes Pentecostal spirituality in terms of five implicit values: personal experience, orality, spontaneity, otherworldiness and commitment to biblical authority.¹⁶ Steven Land’s acclaimed work situates Pentecostal affections and passion in the eschatological concept of the “now and not yet” kingdom of God.¹⁷ Although varied in their emphases, common to all of these descriptions is the theme of personal *experience* with the supernatural Spirit. Anderson shows that even while there are many varieties of Pentecostal spiritualities across the globe, there is consistency in how they are “centred on the experience of the Spirit that pervades the whole

¹⁰ Ibid., 96-97.

¹¹ Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. Van Der Maas, eds. *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 1.

¹² Frank D. Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2006, 19; Cettolin, 67. However the “initial-evidence” doctrine is in decline, Simon Chan, “Evidential Glossolalia and the Doctrine of Subsequence,” *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 2 (1999): 195.

¹³ Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*; Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven*; Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *An Introduction to Ecclesiology: Ecumenical, Historical and Global Perspectives* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2002).

¹⁴ Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, 149.

¹⁵ Kärkkäinen, *Ecclesiology*, 70.

¹⁶ Russell P. Spittler, “Spirituality, Pentecostal and Charismatic” in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, eds. Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. Van Der Maas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 1099-102.

¹⁷ Land, 38-39.

person.”¹⁸ This distinctive applies to Pentecostalism in Australia. Cettolin observes that in Australia’s Pentecostal history, Spirit experience was always clearly emphasised¹⁹ and that the Australian context shares much of the characteristics of its Western counterparts.²⁰

The emphasis on supernatural encounter is best understood in the broader context of the Pentecostal worldview.²¹ As noted (Ch.1.3.2), Pentecostals envisage the contemporary church as *experientially continuous* with the early church. Thus, there is no demarcation between the operation of the Spirit today and in biblical times. This sense of *shared experience* between biblical and modern players lays the foundation for a distinctive Pentecostal spirituality, epistemology and theology.²²

3.1.2 The Evangelical Tradition

The contemporary Pentecostal context is further understood in light of its relationship to Evangelicalism. Modern Pentecostalism generally aligns itself within the Protestant tradition and under the smaller umbrella of Evangelicalism.²³ In North America, this alliance was formalised socially and institutionally in the mid 1900s.²⁴ Since then, Evangelicals have been the primary conversation partner in Pentecostal theology (albeit less so in the previous twenty-five years).²⁵

Like Pentecostalism, Evangelicalism is difficult to define due to the many divergent strands influencing the movement. In North America, Roger E. Olson identifies two streams – a “fairly

¹⁸ Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 204.

¹⁹ Cettolin, 31, 45.

²⁰ Ibid., 36.

²¹ Margaret M. Poloma, “The Millennialism of the Pentecostal Movement,” in *Christian Millenarianism: Themes and Perspectives*, ed. Stephen Hunt (New York: C. Hurst & Co., 2001), 5; James K. A. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010); Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology*; Archer, “Retrospect and Prospect,” 133; Jackie D. Johns, “Pentecostalism and the Postmodern Worldview,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 7 (1995): 73-96.

²² Warrington, 16.

²³ Poloma and Green observe that nearly all North American Pentecostals consider themselves Evangelical, *Godly Love*, 3-4; Maltese et al note a similar trend in the Philippines, “Negotiating Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism,” 9.

²⁴ Steven M. Studebaker, *From Pentecost to the Triune God* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2012), 149.

²⁵ Ibid.

aggressive form of Reformed theology” and a “Post-conservative” stream.²⁶ In the Church of England, Kings has observed three – “Conservative,” “Open” and “Charismatic.”²⁷ These are distinguished by their beliefs about bibliology and authority, ecclesiology, worship styles, eschatology and mission.²⁸ Leading British authority David Bebbington has identified four common marks of evangelicalism that have been accepted on both sides of the Atlantic: 1. conversionism – the belief that lives need to be changed; 2. activism – the expression of the gospel in effort; 3. biblicism – a particular regard for the Bible and, what may be called crucicentrism – a focus on the cross.²⁹ He argues that even though these features have shifted over the years and some differences exist between North America and Britain,³⁰ this “quadrilateral” of priorities remains.

While Pentecostals uniformly embrace the kind of Spirit encounters depicted in the biblical text, two different approaches to Spirit experience can be identified within Evangelicalism. The *Conservative* (or Reformed) stream tends to reject Spirit experience altogether (Cessationism), while the *Charismatic* stream generally shares the experiential approach of the Pentecostals. Mark Stibbe, the purported “focal theologian” of the charismatic stream in Britain³¹ has noted the importance of Spirit experience among Charismatics³² and Keener and Cartledge describe Charismatics as those who affirm and practise spiritual gifts, but who are not members of a Pentecostal church.³³ In Australian churches, Cettolin comments that it is sometimes difficult to differentiate between the two.³⁴ For British charismatic Max Turner, there is no sharp line dividing “Pentecostal” and “Charismatic” experience. The basic difference is “one of degree and not of kind; one of emphasis, and not absolute”

²⁶ Roger E. Olsen, *Reformed and Always Reforming: The Postconservative Approach to Evangelical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Press, 2007), 7-31.

²⁷ Graham Kings, “Canal, River and Rapids: Contemporary Evangelicalism in the Church of England,” *Anvil* 20, no. 3 (2003): 167–84.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ David W. Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain: A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1989), 2.

³⁰ David W. Bebbington, “Evangelicalism in Its Settings: The British and American Movements since 1940,” in *Evangelicalism: Comparative Studies of Popular Protestantism in North America, the British Isles, and Beyond 1700-1990* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994), 365–88.

³¹ Kings, “Canal, River and Rapids”, 175.

³² Mark W. G. Stibbe, “This Is That; Some Thoughts Concerning Charismatic Hermeneutics,” *Anvil* 15, no. 3 (1998): 181–93.

³³ Craig S. Keener, *Gift Giver: The Holy Spirit for Today* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Press, 2001), 11-12; Cartledge, “Definition and Description,” 79-81.

³⁴ Cettolin, 15-16.

– distinctions exist only in terms of semantics, expectation and presentation.³⁵ Thus some speak of a “Pentecostal-Charismatic” (P-C) approach to Spirit experience.³⁶

The differences in the two approaches to Spirit experience in Evangelicalism can be traced back to its origins. Ruthven argues that Evangelicalism finds its roots in the Reformation where experience was fundamentally rejected by Protestants in debates with the Catholic hierarchy over matters of doctrine, and that this established a theological trajectory shaping revelatory experience ever since.³⁷ In contrast, Pentecostalism finds its roots in the assumption of experiential continuity with the early church. Archer shows how Pentecostalism is a protest *against* the tradition of classical Protestantism.³⁸

However, in spite of its Cessationist roots, Spirit experience features periodically throughout Protestantism. Several Protestant movements have been identified as Pentecostal antecedents. Bruner lists the Anabaptists, post-Reformation Quakers, Pietists, Wesleyan and revivalist movements of 17 and 18th Century, Edward Irving and Charles Finney and the 19th Century Holiness movements.³⁹ Hence there is a significant amount of overlap in the approach of Spirit experience between Pentecostals and Charismatic Evangelicals. At the same time, as this study shows, the Cessationist epistemological paradigm and associated view of Scripture still haunts Pentecostal ethos and practice.⁴⁰

3.2 THEOLOGICAL FRAMEWORKS

The Pentecostal and Evangelical approaches to Spirit experience provides the context for understanding the theology and practice of Pentecostal revelatory experiences. Theological understandings about contemporary revelatory experiences are derived from Scripture. However, different perspectives exist as the nature of this relationship. I propose the following four theological categories to broadly frame existing understandings:

1. Contemporary revelatory experience as *ceased*,

³⁵ Turner, *Holy Spirit*, 339-345.

³⁶ Oss, “A Pentecostal/Charismatic View,” 238–83.

³⁷ Jon M. Ruthven, *On the Cessation of the Charismata: The Protestant Polemic on Postbiblical Miracles* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2007), 33, 189, 192; Ruthven, *What’s Wrong*, 11, 15-18, 28-32. See also 3.2.1.

³⁸ Archer, “Retrospect and Prospect,” 139.

³⁹ Frederick D. Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970): 35.

⁴⁰ As Daniel Castelo also concludes, *Pentecostalism as a Christian Mystical Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2017), 90.

2. Contemporary revelatory experience as *phenomenologically inferior* to the biblical experience,
3. Contemporary revelatory experience as *phenomenologically equivalent* to the biblical experience with Scripture as *unnecessary* and,
4. Contemporary revelatory experience as *phenomenologically equivalent* to the biblical experience with Scripture as *final and permanent testament to revelation*.

The four positions are distinguished by beliefs about the relationship of biblical revelatory experience to experience in contemporary times – whether it has ceased, changed or continues. In the first two frameworks, phenomenologically equivalent biblical experiences are no longer accessible, with the point of demarcation being the close of the Canon or the death of the Apostles. In the third and fourth frameworks, biblical revelatory experience continues without phenomenological distinction, but with different perspectives on Scripture’s role. The four frameworks are depicted diagrammatically as follows:

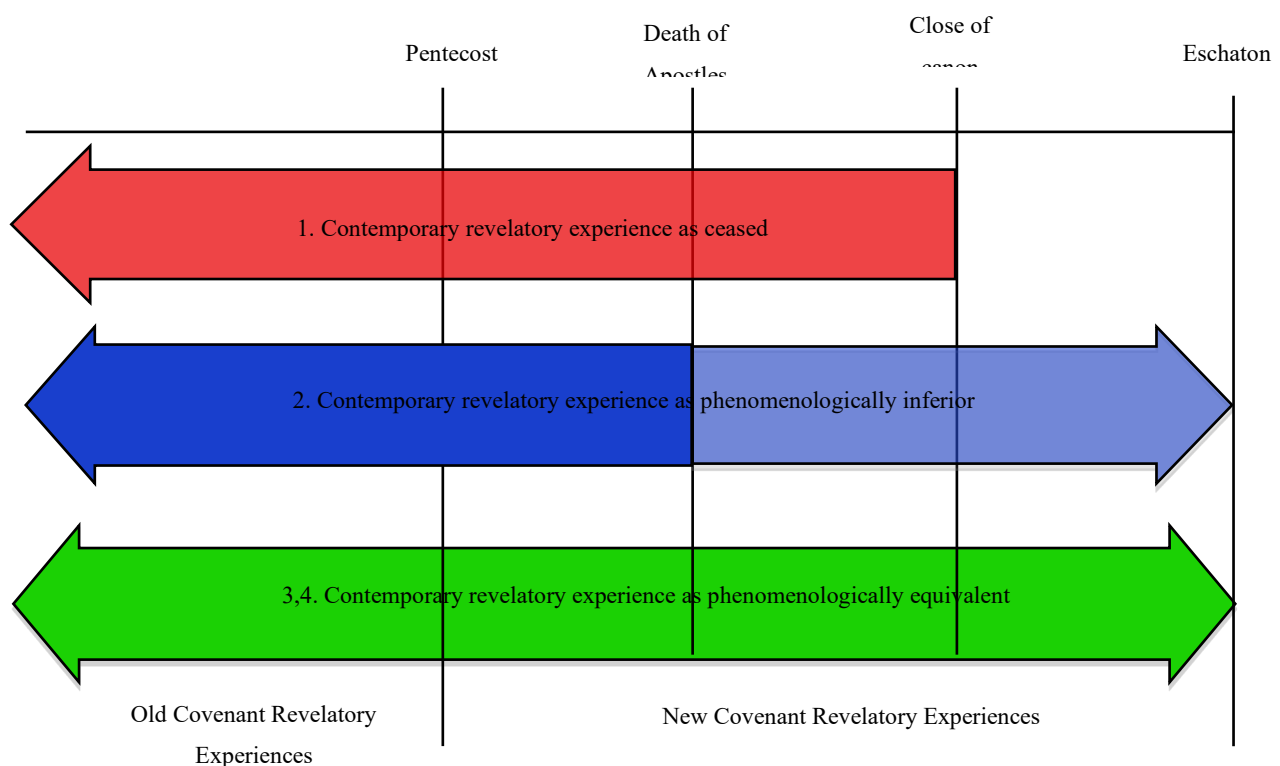


Figure 2: Four Theological Frameworks for Contemporary Revelatory Experience

In this section, the four frameworks are outlined. The discussion reveals that the first three are unviable for Pentecostals. The fourth approach reflects the worldview of the Pentecostals and is proposed as the appropriate alternative.

3.2.1 Contemporary Revelatory Experience as Ceased

The first theological framework views contemporary revelatory experience as ceased. Revelatory experiences are no longer necessary since revelation is “complete” and fully contained in the Scriptures. Known as *Cessationism*, this perspective can be found today in the conservative stream of the Evangelical tradition.⁴¹ Contemporary proponents include MacArthur, Packer, Gaffin and Farnell.⁴²

Cessationism rejects the viability of contemporary revelatory experiences apart from the canon. Any claim to extra-biblical encounters such as those made by Pentecostals are deemed invalid, subversive and even demonic. God still “speaks” but *only* via the Scriptures and often without the aspect of new revelation.⁴³ For the Pentecostal, the Cessationist position is clearly an untenable option. Although few hold to Cessationism in its purest form today,⁴⁴ inclusion here is important for its rationale.

⁴¹ Grudem, *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?*

⁴² John F. MacArthur Jr., *The Charismatics: A Doctrinal Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978); John F. MacArthur Jr., *Charismatic Chaos* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992); James I. Packer, *God's Words* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity), 1981; Richard B. Gaffin, *Perspectives on Pentecost* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1979); 89-116; Richard B. Gaffin, “A Cessationist View” In *Are Miraculous Gifts for Today?*, ed. Wayne Grudem (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 23-64; David F. Farnell, “When Will the Gift of Prophecy Cease?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150, no. 598 (1993): 171-202; Also, David Hill, *New Testament Prophecy* (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1979), 105, 126, 129, 138, 143-144; James I. Packer. *Keep in Step with the Spirit*. Leicester: IVP, 1984, 215.

⁴³ Reformed theologian A. B. Du Toit argues that only the aspect of “revelation” in prophecy has ceased, “Die charismata – ’n voortsetting van die gesprek. Pauliniese kriteria ten opsigte van die beoefening van individuele charismata volgens 1 Korinthiers 12-14” *NG Teologiese Tydskrif*, 20(3), (1979), 197 in S. Fourie, *Prophecy: God's Gift of Communication to the Church* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1990), 15.

⁴⁴ Graham Houston, *Prophecy: A Gift for Today?* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1989), 13. Oss notes a decline in Cessationism in North American from the late 1980s, “A Pentecostal/Charismatic View,” 239.

The Cessationist position has ebbed and flowed in history for a variety of reasons. In the early church, the rise of Cessationist thinking has been linked to the Montanist movement.⁴⁵ Cessationism was also prominent at the time of the Reformation, where arguments for *sola scriptura* were used by the Reformers to reject revelatory experiences as a basis for Catholic teaching (as well as those of the radical Reformers).⁴⁶ Instead, early Reformers taught that contemporary prophecy was equivalent to inspired preaching.⁴⁷ For Calvin, prophecy was “simply the right understanding of Scripture and the particular gift of expounding it.”⁴⁸ Similarly, Luther criticised the “Heavenly Prophets” of his day for only following a “living voice from heaven.”⁴⁹ This position shaped the Protestant tradition in the coming years, with the Westminster Confession of 1646 opening with a Cessationist statement.⁵⁰ Cessationist thinking came again to the fore in the late 1800s in response to the miracle debates of the Enlightenment and was popularised by Benjamin Warfield in the early 1900s in response to the P-C movement.⁵¹

Ruthven has examined the motivations behind Cessationism from Calvin to Warfield. He shows that Warfield’s argument rests on the *sufficiency* of Scripture. In Warfield’s view, the charismata and other revelatory experiences were used to accredit the manifestation of Christ and apostolic doctrine. The primary function of miracles and revelation was to act as *evidence*. When the canon was closed, such confirmation was no longer needed.⁵² For Cessationists, the Scriptures are *sufficient* for spiritual

⁴⁵ Adolph von Harnack, *History of Dogma*, trans. N. Buchanan, 1896; (New York: Dover Publications, rpt. 1961) 2.53; Adolph von Harnack, *The Origin of the New Testament and the Most Important Consequences of the New Creation*, trans. J.R. Wilkinson (New York: Dover Publications, 1925), 37.

⁴⁶ Ruthven, *Cessation*, 33,189,192; Ruthven, *What’s Wrong*, 11, 15-18, 28-32; William L. De Arteaga, *Agnes Sanford and Her Companions: The Assault on Cessationism and the Coming of the Charismatic Renewal* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2015), 29-39.

⁴⁷ Robeck, “A Pentecostal Perspective on Prophetic Gifts,” 26; Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 186; Volken, 88-91.

⁴⁸ David W. Torrance and Thomas F. Torrance, *The Epistles of Paul The Apostle to the Romans and the Thessalonians Romans Calvin’s Commentaries*, ed. Ross Mackenzie (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1961), 269.

⁴⁹ Martin Luther, “Letter to the Christians at Strasburg in Opposition to the Fanatic Spirit” (n.d), 40:70.

⁵⁰ *What’s Wrong*, 14.

⁵¹ Ruthven, *Cessation*, 15,31,193; Benjamin B. Warfield, *Counterfeit Miracles* (Edinburgh: Banner of Truth Trust, 1918); Benjamin B. Warfield, *The Inspiration and Authority of the Bible* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1970).

⁵² Similarly, for Farnell, revelation was for the purpose of writing Scripture, “When Will the Gift of Prophecy Cease?”

growth and revelation occurs today through piety and Bible study alone. Ruthven shows that current Cessationist thinking owes much to the Reformers' and Warfield's influence.⁵³

The rationale for Cessationism today lies largely with beliefs about the inspiration of Scripture. The revelation of Scripture is held to be "special"—in that it is verbally inerrant, infallible and authoritative – and therefore unrepeatable.⁵⁴ As Gaffin asks, "How can God reveal something that contains error? How can God who is *infallible*, reveal something that is *fallible*? The answer is simple: He cannot. He does not."⁵⁵ Any fresh claim to experiential equivalency in contemporary revelation is seen as *adding* to the canon and represents an attack on its uniqueness. The additional voice "serves to weaken the power of the Word"⁵⁶ and results in a "spiritual free-for-all," giving rise to heretical movements in the church.⁵⁷ MacArthur laments: "New revelation, such as dreams and visions are considered as binding on the believer's conscience as the book of Romans or the gospel of John."⁵⁸ The Cessationists' overarching concern is to maintain the place of Scripture as the ultimate source of revelation.

3.2.2 Contemporary Revelatory Experience as Phenomenologically Inferior

A second theological position holds that contemporary revelatory experience is possible, but is *experientially discontinuous* and *phenomenologically inferior* to the biblical experience. As such, this framework represents a modified form of Cessationism, such that phenomenologically equivalent experiences are not possible outside the canon. This "discontinuous," or "two-tier" viewpoint can be found in the Charismatic stream of the Evangelical tradition and the Pentecostal academy. In this thesis, it is termed the "P-C view."

The two-tier position is characterised by phenomenological and ontological *differences* between revelatory experiences in the biblical context compared to contemporary times. Although contemporary experiences *may* be received in the same modes as the biblical experience (as DVs,

⁵³ Ruthven, *Cessation*, 31. Clark provides a list of contemporary translations and commentaries that equate prophecy with inspired preaching, 211.

⁵⁴ Gaffin, *Perspectives*, 97-99.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 207; Also Norman T. Geisler, *Signs and Wonders: Healings, Miracles and Unusual Events: Which Are Real: Which Are Supernormal?: Which Are Counterfeit?* (Wheaton: Tyndale, 1988), 159-161.

⁵⁶ Ruth A. Tucker, *God Talk: Cautions for Those Who Hear God's Voice* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 2005), 64.

⁵⁷ MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, 54,57; Tucker, 15, 56.

⁵⁸ MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, 64.

auditions and the like), they are seen to have less epistemological reliability and authority than their biblical counterparts. Contemporary encounters are variously described as errant, fallible, subjective, subjective, local, unreliable and having minimal authority, in contrast with canonical experiences that are inerrant, infallible, objective, universal, reliable and therefore always authoritative. Thus, while Scripture as a revelatory mode is not the *only* way of hearing God as in the Cessationist perspective, it is the *primary* and *preferred* mode. 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.”⁵⁹

The position has been defended most substantively by Baptist theologian Wayne Grudem in his seminal work *The Gift of Prophecy*. As a Charismatic Evangelical, Grudem sought to validate revelatory experience in the church while still maintaining the high priority of Scripture. Although Grudem’s study focuses on prophecy and does not consider private revelations, his perspective has bearing on the broader revelatory experience at a number of points.

According to Grudem, two categories of prophetic experience exist – the *special* experience of the (canonical) Old Testament prophets and their counterparts, the New Testament apostles, who speak the “very words of God” – and the *ordinary* experience of the non-prophets of the Old Testament, New Testament congregations and the contemporary church who are only able to use “human words to report something God has brought to mind.”⁶⁰ To make his case, Grudem draws on selective biblical evidence that focusses on three areas: the “foundational” role of apostles and prophets in the church (Eph 2:20), the absolute claims of Old Testament prophecies and New Testament “apostolic” prophecies (seen to be delivered without the need for testing) and the errant messages of “ordinary” prophecy such as Agabus (Acts 21:10-11). Grudem concludes that post-apostolic prophetic experience is flawed in comparison to the standard of verbal inerrancy.⁶¹ For Grudem, contemporary revelatory experience is *possible*, but is less authoritative than that of the Bible writing characters because it is *always* comprised of human words with no possibility of accuracy.⁶²

⁵⁹ George Mallone, *Those Controversial Gifts* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1983), 37.

⁶⁰ Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, Location 143-162.

⁶¹ Ibid., Location 806-864.

⁶² Ibid., Location 962.

Grudem denies that he is proposing two *types* of prophetic experience, but rather two *levels of authority*.⁶³ However, this argument does not hold since he bases divine authority on the *quality* of the phenomena and the degree of human influence in the process. For example, Jesus' instructions about the coming role of the Spirit (Jn 14:26; 16:13) are described as "amazing gifts to write Scripture" reserved only for the apostles.⁶⁴ These experiences are contrasted with non-apostolic experiences for their unequalled "purity" and "power."⁶⁵ As the "very words of God," canonical experiences are *verbally* inerrant and infallible, and therefore authoritative. On the other hand, because contemporary experiences are framed in human words, they are verbally errant, fallible and have minimal authority.⁶⁶ Therefore, God's voice can still be heard outside the canon, but the eminently superior way to hear God's voice is through the Scriptures. Grudem argues that the idea of a lesser form of experience has been held throughout history by proponents such as John Knox, Charles Spurgeon and the Puritans.⁶⁷

Like the Cessationists, Grudem's main concern is to preserve the place of Scripture as the authoritative source of Christian doctrine. Indeed, this position can be seen to stem from certain presuppositions about the inspiration of Scripture.⁶⁸ Grudem subscribes to the conservative Evangelical view of bibliology which equates divine inspiration (2 Tim 3:16) with verbal inerrancy.⁶⁹ This doctrine of Scripture *requires* contemporary experience to be qualitatively inferior. As Charismatic British pastor Donald Bridge states, "If (contemporary) prophecy is assumed to be directly inspired by God, authoritative and infallible, then clearly there can be no prophecy today. The Bible is complete."⁷⁰ Furthermore, this view reflects beliefs about the *sufficiency* of Scripture – only the words of Scripture are binding on the believer; "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."⁷¹ In other words, certain

⁶³ Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, Location 461-481. In his original thesis, Grudem advocates for two *types* of revelation, but qualified this in his later work, Wayne A. Grudem, "The Gift of Prophecy in 1 Corinthians 12-14" (PhD, University of Cambridge, 1978), 57-59.

⁶⁴ Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, Location 235, 2799.

⁶⁵ Ibid., Location 484.

⁶⁶ Ibid., Location 2448. Also, Donald Bridge, *Signs and Wonders Today* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1985), 202-204.

⁶⁷ Grudem, Location 4020-4167.

⁶⁸ Turner makes a similar observation: "One suspects Grudem (and others) illegitimately combines elements of his doctrine of Scripture with his analysis of prophetic phenomenology," *Holy Spirit*, 191.

⁶⁹ Short Statement 4, Evangelical Society, "Chicago Statement on the Inerrancy of the Bible" (1978), http://www.etsjets.org/files/documents/Chicago_Statement.pdf [accessed Dec 21, 2019].

⁷⁰ Bridge, 202-204.

⁷¹ Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, Location 3013.

doctrines regarding the inspiration of Scripture provide the rationale for the phenomenologically inferior perspective.

3.2.2.1 Acceptance in the Pentecostal-Charismatic Tradition

Since Grudem's original publication in 1988 (republished in 2000), his position has been widely accepted by Pentecostals and Charismatics alike. Even with significant critique, the concept of a "two-tiered" approach was welcomed for its ability to allow for ongoing revelatory experiences while upholding the high place of Scripture. Singaporean Dennis Lum calls Grudem one of the most significant and influential scholars in the area of prophecy.⁷² Ruthven and Turner have both noted that Grudem's position has become the "default" position for Pentecostals and Charismatics.⁷³

Acceptance of Grudem's position has extended across national boundaries, with both Pentecostal scholars and popular leaders referencing Grudem in their works. In North America, *The Gift of Prophecy* was held up as the standard reference for the prophetic movement⁷⁴ and the AG listed it as a recommended resource in their booklet on spiritual gifts.⁷⁵ In Singapore, Grudem's book has been widely distributed within the AG and scholar David Lim bases his study on Grudem's work.⁷⁶ In the UK, William Kay concurs with Grudem's conclusions⁷⁷ as does Muindi in Africa⁷⁸ and John Penney in Australia.⁷⁹ While other Pentecostals don't specifically cite Grudem, they share his "two-tier" approach. For example, long before Grudem early British Pentecostal pioneer Donald Gee argued for a different type of "inspiration" that is not on the "same level" of the Scriptures.⁸⁰

⁷² Lum, 87.

⁷³ Ruthven, "The 'Foundational Gifts' of Ephesians 2:20," 31; Turner, *Holy Spirit*, 183.

⁷⁴ M. G. Maudlin, "Seers in the Heartland: Hot on the Trail of the Kansas City Prophets," *Christianity Today* (1991): 18-22.

⁷⁵ Stanley M. Horton, *Gifts and Fruits of the Spirit*. Springfield: Gospel, n.d. Also, Stanley M. Horton, "Review of *The Gift of Prophecy in the New Testament and Today*," *Paraclete* 25, no. 1 (1991): 30-32; Gordon D. Fee, *1 Epistle to the Corinthians; God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994).

⁷⁶ David Lim, *Spiritual Gifts: A Fresh Look* (Springfield: Gospel, 2003), 105.

⁷⁷ Kay, *Prophecy!* (Nottingham: Lifestream Publications, 1991), 35-36, 95.

⁷⁸ Samuel W. Muindi, "The Nature and Significance of Prophecy in Pentecostal-Charismatic Experience: An Empirical-Biblical Study" (PhD, Birmingham, University of Birmingham, 2012), 121.

⁷⁹ Even while critiquing its exegetical basis, Penney "Testing," 66, 69, 73.

⁸⁰ Gee, *Concerning Spiritual Gifts*, 44-45, 101. Also, North American Harold Horton, *The Gifts of the Spirit*. Springfield: Gospel, 1975, 172.

Similar acceptance for Grudem's position has been found among Charismatic Evangelicals.⁸¹ Oss argues that Grudem's view is the accepted P-C view in North America and that "mainstream Pentecostals have never elevated miraculous gifts (including utterance gifts) to the level of canon" meaning "inerrant revelation with full divine authority."⁸² Similarly in Britain, Stibbe draws heavily on Grudem's work,⁸³ and Petts reflects the key tenets of a two-tier approach, making clear distinctions on the basis of fallibility.⁸⁴

The discontinuous position is also reflected in a plethora of popular P-C works on hearing God's voice, with some authors specifically citing Grudem.⁸⁵ Evidence of phenomenological discontinuity can be found in references to the epistemological unreliability of contemporary revelatory experience,⁸⁶ the audible "inspiration" of the Spirit in Scripture versus the lesser, inaudible "prompting" of the Spirit in contemporary times,⁸⁷ the "strangeness" of dreams or visions⁸⁸ and the fallibility of "secondary" contemporary prophetic messages.⁸⁹ However, the framework is most clearly evident in popular works via the *rhēma/logos* schema. This approach adopts a discontinuous framework via the use of two Greek words – λόγος (logos) and ῥῆμα (rhēma). Typically, "logos" refers to the *written* word of the canon that is held to be universal, eternal, objective and infallible. On the other hand, "rhēma", represents the *spoken* word of contemporary experience that is held to be

⁸¹ Jack Deere, *Surprised by the Voice of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 278-286; Sam Storms, *The Beginner's Guide to Spiritual Gifts* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 2012), 109–50; *Practicing the Power: Welcoming the Gifts of the Holy Spirit in Your Life* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2017), 82–122.

⁸² Oss, "A Pentecostal/Charismatic View," 239, 279.

⁸³ Mark Stibbe, *Know Your Spiritual Gifts* (London: Marshall Pickering, 1997), 121.

⁸⁴ Petts, *Body Builders*, 144, 146.

⁸⁵ Mike Bickle, *Growing in the Prophetic*, 2nd ed. (Lake Mary: Charisma House, 2008), 36; Cindy Jacobs, *The Voice of God*, 2nd ed. (Grand Rapids: Chosen Books, 2016), 174.

⁸⁶ Samuel C. Williamson, *Hearing God in Conversation* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2016), Kindle Electronic Edition, Location 2868-2893.

⁸⁷ Robert Morris, *Frequency* (Nashville: W. Publishing Group, 2016), Kindle Electronic Edition, Location 167.

⁸⁸ Dallas Willard, *Hearing God: Developing a Conversational Relationship with God* (New York: Harper Collins, 1993), Kindle Electronic Edition, Location 145-6; Joyce Meyer, *How to Hear from God* (New York: Warner Books, 2003), 45, 48.

⁸⁹ Gentile, 152; Frank Damazio, *Developing the Prophetic Ministry* (Portland: Trilogy Productions, 1983), 54-55.

particular, temporal, subjective and fallible.⁹⁰ This way of understanding contemporary revelatory experiences is widespread throughout P-C churches in the West.⁹¹

3.2.2.2 Alternate Distinctions

A small number of P-C scholars provide an alternative to Grudem's framework by distinguishing contemporary experiences from the biblical experience by means *other* than than phenomenological quality. These typically acknowledge some level of phenomenological equivalence, but rather characterise contemporary experience by its lesser authority, limited application and/or lack of "doctrinal content." South African Fourie for example, recognises phenomenological equivalence and advocates for contemporary experience's *relativised* rather than *universal* authority (while oddly still referencing Grudem over the "general content" of the message rather than the "actual words").⁹² Similarly, South African Matthew Clark shows that contemporary revelation will only relate to Christian *practice* rather than doctrine,⁹³ while also holding contemporary utterances to be "fallible" compared to the "infallible" canonical word of the Lord.⁹⁴ Charismatic scholar Max Turner shows that the differences between contemporary and biblical prophecy are largely "immaterial" in their "mechanism, content, function and purpose,"⁹⁵ while characterising the "weaker" contemporary experience by its lack of doctrinal content, non-foundational role and "secondary" level of authority.⁹⁶ Pentecostal historian Cecil M. Robeck takes a similar stance, arguing that the distinction between contemporary and biblical experience is by their application to *local* rather than *universal* settings.⁹⁷ Contemporary experiences are therefore "particular, temporal and subjective" while Scripture is "universal, eternal and objective."⁹⁸

⁹⁰ Cartledge, "Definition and Description," 90-91. A sample of popular works: Mark Virkler, *Dialogue with God* (South Plainfield: Bridge Publishing, 1986), Kindle Electronic Version: Location 589, 612, 715; Damazio, *Developing the Prophetic Ministry*, 54-55; Meyer, *How to Hear from God*, 39; Bill Hamon, *Prophets and Personal Prophecy: God's Prophetic Voice Today* (Shippensburg: Destiny Image, 1978), 30-35; Bill Johnson, *Dreaming with God: Secrets to Redesigning Your World through God's Creative flow* (Shippensburg: Destiny Image, 2006), 72; Adrian Beale and Adam F. Thompson, *The Divinity Code: To Understanding Your Dreams and Visions* (Shippensburg: Destiny Image, 2011).

⁹¹ Cartledge accredits its development to the British house church movement, Cartledge, "Definition and Description," 90-91; Virkler sources the original teaching from South Korean pastor Paul Yonggi Cho, *Dialogue with God*, Loc. 715.

⁹² Ibid., 36.

⁹³ Clark, 235, 298; Robeck, "Written Prophecies," 34.

⁹⁴ Clark, 211.

⁹⁵ Turner, *Holy Spirit*, 318.

⁹⁶ Ibid., 313, 337, 339.

⁹⁷ Robeck, "Canon, Regulae Fidei," 65-92.

⁹⁸ Ibid., also, Robeck, "Written Prophecies," 39, 43.

3.2.2.3 Problems with the Phenomenologically Inferior Position

The phenomenologically inferior framework as proposed by Grudem has received significant criticism from P-C⁹⁹ and Cessationist scholars alike.¹⁰⁰ This has been largely based on exegetical grounds and the grammatically unlikely notion of correlating the role of the Old Testament prophets with the New Testament apostles in Eph 2:20.¹⁰¹ Turner is correct when he shows that the categories offered by Grudem for the biblical experience – such as the “exact words of God” – are forced and over-schematised. Instead, the biblical evidence reveals a “spectrum of authority” extending from apostolic speech to “vague and barely profitable attempts at oracular speech.”¹⁰²

However, the problems with the two-tier position are not merely exegetical. Philosophically, the argument for two levels of authority does not hold. As Cessationists rightly maintain, *if* God’s voice can be heard in contemporary experience in a manner that is phenomenologically equivalent to the biblical experience, it follows that it *must* carry the same level of authority, since divine authority derives from God himself. As MacArthur asks, “How could some of God’s words be less authoritative than others?”¹⁰³ Pentecostal scholars have noted that the issue of *authority* lies at the heart of the scholarly debate.¹⁰⁴ In response, the catch-cry throughout the P-C movement has been that contemporary experiences are not authoritative *in the same way* as canonical experiences are. Hence, contemporary experiences are described as “secondary”, “subject to” or “not on a par with” the Scriptures. Robeck and others report that the “vast majority of charismatic communities”

⁹⁹ Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 93-100, 176-177; Turner, *Holy Spirit*, 210-212; Penney, “Testing,” 35–84.

¹⁰⁰ David F. Farnell, “Does the New Testament Teach Two Prophetic Gifts?” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 150, no. 597 (1993): 62–88; R. Fowler White, “Gaffin and Grudem on Eph 2.20: In Defence of Gaffin’s Cessationist Exegesis,” *Westminster Theological Journal* 54 (1992): 303-20; Bruce Compton, “The Continuation of New Testament Prophecy and a Closed Canon: Revisiting Wayne Grudem’s Two Levels of New Testament Prophecy,” *Detroit Baptist Seminary Journal* 22 (2017): 57–73; Richard B. Gaffin, “The New Testament as Canon,” In *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic: A Tradition, A Challenge, A Debate*, edited by H. M. Conn (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988).

¹⁰¹ White, “Gaffin and Grudem”; Gaffin, “The New Testament as Canon”; Compton, “Continuation”; Penney, “Testing,” 64-67.

¹⁰² Turner, *Holy Spirit*, 211.

¹⁰³ MacArthur, *Charismatic Chaos*, 56.

¹⁰⁴ Scott A. Ellington, “Pentecostalism and the Authority of Scripture,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 9 (1996): 16-38; Clark, 160-201; Robeck, “Written Prophecies.”

emphatically assert this¹⁰⁵ and that this perspective has been associated with Pentecostalism throughout this century.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, Cartledge suggests that the *rhēma*/logos construct was developed to address the accusation of “putting prophecy on par with” Scripture.¹⁰⁷

The “two-tier” position also has problems on *experiential* grounds. While the “formal voices” of P-C theologians advocate clear distinctions between extra-biblical revelatory experience and biblical experience, this does not hold in practice. On the contrary, Pentecostals *speak and act* like their revelatory experiences are as authoritative as experiences in the text. Robeck bemoans: “While there is the de jure claim that Scripture holds the ultimate authority, there are de facto practices which appear to deny that claim.”¹⁰⁸ He shows that among early Pentecostals, prophecies became reference points that were referred to again and again – a clear “denial of the claim made by most Pentecostals-Charismatics that Scripture is the all-sufficient rule for faith and practice.”¹⁰⁹ Grudem has made a similar observation:

Although most Charismatics would agree that prophecy today is not equal to Scripture in authority, it must be said that in practice much confusion results from the habit of prefacing prophecies with the common Old Testament phrase, “Thus says the Lord.” ... The modern use of this phrase is unfortunate, because it gives the impression that the words which follow are God’s very words, whereas the New Testament does not justify that position – and when pressed, most responsible charismatic spokesman would not want to claim it for every part of their prophecies anyway.¹¹⁰

The problem is that, holding to a view of phenomenological equivalency means that Pentecostals base their experiences on the pattern of Scripture itself. So, Pentecostals use the phrase “God said” after the biblical characters (Acts 8:29; 11:28; 13:2). They write their prophecies down in order to co-operate with them as the biblical characters were instructed to do (Ex 34:27; Jer 30:2; Hab 2:2-3).¹¹¹ They

¹⁰⁵ Robeck, “Written Prophecies,” 28; Kay, *Prophecy!*, 35-36; Richard Quebedeaux *The New Charismatics II* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), 132-133; Gentile, 152; Gerald T. Sheppard, “Prophecy: From Ancient Israel to Pentecostals at the End of the Modern Age,” *The Spirit and Church* 3.1 (2001): 55.

¹⁰⁶ Clark, 159, 246, 211.

¹⁰⁷ Cartledge, “Definition and Description,” 90-91; Turner, *Holy Spirit*, 313.

¹⁰⁸ Robeck, “Written Prophecies,” 28.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 36, 43.

¹¹⁰ Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, Location 997, 3669. Stanley M. Horton also warns against this language, *Bible Prophecy* (Springfield: Gospel Publishing House, 1963), 187-188.

¹¹¹ Robeck, “Written Prophecies,” 29.

reference prophetic words for behaviour as in the early church (1 Tim 1:18; Acts 15 cf. Gal 2:11-13). In other words, Pentecostals model their responses on the practices of the early church. This raises questions as *how* the biblical narratives can be applied. However, these issues are not addressed in the literature (due to the focus on prophecy).

Even while not all Pentecostals and Charismatics share the same bibliology as Grudem,¹¹² there have been no alternatives offered within the P-C tradition that provide a way to maintain the critical place of Scripture while allowing for phenomenologically equivalent revelatory experience.¹¹³ With only a discontinuous approach to work with and in order to maintain their position as “people of the Book,”¹¹⁴ Pentecostals have attempted to fit their experience into a phenomenologically inferior framework and in doing so, find themselves saying one thing and practising another. While the need for clear demarcation between contemporary experience and biblical experience is clear, the phenomenologically inferior position advocated by Grudem and other P-C authors is incompatible with the Pentecostal approach to revelatory experience at its foundations. Because this position is based on the assumptions of a particular conservative bibliology, attention is given in this study to the relationship of revelatory experience to doctrines of Scripture as a whole (Ch. 7).

3.2.3 Contemporary Revelatory Experience as Phenomenologically Equivalent and Scripture as Unnecessary

The third theological framework views contemporary revelatory experience as phenomenologically equivalent to the biblical experience, but with Scripture as an unnecessary and even dangerous

¹¹² In North American Evangelicalism, the doctrine of verbal inerrancy (as enshrined in the Chicago Statement (1978) and the standards of the Evangelical Theological Society (1949)) has been widely accepted as a defining attribute of Evangelicalism. However, these doctrines have not been central to the evangelical identity in Britain, with differences emerging between the streams after the First World War, Bebbington, “Evangelicalism in Its Settings,” 372; Stephen R. Holmes, “Evangelical Doctrines of Scripture in Transatlantic Perspective: The 2008 Laing Lecture,” *Evangelical Quarterly* 81 (2009): 38–63. In Pentecostalism, the doctrine of inerrancy has not been strongly emphasised – at least in its beginnings. Ellington shows that more recently, the language of inerrancy has been adopted out of a desire to be accepted by Evangelicals more than conviction, “Pentecostalism and the Authority of Scripture,” 19.

¹¹³ Turner’s work comes closest. Yet, whilst he is “unhappy about the way Grudem phrases his contrasts” and observes the *rhēma* /logos paradigm to be “semantically dubious,” he still validates Grudem’s position for “weaker” contemporary experience, *Holy Spirit*, 212, 313, 337.

¹¹⁴ Archer and Ross, “Bible in Pentecostal Traditions,” 143; Jackie David Johns and Cheryl Bridges-Johns, “Yielding to the Spirit: A Pentecostal Approach to Group Bible Study,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* I, 1992, 117.

obstacle. This perspective has been investigated by anthropologist Matthew Engelke in a contemporary Pentecostal group among the Masowe tribe of Zimbabwe.¹¹⁵ Although a sociological study, his work offers important insights into the relationship of revelatory experience to Scripture.

For this group known as the “Friday Apostolics,” contemporary revelatory experience is phenomenologically equivalent to biblical times, but is of greater value than Scripture because of its relevancy. As Engelke shows, this perspective may be partly due to the rejection of white Christianity “and their book” and the need to develop their own identity.¹¹⁶ However, the overarching concern is Scripture’s inability to address contemporary issues in the Masowe culture. As one member says: “The Bible is the Word of God, but it is not always relevant to the needs of Africans today. We are facing new problems – AIDS, witchcraft and other problems... What matters is not what happened in Palestine 2000 years ago, but what the Holy Spirit is working on now, live and direct.”¹¹⁷ For the Friday Apostolics, the Bible as a material object presents a “mediating obstacle” to a live and direct relationship to God.¹¹⁸ Their preference is to receive the Word of God directly from the Holy Spirit so that Christianity can be as “vibrant and alive” as when Jesus walked the earth.¹¹⁹ This position avoids the “problem of presence” whereby relationship with God is seen to depend on books (or buildings and other sacred objects).

While Pentecostals share the position of phenomenological equivalency with the Friday Apostolics, the inability to secure the place of the Scriptures makes this an unacceptable theological framework for them. As noted, Pentecostal theologians hold a high view of Scripture and reject any claim of greater value for their revelatory experiences. The position of the Friday Apostolics highlights the threat contemporary experience poses to the role of Scripture. Pentecostal scholars are aware of the tendency to value the “rhēma word” above the “authoritative Word of God” (as Scripture) and warn against practices that displace Scripture as the norm.¹²⁰

However, the approach of the Zimbabwean Apostolics also reveals the value of inspired experiences in addressing contemporary concerns. The cultural embeddedness of the Scriptures points to the need for the Spirit’s work in applying divine wisdom to new situations (Jn 16:13). While some argue that

¹¹⁵ Matthew Engelke, *A Problem of Presence* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007).

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 5.

¹¹⁷ Ibid., 6.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 245.

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 1.

¹²⁰ French L. Arrington, “The Use of the Bible by Pentecostals,” *Pneuma* 16, no. 1 (1994): 106; Mark McLean, “Toward a Pentecostal Hermeneutic,” *Pneuma* 6, no.2 (1984): 52.

contemporary experiences will only relate to local or particular concerns, the question may be asked if God has *anything* to speak to the universal church today on issues that extend beyond the first century.

The Apostolics' perspective highlights the question of *if* or *how* contemporary revelatory experience impacts on doctrinal formation in post-biblical settings. If Scripture provides the basis for Christian belief and practice, clear delineation is required over what constitutes the *limits* of established revelation. Pentecostals require a theological framework that allows for the Spirit's revelation in new situations without undermining the place of the Scriptures.

3.2.4 Contemporary Revelatory Experience as Phenomenologically Equivalent with Scripture as Final and Permanent Testament to Revelation

A fourth theological framework views contemporary revelatory experience as phenomenologically equivalent with the biblical experience, with Scripture as final and permanent testament to revelation. Here, the descriptor "phenomenological equivalency" pertains to all aspects of the revelatory experience. This includes the *content* and *function* of experience – as a means to express the divine will, character and intentions, as well as the *process* of experience at each phase: *hearing* – where revelatory modes include dreams and visions (D/Vs), voices (auditions) and sensory impressions, *recognising* – where experiences bear the possibility of epistemological reliability and discernment processes are modelled after the biblical experience, and *responding* – where once tested, the experience bears divine authority over its intended audience and the circumstances to which it refers.

This perspective proposes that the theological patterns, epistemological processes and language of biblical experiences can be replicated today without undermining the place of Scripture. It allows for the possibility that once discerned, contemporary revelatory experiences can be divinely authoritative *without* making claim to canonical status or displacing Scripture as the ultimate charter for faith. It further allows revelatory experiences to play a role in developing and appropriating doctrine in new contexts. This framework is best represented by the Catholic tradition and is elaborated on in the work of theologian Niels Hvidt.¹²¹ Unlike the P-C position which tends to emphasise discontinuity between canonical and contemporary experience, the Catholic position assumes *no* differences between contemporary and biblical revelatory experience from a phenomenological point of view.¹²²

¹²¹ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*.

¹²² Ibid., 6-7.

In this framework, Scripture maintains its formative place as the final and permanent testament to Christian faith and practice. Here, the early church sets the pattern. The body of Christian Truth – termed the “Rule of Faith” in early church terminology¹²³ – has been set by the incarnation of Jesus and the teaching of the early apostles. No contemporary revelatory experience can change or add to the core tenets of faith that are now recorded in Scripture. However, as testament to revelation, Scripture should not be equated with the reality of revelation itself.¹²⁴ Christ and the apostolic teaching that bore witness to his incarnation, death and resurrection remains the foundation on which Christian faith rests (1 Cor 3:11; Eph 2:20).

At the same time, the bibliological questions of the inspiration, authority, infallibility and sufficiency of Scripture highlighted by the practice of ongoing experience must be addressed. This study reveals how the practical outworkings of Pentecostal revelatory experience challenges conservative evangelical doctrines of Scripture. It proposes that the phenomenologically equivalent position is possible without undermining the place of Scripture, but only when a certain view of Scripture is adopted.

3.3 SUMMARY

This chapter has located contemporary revelatory experience within its ecclesial and theological context. The four theological frameworks provide the backdrop for the analysis of the ordinary theology of Pentecostals (Ch. 7,8).

Although the phenomenologically equivalent worldview of the Pentecostals has been widely acknowledged in the literature, little work has been done to explore the implications of this perspective for contemporary revelatory experience and its relationship to Scripture. In the absence of a theological framework that reflects their worldview, Pentecostals have relied on existing approaches accessible to them via the Evangelical tradition. These are linked to a particular doctrine of Scripture that views inspiration as unique and unrepeatable. The result is that Pentecostals have found themselves acting incongruently, approaching revelatory experience from a foundation of historic continuity while framing it with a “discontinuous” theology. What is needed is a comprehensive

¹²³ The “Rule of Faith” (variously described in the early church as “the word of truth,” “apostolic teaching,” “tradition,” “apostolic deposit,” “sound doctrine,” and “the faith”) was the basic core and defining centre of early Christian theology and was used as the standard against which all teaching was measured, Allert, *A High View of Scripture?*, 55; I. Howard Marshall, *Beyond the Bible: Moving from Scripture to Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), 55.

¹²⁴ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 236.

theological reflection on Pentecostal experiences that allows their unique perspective to be taken into account, a call that has been made by several scholars.¹²⁵

The next chapter reviews studies in the empirical-theological and sociological literature that contribute to understandings about the revelatory experiences of Pentecostals.

¹²⁵ Stephen E. Parker, *Led by the Spirit: Toward a Practical Theology of Pentecostal Discernment and Decision-Making* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 20; Robeck, "Written Prophecies," 44; McLean, "Pentecostal Hermeneutic," 50.

4. LITERATURE REVIEW

In spite of the ubiquity of private revelatory experiences among Pentecostals, research involving their theology and practice is rare. While there is increasing interest in the operation of prophecy, there is a paucity of studies on the broader revelatory experience that includes dreams and visions, auditions and sensory impressions. At the same time, the prevalence of these phenomena – particularly dreams and visions – among Pentecostals and Charismatics has been noted. Anderson, Cox and Hollenweger have all recognised the use of dreams among Pentecostals.¹ Cox sees the interest in dreams as points of contact with the divine and frames them under the banner of Pentecostalism’s “primal spirituality.” Hollenweger attributes Pentecostalism’s “breathtaking growth” to the connections with black/African traditional religious concerns, which include a prominent place for dreams.² However, these mentions are only made in passing, and detailed works in the Pentecostal literature are rare.

This chapter reviews the relevant literature on contemporary Pentecostal revelatory experiences, beginning with theological-empirical studies and followed by works in social science. These studies arise from a range of geographic regions, including the US, Britain, Africa and Asia. Currently there are no works that focus specifically on the revelatory experience in the Australian P-C context. While it is not possible to draw too many conclusions from such diversity, the review highlights areas of need and provides focus for the current study.

4.1 THEOLOGICAL-EMPIRICAL STUDIES

This section reviews theological and theological-empirical studies relating to the P-C revelatory experience including that of dreams and visions. This is followed by an overview of studies in the experience of P-C prophecy.

4.1.1 Pentecostal-Charismatic Revelatory Experiences

A small number of studies in P-C revelatory experiences exist and are reviewed here; two on P-C revelatory experience in general and two on dreams and visions.

¹ Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*, 197; Cox, 81-83; Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997), 18. Also, Julie C. Ma and Wonsuk Ma, *Mission in the Spirit: Towards a Pentecostal/Charismatic Missiology* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2010), 161.

² Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, 18.

The Nature of Revelatory Experiences in British Charismatic Churches

Mark Cartledge undertook an empirical study of revelatory experiences at a time when there were very few studies of the phenomena.³ His research defined and described revelatory experience within the British Charismatic movement using qualitative data from 31 participants from nine Anglican churches. Although he used the terminology of “prophecy” throughout his work, his study embraced all experiences that interviewees defined as “prophetic,” including direct revelations in “pictures” and words, inspired prayer, interpretation of tongues, audible voices and subjective impressions.⁴ Cartledge engaged the work of Max Turner to conclude that the charismatic phenomenon in his study generally cohered with the New Testament gift of prophecy.⁵

Cartledge’s research showed that the contemporary charismatic experience functioned primarily to fulfil the Pauline standard of strength, encouragement and comfort (1 Cor 14:3).⁶ Content was particularistic rather than doctrinal and acted to provide personal knowledge and guidance. Cartledge also showed that contemporary experience correlates with the biblical counterpart in a number of aspects, but did not play the same “foundational” role (Eph 2:20).⁷

Cartledge’s findings are relevant to this study, particularly in relation to his understandings about the modes of revelatory experience and his comparisons with the biblical experience through Turner’s work. Since Cartledge’s research does not address higher-level revelatory experiences in detail, particularly in terms of their authoritative nature, it acts as an introduction from which to investigate further. However, in line with general trends in P-C works, the experience is largely seen through the lens of prophecy in the epistles which limits the discussion.⁸

The Role of Revelatory Experiences in Decision-Making

Stephen Parker’s 1996 study investigates the process of discernment and decision-making in an American Classical Pentecostal church.⁹ Through participant observation and in-depth interviews with six individuals, he examines the nature of Spirit experiences, the criteria used for discernment and the decisions that resulted from them. These findings were analysed from the psychological perspective of creative regression theorists and the theological perspective of Paul Tillich.

³ Mark Cartledge, “Charismatic Prophecy,” *Journal of Empirical Theology* 8 (1995): 71-88.

⁴ Ibid., 79.

⁵ Ibid., 86.

⁶ Ibid., 87.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Turner, *Holy Spirit*, 185-220.

⁹ Parker, *Led by the Spirit*.

Parker's work modifies Tillich's insistence that experience is best treated as a *medium* rather than a *source* of theology. Although Tillich's concern about the dangers of "privatisation and esoteric interpretations" are not unfounded, Parker argues effectively for how the Spirit-leading experiences of Pentecostals can be deemed *revelatory*. He argues for a greater role of experience in theology than provided by neo-orthodoxy and Evangelicalism, echoing the push of other Pentecostal scholars as well as this project.¹⁰

Parker's work is most helpful for its insights into the role of the community in discernment. Personal experiences need to be brought into the realm of the communal to allow for adequate interpretation against biblical narratives, theological soundness and coherence with Pentecostal narratives and traditions.¹¹ However, application to this study is somewhat limited since the experiences in Parker's study are generally not of the same phenomenological ilk of those in this study. Claims to direct inspiration are rarely made and Spirit-leading tended to arise from reflection and retrospection on circumstances rather than identifiable revelatory encounters.¹²

Theological Analysis of Dreams and Visions in Africa

Anna Droll investigated D/Vs as vehicles for divine revelation in the African context.¹³ She analysed data from 77 interviews and 137 surveys through the pneumatological insights of Pentecostal scholars Amos Yong and Nimi Wariboko. Droll found that D/Vs were highly valued in the African church for their ability to provide an experience of God based on a hermeneutic grounded in Scripture. Drawing on Amos Yong's concept of the pneumatological imagination, visionary phenomena are understood in terms of three descriptives: *relationality*, *rationality* and *dynamism*.¹⁴ The relational aspect refers to the God who speaks personally and intimately into human experience as demonstrated in the Old Testament and Gospel accounts. Rationality (or wisdom) refers to the content of the message, which is Jesus and the cross. Dynamism relates to the power of the experience to stimulate human agency that is transmitted via the Spirit.

¹⁰ Ibid., 153, 173.

¹¹ Ibid., 191-197.

¹² With the exception of "Sheila" who described her experience in terms of "almost an audible voice," 84-85.

¹³ Anna M. Droll, "'Piercing the Veil' and African Dreams and Visions: In Quest of the Pneumatological Imagination," *Pneuma* 40 (2018): 345-65.

¹⁴ Ibid., 352-354.

Droll's study considers Wariboko's insights in the function of D/Vs for overall Pentecostal spirituality as well as personal spirituality.¹⁵ She found that the function of D/Vs is grounded in the concept of "epistemological knowing" whereby knowing is intrinsically linked to phenomenality. Spiritual experiences such as D/Vs were considered necessary to truly "know the Real." D/Vs are understood as "events of grace" as they act on passive agents to provide the courage and impetus to re-order priorities and activate mission in the life of recipients. D/Vs also confront the problem of evil in spiritual warfare.¹⁶ Finally, D/Vs are valued for their congregational benefit in bringing unity and edification, as well as providing wholistic, pastoral care for individuals.¹⁷

As D/Vs form one mode of the broader revelatory experience, Droll's study is closely aligned to the current project in terms of methodology and findings. Her study reflects the phenomenologically equivalent position in that revelatory experience is deemed "similar" to the biblical accounts and the "piercing of the veil is superintended by the same divine agency."¹⁸ Her engagement with eminent Pentecostal theologians Yong and Wariboko allows for insights to be made in Pentecostal pneumatology in a Majority World culture and coheres with the findings of this study, particularly in relation to the functional aspects of revelatory experience.

The Decline of Dreams and Visions in Contemporary Pentecostalism

David Hymes' study considers dreams and visions in (American and Australian) Pentecostalism in light of Old Testament understandings. He shows that initially D/Vs (along with glossolalia, prophecy and interpretation) were important mechanisms of divine revelation and the "bread and butter" of early Pentecostal spirituality.¹⁹ However over time, they attracted increasing suspicion, with a preference for hearing God in Scripture. As one American leader states:

We believe in dreams and visions, tongues and interpretations. They have their place, but when folks throw themselves open to these things and expect to be guided and instructed and governed by them, they are on dangerous ground. God has declared that all Scripture is given for this purpose and He has never intended that the Church should be guided by

¹⁵ Ibid., 355-359.

¹⁶ Ibid., 359.

¹⁷ Ibid., 347, 364.

¹⁸ Ibid., 359.

¹⁹ 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].

dreams and visions, tongues and interpretations, and they are, in comparison with the Word as chaff to the wheat.²⁰

Hymes shows that this scepticism has been pervasive throughout wider history, particularly among cultures of the West. He quotes Kelsey who identifies enlightenment thinking and the influence of Aristotle as the main culprit.²¹ Hymes also attributes increasing reticence to dreams and visions to the problems of misuse and conflict with church authorities.

In more recent times, Hymes shows that “visions” have come to be valued over dreams due to the fact that unbelievers can experience the latter. Contemporary leader Bill Johnson is cited as one of many who have expanded the meaning of dreams to include the human imagination.²² Though anecdotal, Hymes’ study highlights an important trend. The repeated tendency of the church to reject extra-biblical revelatory experiences due to their associated problems reinforces the importance of a practice-informed theology for the experience.

Although few in number, these studies provide helpful insights into the theology and practice of contemporary Pentecostal revelatory experiences. Cartledge provides an excellent description of the range of revelatory modes experienced by P-C Christians and provokes questions this study addresses in detail. Even while Parker and Droll’s study does not give attention to the relationship of experience to Scripture in detail, their work highlights the value of Spirit experience in decision-making and as a tangible encounter with God that facilitates spiritual growth. Hymes’ work points to the threat revelatory experiences poses to pastors and leaders and the need to investigate how these experiences can be regulated and facilitated in the church.

4.1.2 Pentecostal-Charismatic Prophecy

Studies in P-C prophecy are reviewed here because they have some bearing on the broader revelatory experience. Turner was one of the first to consider contemporary prophecy reflecting on Cartledge’s work.²³ More recently, empirical studies have investigated the practice in Africa and Singapore. A number of non-empirical studies are also included here for their theological insights – two from early

²⁰ John McAlister, “Dreams and Visions,” *The Pentecostal Evangel* (April 6, 1929), 2.

²¹ Kelsey, *God, Dreams and Revelation*.

²² Johnson, *Dreaming with God*, 67-85; also William K. Kay and Anne E. Dyer, *Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies* (London: SCM, 2004), 120.

²³ Turner, *Holy Spirit*, 306-318.

(American) Pentecostalism and three from the African continent. These works offer helpful insights into the *content* and *function* of the broader revelatory experience.

The Nature, Purpose and Significance of Prophecy among Singaporean AG Pastors

Dennis Lum examined the nature, purpose and significance of prophecy among Assemblies of God pastors in Singapore. Using Johannes Van der Ven's practical theological model, the study analysed qualitative and quantitative data from a sample of 168 pastors. Prophetic experience was found to be revelatory in content and functioned according to the Pauline criteria of encouragement and comfort.²⁴ Lum's study revealed a perspective of contemporary prophecy as largely discontinuous with the biblical experience. Prophecy was understood to be "usually" coded in human words chosen by the speaker in line with Grudem's understanding.²⁵ Prophetic experience was also understood to carry a "much lower level of authority" than the Bible and pastoral leadership.²⁶ Reliance on Scripture, natural judgement and corporate agreement was preferred over revelatory experience for decision-making.²⁷

Lum's study is comprehensive and provides excellent insights into the practice of Pentecostal prophecy in Singapore. At the same time, his work is somewhat limited in its contribution to this thesis, largely because it examines the beliefs and practices of pastors rather than everyday congregational members. When it comes to the question of authority for prophetic experience, this is addressed from the perspective of pastors rather than recipients. It may not be surprising that prophecy did not carry more authority than pastoral leadership since the sample consisted of pastors who have a vested interest in protecting their authority against the claims of revelatory experience. The perspective of pastors may not be aligned with what is actually happening in the pews.

The Nature and Significance of Prophecy in Kenyan Churches

Samuel Muindi investigated the nature and significance of prophecy in Kenyan Pentecostal churches.²⁸ Like Lum, Muindi applied Van der Ven's model, but instead drew only on qualitative data. Eighty-two individuals were interviewed about the reception and delivery of prophetic messages. Muindi's study highlighted the "parakletic" nature of prophecy, as the Spirit acted to reveal the continuing and immediate presence of Jesus in the church.²⁹ This presence was felt to be "real"

²⁴ Lum, Location 6282.

²⁵ Ibid., Location 6766.

²⁶ Ibid., Location 6446, 6643.

²⁷ Ibid., Location 6695.

²⁸ Muindi, *Pentecostal-Charismatic Prophecy*.

²⁹ Ibid., 196-200.

and was contrasted with a “propositional-doctrinal” approach. Prophetic experience acted as a hermeneutical bridge between written Scripture and contemporary reality as the Holy Spirit “animated” Scriptural truths and applied them to specific contexts (Jn 6:63). The experience acted sacramentally to bring “human finitude” into an intense experience of “eternal-eschatological divine presence,” bringing the Pauline ideas of edification, encouragement and comfort. The impact of this process drew individuals closer to God and conduced Christ-likeness.³⁰

Muindi’s findings revealed a somewhat phenomenologically equivalent perspective of contemporary prophetic experience. Participants indicated that their perceptions, expressions, convictions, beliefs or actions in prophecy corresponded “fairly well” to the patterns in Scripture.³¹ A hermeneutical correlation between contemporary prophecy and the charismatic manifestations in the Lukan narratives was noted.³² At the same time, a clear distinction is made between “apostolic-canonical” prophecy and contemporary prophecy.³³ While being described as “enduring,” contemporary prophecy was seen to be less authoritative. Unlike the “universal nature” of canonical prophecy, charismatic prophecy is viewed as a “kairological” word for specific people in specific situations.³⁴ However, neither the nature of “canonical prophecy” as universal or the element of authority in contemporary experiences is elaborated upon in the study.

Prophecy in Early North American Pentecostalism

Historian Cecil Robeck provides some excellent insights in his study of published prophecies among early 20thC American Pentecostals.³⁵ His survey included Assembly of God (AG) periodicals, the writings of Aimee Semple McPherson, smaller Pentecostal organisations and samples from David Wilkerson and Charismatic groups. Robeck shows that the practice of writing and distributing prophecies to wide audiences was common in the early Christian community,³⁶ but argues against the practice since it produces theological confusion about their value relative to the canon. Of special concern is the practice of circulation that gives the impression of universal applicability for a prophecy, even when it had been addressed to individuals.³⁷ Robeck reinforces the argument that

³⁰ Ibid., 210-14.

³¹ Ibid., 156.

³² Ibid., 209.

³³ Ibid., 103-4.

³⁴ Ibid., 225.

³⁵ Robeck, Jr. “Written Prophecies, 26-45.

³⁶ Robeck also surveys Lutheran, Orthodox, Episcopalian, Baptist and Roman Catholic publications, “Written Prophecies,” 36; also Kay, *Prophecy!*, 95.

³⁷ Robeck, “Written Prophecies,” 33-43.

revelatory experiences in Scripture always have *universal* application while contemporary prophecies are *localised* to particular audiences. An additional concern related to the process of discernment when prophecies were written down without acknowledgement of the author or the context of the prophecy.³⁸ This practice limited the capacity for testing by the reader as it did not allow for existential, intuitive senses to be applied or for the character of the messenger to be judged (Mt 7:15-20).

For Robeck, these practices indicate a mismatch in Pentecostal practice and thinking. While Pentecostals maintain that contemporary prophecy is always subservient to the role of Scripture and falls *under* its authority, practices such as widespread circulation and references to doctrine in prophecies have “a strongly canonical ring” to them.³⁹ Discontinuation of these practices since the 1920s is noted as a sign of evolving maturity and Robeck calls for a complete moratorium on them.⁴⁰

As noted (Ch. 3.2.2.4), Robeck’s distinction of application in universal/local settings may go some way towards differentiating between revelatory experiences in Scripture and contemporary settings, but requires further development. As he himself notes, revelatory experiences occurred in local settings (e.g. Acts 10-15), but later had universal application and authority. On the other hand, Scripture reveals instances where Spirit-speaking experiences were authoritative for characters in the story, but not for contemporary readers (e.g. Acts 8:26-29; 16:6-10). The line dividing universality and particularity may indeed be a tenuous one. Robeck raises a number of important questions about the authority of prophetic experience that are addressed in this study.

Theological Reflections on Prophecy in the North American Foursquare Movement

Korean scholar Sang-Whan Lee provides insights into early American Pentecostal understandings of prophecy in his discussion of the Foursquare teachings of Aimee Semple McPherson.⁴¹ Lee shows that McPherson held a phenomenologically equivalent approach towards contemporary revelatory experience. Like other Pentecostals of her day, there was an expectation for the “exact repetition of the biblical gift of the Spirit” in her generation.⁴² For Lee, this *requires* that contemporary prophetic experience cannot be inferior and subordinate to the biblical experience in “truthfulness, credibility, and authority,” for the triune God himself is the author of these revelations and this would presuppose

³⁸ Ibid., 38-40.

³⁹ Ibid., 27 (with one prophecy referencing the Trinity, 30).

⁴⁰ Robeck, “Written Prophecies,” 32.

⁴¹ Sang-Whan Lee, “Pentecostal Prophecy,” *The Spirit and Church* 3.1 (2001): 147-71.

⁴² Ibid., 158-159.

the “self-inferior and subordination of God.”⁴³ Any additional revelations beyond Scripture are seen as *complementary*, rather than contradictory. Contemporary experiences are also *necessary* because the nature of God’s revelation (seen in Scripture) is gradual rather than complete and new situations require new revelation. His discussion also highlights issues related to the authority of the written “word of God” compared to the spoken word. He shows that McPherson, like Karl Barth, rightly makes an ontological distinction between the Scripture and the living Word of God, Jesus.⁴⁴ This approach has an impact on the discernment of experiences and emphasises the need for Trinitarian understandings.

Lee’s well-argued study provides insight into the understandings of prophecy in the early American Pentecostal tradition according to one of its most public figures. His observations about prophetic experience as not being inferior or subordinate to biblical revelation acts as an exception to the majority view in Pentecostal thinking.

Theological Reflections on Pentecostal Prophecy in South Africa

S. Fourie’s 1990 work reflects on Pentecostal history, a small sample of experiences in South African P-C circles and prophecies from a leading charismatic church to assess the parallels between contemporary and biblical prophecy.⁴⁵ He shows that a Pentecostal paradigm presupposes harmony between contemporary experience and that of the first Christians. This implies the “pollution” of human influence and personality in both the *biblical* and contemporary experience.”⁴⁶ The original canonisation process of Scripture is then correlated with the process of contemporary discernment. Furthermore, Fourie acknowledges the divine authority of contemporary prophetic experience, but qualifies it significantly. He argues for *relational* rather than universal authority. While no prophecy “can be deemed canonical for the whole church world-wide,” it *can* be “canonical” for a person or group of persons for a particular time or purpose. However, it should never be absolutised into “revelational knowledge.”⁴⁷

Although limited by its anecdotal nature and brevity as an “introduction to the academic discussion,” Fourie’s thesis provides helpful insights into the current project. Even with only public prophecy in mind, he begins to address the theological implications of the Pentecostal paradigm on the revelatory

⁴³ Ibid., 167-168.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 165.

⁴⁵ S. Fourie, *Prophecy: God’s Gift of Communication to the Church* (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1990).

⁴⁶ Ibid., 46.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 41-49.

experience more than other authors. His insights on how the process of discernment in community reflects the canonisation process are important for this study. However, his proposal regarding the relativisation of authority for prophetic experience does raise questions about how and if experience is applied to a wider audience (Ch. 3.2.2.4).

The Characteristics of Prophets and Prophecy in Zimbabwean AIC Churches

Gunda explores the nature of prophets and prophecy in the African Initiated Churches (AIC) of Zimbabwe.⁴⁸ Although a socio-historical rather than theological work, his study is pertinent in its discussion of Scripture and the use of an Old Testament lens for understanding prophets and prophecy. Gunda identifies a number of prophets in Zimbabwe who have become “mega-church superstars.” These prophets base their identity on the pre-classical prophets (especially Elijah and Elisha) and are known for the ability to accurately predict the future and perform “awe-inspiring deeds” including healing and other miracles. Gunda shows that this emphasis on prediction is a continuation of the idea of the “diviner-medium,” a well-known figure in the indigenous culture that provides security by manipulating the future. Prophetic activity in the Zimbabwean AICs is contrasted with the approach of Western mainline mission agencies who ignored the supernatural worldview of the local population.

What is apparent in Gunda’s study is the preference for Old Covenant understandings about prophets and prophecy over the New. This raises questions about the prophets’ status as “megastars” in light of New Testament models and where universal access to revelatory experience finds its place.

The Content of Prophecies in African-South African Churches

Madipoane Masenya (2005) explored the content of African-South African prophecy in relation to the Bible.⁴⁹ His study was concerned with the disparity between the *personal* subject matter of contemporary prophecy and the emphasis on social-political critique in Old Testament prophecy. Prophecy in the contemporary church was found to be focussed on individual and salvation concerns rather than on national or global systems of power.⁵⁰ Masenya’s recommendation was for the scope of contemporary prophecy to be broadened. Though anecdotal in nature, his study raises questions about the content of contemporary prophetic experience and the use of an Old Covenant lens for New Covenant experience.

⁴⁸ Masiwa Ragies Gunda, “Prediction and Power: Prophets and Prophecy in the Old Testament and Zimbabwean Christianity,” *Exchange* 41 (2012): 335–51.

⁴⁹ Madipoane Masenya, “The Bible and Prophecy in African-South African Pentecostal Churches,” *Missionalia* 33, no. 1 (2005): 35–45.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 40.

The review indicates somewhat of a mixture of theological understandings about contemporary prophecy and its significance in the Pentecostal church. Both Lum and Muindi reflect a two-tier approach whereby prophecy is conceived as a stronger canonical mode and a weaker contemporary mode. This approach is reflected in Robeck's study which highlights the problems that occur when equivalence in authority with the biblical experience is assumed. In contrast, Lee's work in early Pentecostalism and Fourie's reflections in the South African context assume phenomenological equivalency with the biblical and contemporary experience. Although largely anecdotal, they provide exceptions to the prevailing majority P-C view, while still evidencing some of the vestiges of a discontinuous position. Both Gunda and Masenya's work raises questions about the use of the Old Testament as a preferred source of understanding for contemporary prophecy. These studies again highlight a workable theological framework that addresses the nature of contemporary experience and the relationship of Scripture.

4.2 SOCIAL SCIENCE STUDIES

The P-C revelatory experience has attracted the attention of sociologists and anthropologists in US, Britain, Australia and Asia. In this section, social science studies of the revelatory experience are reviewed in two areas: their impact in the church and the role of discernment in community.

4.2.1 The Impact of Revelatory Experience

This section reviews studies that highlight the positive and negative impacts of revelatory experience on churches in North America, Britain, Asia, Australia and Nepal.

The Nature of Revelatory Experience in a North American Charismatic Church

Tanya Luhrmann investigated the nature of revelatory experiences in a 2012 anthropological study in North American (charismatic) evangelical spirituality. Luhrmann spent a year in participant observation and in-depth qualitative interviews in order to answer the question: how does God become real for people?⁵¹ Her study provides a detailed account into the nature of revelatory experiences in a Vineyard church. Luhrmann's work is valuable for its vivid descriptions of revelatory experience and its function for participants. She highlights the personal and intimate nature of God who is "supernaturally present" for congregation members. As in Droll's study in Africa, she

⁵¹ Tanya M. Luhrmann, *When God Talks Back* (New York: Vintage Books, 2012).

notes a key function of revelatory experience is to make relationship with God “real” for the individual with all its attendant affections.⁵²

The Impact of Revelatory Experiences in the American Assemblies of God

Margaret Poloma is a seminal writer in the field of “charismatic” experience and has conducted several in-depth studies in the American AG. Her personal experiences as a Roman Catholic prompted interest in religious experiences including prayer, Pentecostalism, contemporary revivals and divine healing.

Poloma’s 1989 study examined the routinisation of charismatic experiences in AG churches through the lens of Max Weber’s thesis. The study was wide-reaching and drew on data from pastors in one congregation as well as observations of over 60 others from 11 different states.⁵³ Using a quantitative scale that included two items on prophecy, one on visions and dreams, and one on being “divinely led to perform a specific activity,” she reported numerous instances of revelatory experience, with over half of pastors reporting them as a frequent occurrence.⁵⁴ Her study showed that prayer experiences served as a “dual motivating and empowering mechanism” and had significant impact on attitudes and behaviour – including the forgiveness of injuries, political activism and subjective perceptions of well-being. She notes that these findings correspond with other research, including a 1993 Episcopalian study.⁵⁵

At the same time, Poloma’s study highlighted the threat paranormal leadings pose to leaders and institutions. Experiences carry the potential to create disorder in the public service when an illegitimate message is spoken out or inappropriate affections are expressed. At an individual level, experiences can stimulate the pioneering of personal endeavours that then challenge established bureaucracy and structures.⁵⁶ She cites two cases where personal revelatory experiences led to a direct challenge to bureaucratic rules and caused breaks with the institution. While religious experiences were generally held in high esteem by pastors, there were indications that the denomination was moving down the familiar pathway of institutionalisation in line with Weber’s thesis. Poloma concluded that in order to navigate the tension between revelatory experience and institutional

⁵² Ibid., 92.

⁵³ Poloma, *Crossroads*.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 66-67, 77.

⁵⁵ Ibid., 176.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 129-139.

authority, an ability to regulate and tolerate conflict was necessary.⁵⁷ She highlights the key role of pastors in the dilemma.⁵⁸

Poloma's study in the American AG was followed up 20 years later with John Green. This study gathered quantitative and qualitative data in a further 21 congregations. Poloma and Green drew on the work of theorist Pitirim Sorokin and his concept of "love energy" to assess the outcome of religious experiences. Termed "godly love," this energy is defined as a "dynamic interaction between divine and human love that enlivens and expands benevolence."⁵⁹ It includes the idea that knowing God and having a personal experience of his love brings with it energising power.

As in Poloma's previous study, the revelatory experience had significant impact on individual behaviours. Direct links were found between spiritual experience and service towards others including healing, charity and evangelism.⁶⁰ This benevolence also extended to charitable works beyond the church into public affairs and social welfare programs.⁶¹ In the denomination overall, the research showed that there were indicators of fresh revitalisation spurred on by new experiences of the Spirit. Poloma suggests that these had been brought about by new revivals and connections with relational networks that fresh experiences with the Spirit as the goal.⁶² Institutional tensions remained, but had become secondary to the priority of empowering Spirit experiences.

The Impact of Revelatory Experiences in Britain and Asia

In 2000, William Kay sought to repeat Poloma's research among Pentecostals in Britain.⁶³ Using similar scales, Kay investigated the charismatic experiences of 930 pastors from four Pentecostal congregations of varying denominations. Though limited only to pastors, his study reported similar findings to Poloma, with a positive correlation between charismatic and evangelistic activity. More recently, Kay completed a study in AG Pentecostal churches in Singapore and Hong Kong and found significant positive correlation between church growth and the practice of spiritual gifts in the

⁵⁷ Ibid., 233.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 139.

⁵⁹ Poloma and Green, 11, 102-187.

⁶⁰ Ibid., 135-142.

⁶¹ Ibid., 120, 141, 186.

⁶² Ibid., 10.

⁶³ William K. Kay, *Pentecostals in Britain* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000).

congregation.⁶⁴ In spite of the many cultural differences between Pentecostal churches in the US, Britain and Asia, he concluded that charismatic activity was a common factor in church growth.

The Decline of Revelatory Experiences in Australia

Angelo Cettolin examined changes in Pentecostal spirituality in the *Australian Christian Churches* (ACC) in light of Weber's thesis of institutionalisation and Poloma's work in the US.⁶⁵ Using a combination of quantitative and qualitative techniques, Cettolin surveyed 135 pastors on their revelatory experiences including hearing God speak through Scripture, visions and dreams and prophecy. His study indicated that ACC pastors were generally moving away from the revelatory practices associated with early Pentecostalism, with 40% of pastors reporting that they were "only occasionally" or "never" led by the Spirit.

In response to the findings, Cettolin warns against a "simplistic dichotomy of charisma versus institution, order versus freedom or Spirit versus structure."⁶⁶ Since institutionalisation is a result of growth, conflict with charismatic experience is inevitable as it has been throughout history. He points to the need for flexibility and innovation in perpetuating growth in church movements. Like Poloma, Cettolin identifies the essential role of the local church pastor in maintaining and facilitating Spirit experiences amongst members.⁶⁷

The Role of Dreams and Visions in Nepali P-C Churches

Robert Sears 2018 anthropological study investigated the role of dreams in a sample of Christians from P-C churches in the Hindu nation of Nepal.⁶⁸ Using a combination of surveys, interviews, and participant observation over a period of nine months, he explored the prevalence, preconditions, processes and impact of dreams in the church.

Sears indicates that Nepalese P-C Christians are sensitive to the possibility that dreams are revelatory and convey messages from God.⁶⁹ He found that dreams played a significant role in conversion, ministry and as a trigger for spiritual growth and transformation. Frequently, they led to an

⁶⁴ William K. Kay, "Pentecostals and the Bible," *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 24 (2004): 71-83.

⁶⁵ Cettolin, 59-61, 66-68.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 89.

⁶⁷ Poloma, *Crossroads*, 139; Cettolin, 111.

⁶⁸ Robert E. Sears, "Dreams and Christian Conversion: Gleanings from a Pentecostal Church Context in Nepal," *Mission Studies* 35 (2018): 183-203.

⁶⁹ Ibid., 200

intensification of religious commitment – increasing “one’s faith in God” and “connected P-C Christians to their calling.”⁷⁰ Dreams also initiated calls to action such as evangelism and prayer for non-Christian family members and the sick.⁷¹ Even while there was some awareness of the potential for pastoral fallout, this did not seem to be a major concern.⁷² Overall, Sears concluded that dreams provided many beneficial effects, both individually and corporately to the Nepali church. They provided personal direction and acted as catalysts for religious change or growth, triggering evangelistic responses and opportunities for ministry.

The findings of Luhrmann, Poloma, Poloma and Green, Cettolin, Kay and Sears all point to the potential of revelatory experiences to facilitate the ministry goals of Pentecostals. The findings are in line with Pentecostal theological understandings about the function of revelatory experiences as the church moves forward under the guidance of the Spirit. Each of the studies reveal a common theme in relation to the benefits of experience for ministry, outreach and benevolent service. This study seeks to investigate further how revelatory experiences function at a closer level. Questions remain as to the authority of these experiences in manifesting outcomes and how they correlate with the experiences of the biblical narratives.

At the same time, the studies in the American AG and the ACC also clearly indicate that the inevitable forces of institutionalisation mitigate against high-level revelatory experiences. The unstable nature and the threat experiences pose to organisational bureaucracy is a recurring feature. How this is addressed theologically and sociologically is a focus of this study.

4.2.2 The Nature of Discernment in Community

The following studies examine the role of discernment in in North American and African church communities.

Prophetic Experience in a Pentecostal Community

Poloma furthered her interest in prophetic experience in a 2003 study of a local Canadian church – Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship (TACF). The study highlighted the role of prophetic experiences in building the church community by providing a social history.⁷³ Her work also

⁷⁰ Ibid., 194-5.

⁷¹ Ibid., 198.

⁷² Ibid., 201.

⁷³ Poloma, *Main Street Mystics*, 146,168.

described how the local community provided discernment for revelatory experiences through “prophetic safety valves.” These guidelines were regularly communicated by leaders in public services. For example, believers were reminded that prophetic messages are influenced by human error and required testing against the criteria of Scripture, biblical teaching and the outcomes of “peace, hope and comfort.” Congregants were advised to maintain a “wait and see” attitude where there was uncertainty.⁷⁴ This was particularly relevant for D/Vs where ambiguity was most evident.⁷⁵ Poloma also noted that this type of regulation by the central leader was not present in private settings allowing for greater freedom as well as greater risk. However, her work remained focussed on the public setting. This project will examine how the activities and rituals of the community assist regulation of the experience in private.

The Role of Prophetic Experience in the Establishment of a Pentecostal Church

A later study by Poloma and Hood illustrates the disruptive nature of prophetic experience and the need for communal discernment processes. This project consisted of four years of close investigation into the establishment of a new Pentecostal church in Atlanta in 2003. As in earlier studies, prophetic experience played a major role in building the “Blood and Fire” (BnF) church. Beginning as an outreach to the homeless, the church carried a strong emphasis on reaching the marginalised and poor through the power of the Holy Spirit. Revelation came most frequently through reading the Bible, “thoughts in the mind” and via leaders in authority. Less common were visions and dreams, nature and journaling. These revelatory experiences were modelled by the senior leader via public prophecies, accounts of prophetic experiences and teachings.

However, the study also details the breakdown of the BnF church and the role revelatory experience played in the conflict. At BnF, the social sanctioning of a revelatory experience was based on the leader’s discretion alone. When prophetic experiences of congregation members began to undermine his authority, he discredited them.⁷⁶ Prophecy was then used as a tool to silence or discredit dissenters. Prophecies were often changed and claims to revelation by the pastor were not backed up by appropriate behaviours. Poloma and Hood noted that little was done to discern the many prophetic voices present.⁷⁷ The study highlights the importance of discernment in the community and the dangers of revelatory experience when clear measures and processes are not in place. It also points to the potential for abuse of prophetic experiences in power struggles and the need for a plurality of voices in the discernment process.

⁷⁴ Ibid., 147.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 165.

⁷⁶ Poloma and Hood, *Blood and Fire*, 105, 186.

⁷⁷ Ibid., 186.

Dream Interpretation and Discernment in an African Church

Social anthropologist Simon Charsley examined how dreams functioned in a Ugandan AIC.⁷⁸ His study was focussed on a particular AIC in Uganda where dream-telling was a regular feature of the program and led to personal confession and prayer. He found that dream-telling was an act of leadership assertion and reflected the concerns of the church including membership and leadership status. Interpretation as a form of discernment was heavily vested in the Senior leader who performed it in the public service. Charsley's work points to the power dynamics surrounding the discernment of revelatory experience and shows how revelatory experience can be used to affirm church leadership.

Discernment among American "Pentecostal Catholics"

Meredith McGuire's 1982 study of American "Pentecostal Catholics" further highlights the role of discernment in church communities. Her work analysed 63 prophecies (including messages in tongues) and their interpretations from seven prayer groups.⁷⁹ Though focussing on public prophecy rather than on private revelations, McGuire's work is relevant as it reveals how discernment relates to the flow of power in community. Even though prophetic experience produces a sense of empowerment for the individual (as divine authority is received through the experience), the leader limits this authority through the act of discernment.⁸⁰ Like the role interpretation played by the Senior Pastor in Charsley's study, discernment becomes an act of power. Thus, while the individual experience takes on the appearance of egalitarianism, this can be thwarted by the leader as he/she acts to maintain stability. McGuire's observation is important since it calls into question how stability is maintained in private settings and the larger issue of how the democratic intent of the revelatory experience can be maintained.

The studies of Poloma, Poloma and Green, Charsley and McGuire all reveal the importance of proper discernment in the life of the community if revelatory experiences are to produce their intended outcomes and avoid the instability demonstrated at BnF. Discernment is a crucial factor in facilitating the revelatory experience in community and maximising its potential to meet ecclesial goals. While revelatory experiences can be regulated in the public service by the leader, the question of how they are managed in private experience are not addressed in these works. This area forms a major focus in this study and will be addressed from both theological and sociological perspectives.

⁷⁸ Simon Charsley, "Dreams and Purposes: An Analysis of Dream Narratives in an Independent African Church," *Africa* 57, no. 3 (1987): 281–96.

⁷⁹ McGuire, 11.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 99, 105.

4.3 SUMMARY

This review indicates that the Pentecostal revelatory experience has attracted the attention of sociologists more than that of Pentecostal theologians. These works reinforce the ubiquity of the experience in Pentecostalism. Although the studies represent a wide variety of cross-cultural contexts, a number of common themes are evident. The potency of the experience both individually and corporately is clear. Revelatory experience remains an effective vehicle for the fulfilment of particular ecclesial goals. However, that same potency equates to greater potential for institutional instability and pastoral damage. The process of discernment thus plays a critical role. In response to the problems of revelatory experience, a trajectory of decline is evidenced in Hymes' and Cettolin's study. Lum shows that prophetic experience is also likely to be restricted to the public setting in order to be regulated even though this may thwart the universal access made possible under the New Covenant. This study examines how institutional stability is maintained in the Australian setting.

Theologically, Cartledge is the only study that has examined the private revelatory experiences of Pentecostals in relation to Scripture. His work reflects the discontinuous framework and is reflected on through the lens of prophecy, so does not address the questions of phenomenologically equivalent experience. Lee's study on the other hand points to a continuous approach among Early Foursquare Pentecostals. The studies in prophecy provide some insights into the content and function of the broader revelatory experience, but are generally limited by their public setting. What is required is an in-depth investigation of the private revelatory experience of ordinary church members that confronts the anomalies between Pentecostal theology and practice and addresses the relationship to Scripture as a whole. This study builds on the findings of the preceding research by focussing on the more problematic higher-level experiences of Pentecostals and their outworking at every phase.

5. FINDINGS: THE THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE OF REVELATORY EXPERIENCES AMONG AUSTRALIAN PENTECOSTALS

The empirical research data is presented in this chapter in two sections. The first section (5.1) focuses on the revelatory experience at an *individual* level and includes the data from the semi-structured interviews (combining responses from all three churches). I begin with a brief description of the sample, followed by a summary of the common themes in the experiences and the ordinary theology of participants as they reflect on them. Various testimonies are included throughout to illustrate key concepts and patterns. This provides the data for the sociological analysis (Ch. 6.1) and the theological analysis of the individual experience (Ch. 7, 8).

The second section (5.2) presents the findings relating to the *communal* context of the experience and includes the data from participant observation, focus groups and to a lesser degree, the interviews. The findings of the study are presented within the cases to highlight the distinctive themes and patterns in each church (A, B, C). Each case includes a description of the church demographic and a summary of their approach to revelatory experience. This provides the data for sociological analysis “across the cases” (Ch. 6.2).

5.1 INDIVIDUAL REVELATORY EXPERIENCES

This section includes a description of the sample and a report of the findings relating to the *content*, *function* and *process* of revelatory experience at each phase.

5.1.1 The Sample

The sample included 54 individuals from three Australian Pentecostal churches. Participants were fairly evenly spread across genders (with the exception of Church A where there was a slightly more females), ages and educational backgrounds (App. 8).

In addition, focus groups were conducted in each of the churches – two groups in Church A and B and three groups in Church C. In Church B and C, youth-based groups were chosen to compensate for the lower number of volunteer interviews from this age-group in the sample.

From the 54 interviews and 7 focus groups, the ordinary theology of 89 individuals in relation to 204 experiences were analysed. Interviewees and focus group members were coded according to their church and status as individuals (e.g. A1, A2, A3, B1, C1 etc), pastors (e.g. AP, BP, CP) or focus

group members (e.g. AF1, AF2, BF1 etc). Focus groups were coded according to their church (AFG1, BFG1, CFG1 etc).

5.1.2 The Content of Revelatory Experiences

The content of revelatory experiences refers to their subject matter and how they are “revelatory.”

5.1.2.1 Personal and Particular Subject Matter

The subject matter of revelatory experiences in the study was found to be personal and particular to the recipient and their immediate circumstances. Experiences comprised a wide range of issues covering every facet of life, including personal and spiritual development, work and career, family and relationships, health, finances and possessions. Some experiences referenced mundane issues, such as the need to abide by local council rules in cleaning up dog waste (A3), whether to attend a certain conference (A12, A14) or starting a lay ministry in the local nursing home (B3). Others dealt with major concerns and triggered life-changing decisions such as shifts in careers (C12), relocation to new countries (A5, A6, A16, AP21) and who to/not to marry (A12, A13, A9, C15, B7, C12, B15). Some experiences were highly specific and detailed, while others were more generic.

A small number of experiences addressed wider concerns beyond the immediate audience that related to the church’s global mission – for example, “revival” in Europe, the underground church in China and atrocities in North Korea (A4, A5, A6).

While experiences were embedded with theological understandings, none challenged core tenets of the Christian faith. A small number pointed towards enhanced theological and eschatological understandings. One respondent reported hearing God say, "I don't do anything the same twice, or maybe I will!" (A10). Another testified to visions of heaven and God’s council chambers with images of apocalyptic-like scenes (A4). A small number of experiences concerned controversial contemporary issues including divorce (A19) and gender roles (AP21, AP22).

5.1.2.2 Previously Unknown Information

Nearly one third of experiences were reported to contain some element of previously unknown information. The information in these experiences was “unknown” in three ways: 1. It was outside the scope of the participant’s knowledge at the time, 2. It had been “hidden” in the past. 3. It related to events that had not yet taken place. For example, see extended testimonies regarding a paedophile and an erroneous brain X-ray (App. 9.1).

Approximately one third of the experiences contained information that related to events that had not yet taken place. However, these were not merely “foretelling” or predictive in that they required no human participation. In the vast majority of cases, the experience called for active behavioural change. Co-operation by the participant was understood to be required for prophetic fulfilment, such as a promise for healing from cancer which called for intercessory prayer (A9). A very small number of experiences were time-based: “In five years, you will be in fulltime ministry” (CF1); “You’ll get work in March” (A15) – the majority were open-ended. Others involved visionary experiences that manifested many years later (B5).

Some instances related to revelation of unknown information in the past. These were seen to be purposeful in the present such as the case in which traumatic experiences in the womb were revealed during a process of healing (A9).

In sum, content was largely personal and particular, often future-oriented and frequently contained information that was previously unknown to the recipient. Experiences also included the application and reinforcement of known information in different settings. A small number of experiences impinged on wider areas of church teaching, such as eschatology and contemporary ethical issues.

5.1.3 The Function of Revelatory Experiences

This section includes the data relating to questions surrounding the function and outcomes of revelatory experiences for Pentecostals in the sample.

5.1.3.1 Build “Personal Relationship” with God

The primary function of revelatory experiences for respondents was to facilitate a “personal” relationship with God. Experiences were understood to reflect God’s inclination towards friendship, partnership and intimacy in a manner likened to human relationships. Since prayer involved the sharing of personal concerns and petitions towards God, it was unsurprising that God would respond in kind. This expectation was founded on revelatory experiences in Scripture:

I don't know how to have a relationship with someone I cannot hear. “God, if I am to go forward with you – you need to speak with me. It says in your Word that you are no respecter of persons, which means that in your eyes, you can treat me the same as Moses and Abraham and you spoke to them in a burning bush or whatever.” And I actually really cried out. I was very angry because I couldn't hear him and I had no dreams and no nothing. I said, “What's the use of saying you want a relationship with me if you can't talk to me?” (C3).

This relationship characterised by two-way communication was seen as integral to faith:

If I didn't hear him, I don't think I would have walked with him. It would be a very monotonous walk if he didn't speak back; if he didn't respond; if he didn't get involved in whatever was going on in my life and if I didn't get involved in what he's doing because it is a two-way street.” (A5).

Divine communication then reflected a God who desired to be actively involved in the lives of respondents. The personal nature of subject matter pointed to God’s deep care for their everyday concerns, desires and aspirations. This relational aspect involved gaining knowledge of the divine nature and the Gospel and then applying it to their lives:

Oh, it's brought me closer to him. It's broken down lies about him. For example, last year he spoke to me that he was going to show me his goodness. I realised that I had a warped perception of what his goodness looks like. So, he took me through that whole experience to show me what it's like. It broke down a whole stack of lies that I believed (A10).

These experiences were contrasted with the experience of learning from the Bible because they were tailored to the individual, which in turn enabled generic knowledge about God to be applied to personal settings (A13, C4).

5.1.3.2 A Vehicle of Divine Presence

Revelatory experience presented a vehicle for experiencing the felt presence of a supernatural deity in specific and tangible ways. As such, it functioned as an apologetic: “I know God is real” (B14, A14, C15). This was particularly the case in experiences that involved previously unknown information. Respondents understood that as a sovereign and transcendent deity, God was able to access information from beyond the confines of human intelligence and the material realm. Such experiences affirmed his supernatural presence and induced a sense of wonderment and awe.

Experiences also affirmed the divine character as mindful and loving, providing a sense of comfort for individuals. This was the case for one respondent who “saw” her Grandmother as a young woman in heaven in a vision at the time of her death on the other side of the world. The experience brought comfort and closure as she was unable to attend her funeral later (A6). Other experiences acted as a form of encouragement and hope, particularly when they pointed to future realities that later came to

pass (“You will get married” (C6); “This is a vision of your future wife”/“your children” (C4, A9); “You will be reconciled with your mother.”)

5.1.3.3 Provision of Divine Care and Protection

A significant number of respondents reported that revelatory experiences functioned practically to provide care and protection of them emotionally and/or physically. On a number of occasions, “God spoke” to protect interviewees from car accidents (A17, A12, A19), a fire in the home (B12), domestic and sexual abuse (C6, A19), an impending lawsuit (A20), redback spiders in a bowl of grapes (AF1) and a suicidal attempt (AP22). Some experiences referred to the healing of physical ailments including the correction of a misread x-ray that circumvented brain surgery (C14), diagnosis of a vitamin deficiency (C3) and the healing of arthritis in a pianist’s hands (C1). This “new” information equipped the person to deal with the matter at hand especially in cases that involved warnings of impending danger. In this way God acted as a helper in times of need. There were also a number of experiences that referenced the provision of *future* needs, including finances, housing (C3, A1, A10) and relationships (C4, C6, A9, A13).

5.1.3.4 Personal Transformation and Sanctification

Revelatory experience was widely reported to lead to personal transformation. Spirit-encounters acted as a change agent, providing the motivation and impetus for personal growth and changes in behaviours that resulted in a sense of betterment in life. Approximately one third of respondents referenced personal and spiritual growth as a result of the experience.

Personal development included healing from emotional wounds such as abuse, divorce and childhood trauma as well as growth areas like self-esteem (A4) and leadership ability (C14). It also involved aspects of moral change, such as forgiveness (A15, B1, B8), development of generosity (B14, AF6), how to be a better marriage partner (A14, B13) and the eradication of corrupting influences (C12). This often led to the restoration and building of healthy human relationships and the removal of negative ones (B7, C10, C12). Experiences often deeply impacted the recipient emotionally and contributed to its transformational impact. For example, see extended testimony regarding the impact of a vision related to God’s provision (App. 9.2.1).

Many of the revelatory experiences referred to the underlying process of sanctification in a person’s life. Change was possible, but only with submission to the revelatory message. A small number of experiences (6) were reported to have a disciplinary function. These were understood in the context of a loving relationship and were seen as necessary to curtail poor attitudes and decisions. In two cases,

revelatory experience significantly impacted respondents at a time of rebellion and called them back to the “right path” (CF2).

5.1.3.5 Revelation of “God’s Plan”

Within a relational framework, messages also functioned to reveal “God’s plan” for the person’s life:

(When you) accept Jesus, it’s his will over our lives that guides us, not what we want. As soon as we say, “Jesus, you’re Lord of our lives,” we’re slaves to him. So, he’s going to let me know. He’s going to send me a donkey to talk to me or a fish to eat me up. I can think of plenty of times in my life when he gave me that kick (CF2).

In a significant number of cases, revelatory experiences provided a form of personal guidance that resulted in radical shifts:

I went to a breakfast seminar down at the Yacht Club. The speaker was talking on “women of excellence.” I was only about 3 years old in the Lord at the time, but the Holy Spirit was stirring me to change direction in my life. I’d worked previously in clubs and hotels and that type of scene and God wanted to get me out of that. And he knew that I loved working on my own.

Afterwards, I said to the Lord, “I don’t feel like a woman of excellence. Every job I’ve ever had, I haven’t liked. I want to change direction.” I was at Bible School at the time. It was afternoon, I had a glass of wine in my hand (he will talk to you if you have a glass of wine in your hand) and he spoke to me and said, “Go back to your cleaning business.” I was so excited. I heard it audibly. So that was a definite change of direction that God wanted me to do (B9).

In cases where experiences involved the fulfilment of predictive information, participants felt a sense of affirmation of the divine will and a confirmation for their decision. For example, see extended testimony, App. 9.2.2. In these cases, the visionary experience became a source of strength when serious challenges were later faced.

5.1.3.6 Mobilisation to Ministry and Mission

Approximately one quarter of the experiences referred to ministry and mission-related activity. This included calls to a particular home church, volunteer and paid service with local welfare services and visitation, vocational ministry, intercessory prayer and evangelism as well as cross-cultural mission.

Often major life changes were involved such as the call to minister to unknown tribes in China (C8), foster children (C6), work with the homeless (C6), join trips to India (C2, C7), pioneer a new church (AP21), evangelise strangers (C15), enter pastoral ministry (AP21, AP22, B16) and start outreach courses (C10). For example:

I was standing on a cliff and looking out to the sea. It was dark – it was night-time and there was a massive full moon on the horizon. As I was watching, the moon started to go behind the horizon and the ocean was pulled back, like a sheet or a blanket. It was kind of apocalyptic, end-of-the-world imagery. On the bottom of the ocean floor were all of these fish bones and carcasses. Basically, what I felt God was saying was, "These are all the fish that no-one went to catch. These are all the fish no-one bothered going fishing for."

I felt that God wanted to talk to me about being a fisher of men. Obviously, that's what we're all called to do, but I felt him say it to me. And it wasn't a condemning thing, you know. It wasn't, "I'm cross with you because you're not doing it" – it was just a fact. I guess I took it to mean that there are so many areas in life and so many different places that people are not going to share the Gospel.

This is a massive thing I've always struggled with because I'm an actor and I've always struggled if this is where I'm supposed to be and what I am supposed to be doing. It can be a really, really dark place. I have to say no to a lot of things because I feel it wouldn't be right. I have a heart for people in the entertainment industry; I have a lot of non-Christian friends who are actors, but I find they're among the hardest people I've ever met to share with about Jesus (C12).

In a number of experiences, the verification of previously unknown information in the experience acted as the impetus to propel respondents into ministry. For example, the revelation of an unknown location for a church in an unfamiliar city (AP21), the existence of an unknown tribe in China (C8) and the secret sex crimes of a North Korean dictator (A6).

A number of interviewees reflected on how their experiences took them beyond their natural inclinations and lifestyles but found that "this is what they were made for" (C9). For one respondent, fostering a child was not something she had considered as a single woman (C6). Another reflected on an experience that led him to minister with children: "It's funny because I continually wanted to fight it. It wasn't something I wanted to do... I never felt convicted to do kids. But then I thought, 'Wow, I really walked into my hub here!'" (C9). Such experiences were understood to be in keeping with the

biblical experience such as the call of Old Testament prophets (AP22) or Paul's "Macedonian call" (AP21).

In sum, the strongest function of revelatory messages for participants was to "build a personal relationship" with God. It was within that context that encounters brought about a sense of divine presence, provided protection and healing, revealed divine plans, triggered a process that led to transformation and sanctification and mobilised respondents to ministry and mission. Respondents reported that the revelatory experience was integral to their spiritual lives, representing not just one aspect, but the substance of it. Comments such as, "I couldn't live without it" were frequent (A6, A16, A10, A5); "Oh it has turned my life completely around. If I didn't hear from him, I wouldn't be here." (A2). Those who reported less frequent experiences did not see them as central to their spiritual life. In these cases, the experience acted as a general encouragement and supplement to the overall Christian experience.

The next part of the findings includes data relating to the "process" of revelatory experiences. This comprises three phases: hearing, recognising and responding.

5.1.4 The Process of Revelatory Experience: Hearing God's Voice

The *hearing* phase of the experience is concerned with the modes of communication in revelatory experiences. This section includes a description of the various modes in general order of their frequency in the sample as well as the question of any preferences between them.

5.1.4.1 Revelatory Modes

Participants in the study heard from God through a variety of modes including voices, dreams and visions, sensory impressions, Scripture, books, people (preachers, prophetic messengers or counsellors), circumstances and nature.

Voices

Nearly all interviewees reported to have heard God speak through a "voice." This voice "sounded" like one of their own thoughts, yet was distinguishable by its tone, content and the fact that it "came out of nowhere" (A14, B1, C10). The phrase "still small voice" (1 Kings 19:12) was used regularly to describe the experience (B12, C2, C4, C8), perhaps reflecting the "quietness" of a thought. The voice was internal, like "an inner witness" (B7, B12) and took place in the realm of the mind like "a conversation in your head" (A19, AP22). Some described it as coming from deep within their "spirit/heart/soul" rather than from their mind. On a number of occasions, the voice was reported to

have been spoken in the first person. Sometimes the message came as an idea or single word, while at other times as complete sentences. Often a question was posed.

One fifth of interviewees recounted experiences involving an “audible” voice. This voice was variously described as “loud and sharp” (A12), “sharp and clear” (A13), “booming” (C15), “deeper than my voice” (A8, A13) and “the most powerful voice I’ve ever heard” (B12). In some cases, the experience had physical after-effects and was accompanied by strong emotion. The “audible” voice was reported to be more recognisable than the internal voice: “It wasn’t an inner thought because with the inner thought, sometimes I go, ‘Was that me or was that God?’ This one, I was like, “that’s not *my* voice” – it wasn’t my sounding voice.” (A13).

Instances of an “audible” voice were relatively rare and typically occurred in times of crisis, such as before a pending car accident (A8, A12, A17, A19) or on the brink of death (B6, C12). They also occurred at pivotal life moments such as peak faith transitions (B12, C7), the beginning of new ventures (B3) and the naming of marriage partners in unlikely situations (A13, C15).

Some confusion existed about what constituted an “audible” voice compared to “inaudible.” Two thirds of interviewees who experienced an “audible voice” reported that a bystander would not have heard the voice even though it had seemed “loud” and “external” to them (the remaining third were unsure). One respondent likened it to Paul’s experience on the Damascus Road – it was “out loud,” but others didn’t hear it (A4). The experience was sometimes difficult to describe; “It was audible to me – I can’t put an explanation to it. It’s not in your head. It’s not your imagination. It’s not in your heart. It’s like it is external.” (AF10). Another describes it in terms of material and spiritual realities:

I think that there are two different realms, because I think that the audible voice is in the physical realm and so I can hear it with my physical ear. But in the spirit realm, my ears are different, although they are spiritual supernatural ears, they are not my physical ears. They are different. I don't hear them with my physical ears (A15).

Dreams and Visions

Dreams and visions (D/Vs) were a common form of hearing God’s voice, with over three quarters of the sample reporting them. Messages came in picture form and were labelled “dreams” during sleep and “visions” during waking hours. Two respondents referred to a trance-like state in between the two (A4, AP22).

A number of visionary experiences contained symbolic imagery that required interpretation, such as a vision of a bird in the cage being released into freedom (A10) and a weasel representing a damaging person (A19). A few experiences included biblical imagery such as the image of a sword in the person's mouth (C12). The following vision was interpreted as a call to move out of one ministry network into another:

We (husband and wife) were at a restaurant eating and the wine steward kept trying to pour our wine and the wine was going all over the table. Try as we might, we could not get the wine to be contained. We looked at each other and just knew we had to change tables. So, we got up, changed tables and the same wine steward came over and poured the wine and it was perfect. That was such a clear word for us (AP21).

To a lesser degree, visionary experiences relayed a literal, non-symbolic scene, such as the location of a lost child, a future scene of the person singing in a nursing home (B3), a church building that later came to be purchased (A9) and a baby yet to be born (B4). One experience contained a mixture of literal and symbolic elements with a vision of a man (who turned out to be the senior pastor) standing with a "staff like Moses" in his hand (A4).

A small number of experiences involved other-worldly apocryphal-type encounters: "I saw Jesus putting me in the father's lap saying, this is your father" (AP22), visions of Jesus (A5, AP22, A12), hell, heaven and angels (C4, AP22, A16) and the Apostle John (AP22). Respondents aligned their experiences with those of the canonical characters Ezekiel and Isaiah (A4, AP22), Paul (A4) and Peter (A4). Three experiences were described as "open visions." As A4 describes it, "An open vision is outside – it's right in front of you – it's tangibly here, like my cup with the tea in it, there it is; I can see that 100% clearly. The other type is in my mind." (A4).

Sensory Impressions

Three quarters of the sample reported revelatory experiences that were received via a sudden onset of new feelings. These communicated a message in a "wordless" way and were variously described as a "hunch", "impression", "conviction," "prompting", a "sense in the gut" and a "tugging at my heart." The experience usually involved physical sensations, like a stirring or excitement that "rose up" and was accompanied by a compulsion to act in some way: "Suddenly my heart will start pounding and I will feel butterflies in my stomach and I've learnt through experience, to just stop and quickly pray and ask 'What is it God?' I will feel the Holy Spirit on me physically, tangibly." (A20). One interviewee woke up in bed physically shaking and understood the experience to be part of his call to vocational ministry (BP16).

These experiences also included negative sensations of discomfort and resistance. Here, the message was often challenging or corrective. One interviewee recounted a distinct lack of peace while booking flights to attend a conference. This was interpreted to be God's way of saying not to go (A14). Another reported discomfort watching a TV show, interpreting it to be God's way of saying "turn it off." (B3).

Additionally, one interviewee reported revelatory experiences involving the sense of smell – such as the fragrance of talcum powder (taken to mean comfort), fresh rain and frankincense (A6).

Scripture

Nearly all respondents reported to have heard God's voice via Scripture. This was commonly described as a Scripture verse "jumping out" at me (A3, C2, C5, C12), the Bible "coming alive" (A7) or the "Holy Spirit using the Scripture to highlight something" (A7, A16). This often took place in the course of regular routines or devotional times, but did not happen on every occasion: "It could be the verse of the day – it just speaks to you exactly where you're at. Gosh, I so needed that!" (CF3). Occasionally, individuals heard God's voice highlighting certain passages in the Scripture that were relevant to their situation: "If I'm praying before I sleep and I'm down and I need to hear from God, the Holy Spirit will give me a psalm in my spirit. I will open up my Bible and the psalm will speak to my heart or to what is happening at the time." (B7).

The data revealed two ways that Scripture functioned as a hearing form. The first was to apply an aspect of established doctrinal truth to the recipient's life. For example, God's voice was "heard" through Jesus' teachings about worry in the Gospels (A4), the importance of honesty in Proverbs (A18) and the need to find comfort solely in God in 2 Corinthians 1 (A18). A passage on seeking God's "kingdom first" and everything else "being added" was understood to apply to A14's marriage – if he was to seek God's kingdom first, God would help restore the relationship.

At times, the biblical narratives were directly applied to individual situations – first century scenes in the Scriptures "came alive" and became a part of the reader's reality. This was the case for A18 with the story of the prodigal son affirming God's adoption of him (A18) and for a passage about Jesus in overcoming the fear of raising her son, "I felt like he was right in front of me saying that same thing to me and it impacted me so much." (A10).

In the cases where individuals struggled to engage in revelatory experiences, Scripture acted as a “fallback,” providing a readily accessible vehicle for hearing God’s voice at any time. This was particularly evident in two of the focus groups. For example:

I don’t feel personally I’ve ever heard a clear voice in my head knowing that is God speaking. It’s more of a feeling. It’s more trusting that he’s there and occasionally getting revelation through Scripture. Like for me, normally it would be like reading the Bible and maybe a certain verse would stick out that didn’t mean anything to me before, or you know, someone speaking something to me that’s in the right season and I know it’s probably from God. Personally, I don’t feel like I ever hear a clear voice (BF7).

“Creative/Experiential” Use of Scripture

The second way that Scripture acted as a hearing form was when God’s voice was heard through a somewhat “creative interpretation” of a text. In such cases, specific verses were understood to speak to a contemporary situation that had little connection to their original meaning. This was a somewhat common occurrence in the sample. For example, Jesus’ words “Go to the other side of the lake” to his disciples (Mk 4:35) was taken to mean, “Go to the other bank (for a new job).” (C10) A reference from Paul’s missionary travels (Acts 20:16) became a revelatory message to go to a conference in America rather than Asia (A12). A line from Isaiah 49:25 acted as God’s message to B14 that all his children would convert to Christianity and a proverb about not “straying from the nest” was understood to be God speaking to B19 about her need to keep attending church.

On two occasions, interviewees reported opening their Bibles randomly in a time of indecision and “hearing God’s voice” when their eyes fell on a verse that was understood to have relevance their situation.

Teaching via Sermons, Books and Religious Material

Nearly three quarters of interviewees reported that they had heard God speak through teaching in sermons or religious material. In some respects, this operated in similar ways to the experience of hearing God’s voice in Scripture as the truths of a book or sermon resonated with the recipient in some way: “When I read that, my heart leapt out of my chest!” (A16). “When I was first saved, the sermon always felt personal every single time like, ‘how does he know me? Why is he talking straight to me?’” (C10). For one respondent, the commentaries in the Study Bible were experienced as a vehicle of God’s voice more than the text itself (A3). This was due to the text being difficult to understand.

Prophecy

The use of prophecy as a vehicle for hearing God's voice was common with three quarters of the sample reporting the experience. However, because the message came via another party, the hearing component of the experience cannot be explored.

The Counsel of Others

A small portion of the sample reported the counsel of others as a vehicle for God's voice. This was differentiated from prophecy in that God's voice was experienced when the advice was seen to derive from natural wisdom: "Sometimes people speak to me and it just hits something inside of you and you respond to it. You go, 'I've just heard something important' and you know somehow. I guess that must be the Holy Spirit telling you something." (B1).

Circumstances

Hearing God via "circumstances" was not a common hearing form in the sample (3 cases). In these cases, God's voice was characterised by serendipitous situations or "open doors" – if a door of opportunity opened, and it was 'good', it was God "speaking." For C2, "When I came to college, I asked God, "Do you want me to be a worship leader or do you want me to help raise the church behind the scenes? And immediately all the doors opened for me to be a leader behind the scenes and I felt at peace." For CF4, "I start to label things that are good in general as being from God – even if they're not from God. If something's good, I thank God for it." The ambiguity of "circumstances" as a hearing form was noted. In one scenario, refusal of an immigration visa was perceived to *oppose* what God was saying: "What the leaders have shown me to do was not just to accept the circumstances as God speaking, but actually push in a little more – to take the time to sit down and listen." (A5).

Nature

Hearing God via "nature" was reported by half of the interviewees. In these cases, the message was general rather than specific and acted as an "object lesson" that confirmed or illustrated a previously known truth. There was no specific mention of a voice – illumination came upon reflection on some aspect of nature. For example, a gum tree was understood to speak about being strong and life-giving despite imperfections (C6) and the expanse of the ocean spoke of God's enormity (B15). Similarly, garden fertiliser was like life's trials – it "stunk," but made the plants grow (A10). In other cases, nature acted as a sign affirming a personal message – a shooting star (A18), a shape in the clouds (C1), a timely wave at the beach (C10) or the sudden appearance of a cockatoo (A15). Some highlighted nature as a place where God had spoken when they had taken time out to listen and "be still" (B15).

5.1.4.2 Preferred Mode

Nearly all interviewees reported no preference for one hearing mode over the other. Emphasis lay instead with the *content* of message. Respondents explained the choice of communication mode by its relationship to the personality of the recipient and/or because it suited the occasion. One participant referred to the fact that they were “visual” and hence were more likely to experience God’s voice in dreams (A9). Another described God’s use of “love languages” that were selected according to the recipient’s style (A16). A5 pointed to God’s creativity and innovation in his choice of mode: “It’s not always one method that he uses because it’s relationship. If you have a best friend and they only ever used words, that could get really boring.” A15 applied the dynamic of human communication to her explanation: “I think like any language - when you talk to me, I take visual cues from your body language, from the environment, from your tone... so it is the same with God.”

In sum, God’s voice was “heard” through a variety of modes by Pentecostals in the sample. In response to the question, “tell me about a time you heard God’s voice,” respondents largely shared testimonies related to “unmediated” modes including voices, D/Vs and sensory impressions. These did not include other people or material objects in the revelatory process, and revealed a spectrum of intensity, ranging from subtle “internal” forms to more “external” forms that had bodily impact. “Mediated” modes such as Scripture, books and sermons were also prominent, however these were less likely to be offered as testimonies. The counsel of others, nature and circumstances were rarely cited as examples of revelatory experience. No one form of revelation was thought to be superior to another – each was valued for its content and relevance to the situation.

5.1.5 The Process of Revelatory Experience: Recognising God’s Voice

The *recognition* phase is concerned with how respondents recognised God’s voice, including understandings about the epistemological reliability of their experience, the criteria used to discern divine origins and who is responsible for discernment.

5.1.5.1 The Epistemological Reliability of Revelatory Experience

The vast majority of respondents in the study displayed a confidence that God’s voice could be identified with some accuracy while at the same time acknowledging the mixed nature of experience and the subsequent need for discernment. Respondents reported revelatory experiences to vary widely in clarity: “Sometimes it’s dramatic like you hear something and it takes your breath away. It was out of the blue and you weren’t expecting it. Other times it’s just feeling your way forward, like ‘this is

what I think God wants me to do,' so you keep on at it." (AP21). A small number expressed doubt about the epistemological reliability of experience in general.

Beliefs about epistemological reliability were reflected in the language applied to the experience. When divine messages were experienced as clear and identifiable, there was an easy use of the phrase "God said." These experiences were often comprised of words couched in the first person and precise wording was used in testimonies: "I want you to go to Australia" (A5); "You don't know that" (A8); "Do you want to work for me?" (A16). When God's voice wasn't as easily recognisable and took time to discern, more tentative phrases were used such as, "I think God said," or "I got the sense of God saying." The inability to hear God's voice clearly was likened to the prophet Samuel's experience as a novice (1 Sam 3), (A16, C8). Like human communication, the ability to hear God's voice was seen to grow with experience and training. Nearly all respondents reported significant improvement in their hearing and discernment abilities over time. The pinnacle of revelatory ability was understood to be demonstrated by those recognised as "prophets" in the church. Accuracy and high levels of previously unknown information were seen as a sign of proficiency and correlated to biblical accounts like Ezekiel and Paul (AP22, A4).

For interviewees, discernment involved sorting through three influences: God, "the Enemy" or themselves. Distinguishing the voice of self from the voice of God proved to be the most difficult: "I had a lot of problems in identifying whether it is God speaking. I would always weigh what has been said with past experience, with my own knowledge, my own opinions and my own bias obviously." (A7). In Church A, a training course included teaching on neuroplasticity so members could learn how to recognise their "soul stuff." Here, the ability to recognise God's voice was linked to awareness of the influence of personal issues that may interfere: "I actually think dealing with a lot of my past helped me get rid of the old messages and move into really hearing what God was saying. Once the baggage was gone, there was less to grab hold of that would confuse me and convince me of something God was saying, which he wasn't." (A19). Emotions such as guilt, impatience or a weakened emotional state presented the greatest obstacles in discernment. In one case, a participant thought he had heard God saying to "quit his job" and "rely on God" (AP21). After six months of unemployment and impending bankruptcy, it was realised that he was suffering from burnout and had mistaken his symptoms for a revelatory experience. Human desires and in particular, romantic feelings were also identified as a barrier to sound discernment (A6). In numerous cases (C3, C5, A17, B6), participants reported to have heard God's voice about a marriage partner, but later identified it to be their own feelings: "I thought it was God at the time because it felt good. 'This makes sense. God wants me to be happy, so this is it.' It's like you start using happiness as the guide. You can justify anything." (C5).

There was also variation reported in the divine/human participation of experiences. In most cases, experiences arose spontaneously with the sense that the subject was being *acted upon* by an external party. In others, there was a degree of active participation by the recipient as they allowed their imagination to respond to an initial trigger. A21 described it this way: “I use the word ‘percolate’ because it’s a coffee analogy. The coffee – or the water pushes its way through the coffee and you have this aroma and something happens. I feel like ideas and songs and sermons come like that. They percolate their way through. You get the initial idea and then it grows.” In such cases, precise assessment of the level of human/divine elements was deemed impossible and even unnecessary.

In three of the focus groups, a small proportion of members struggled to engage with revelatory experience at all. C1 described his frustration; “A lot of people say ‘God spoke to me, God told me this, he told me that,’ and I realised just from going over it, gosh everyone’s, really loose with these terms – what is actually happening there?” Similarly, for BF9: “I think of Pentecostal pastors and they say, ‘God spoke to me and we’re going to do this, this and this,’ and I think, ‘Oh I wish God spoke to me like that!’ I’m more like: ‘I think it’s God, but I’m still not sure. I’m never sure. They seem to be quite sure of what they hear.’” In one case, the inability to recognise God’s voice acted to derail the interviewee’s faith (A18).

5.1.5.2 Discernment Criteria

Various discernment criteria were evident in the study and are listed here in general order of frequency: Scripture, the character and personhood of God, emotional impact, the “otherness” of the voice, the substantiation of previously unknown information, secondary revelatory experiences and the counsel of family and friends.

The Scriptures

Approximately half the respondents cited the Scriptures as the main criterion for discernment. This criterion relied on an adequate knowledge of the Bible: “If it’s from God, it should be in line with the Word of God. If you don’t search the Word of God for yourself, you won’t really know it’s God speaking unless you are in the Word.” (BF5). CF2 explains: “If I’m in a dream and I see myself jumping off the cliff, I can put that to Scripture because God says, “I have plans to prosper you” and at no point does God’s plan include jumping off a cliff.” B11 felt the need to find specific texts to match her experience: “So if I feel like God is telling me something that doesn’t quite sit right, then I should check the Bible and see if verses would confirm that it is or isn’t.” In some cases, direct references to Scripture – particularly the narratives – were used to discern the experience. For example, A16 saw the account of Samuel’s call as confirmation of her own dream calling her into

ministry as a child. Similarly, visions of heaven were paralleled to Ezekiel's experiences by AP22 and a call to plant a church overseas was aligned to the "Macedonian call" of the Apostle Paul by AP21.

At the same time, the criterion of Scripture was an insufficient measure for discernment in a vast majority of experiences due to the fact that experiences fell outside the range of biblical scope.

The Character of God

The character and personhood of God was cited as a key criterion for discernment by over half of respondents. God was identified as the source *if* the message was consistent with God's good and loving nature – as depicted in the Scriptures. Here, understandings of the divine nature tended to reference the New Testament more than the Old. As one interviewee explained, "When I say 'fit in with Scripture,' I don't mean – like you know the Benjaminites cut up one of the girls and sent them to Israel – so I'm going to cut up my wife and it agrees with Scripture.' It has to line up with the context of Scripture, the context of the heart of God." (A10). Interviewees "knew God was speaking" because "all his ways are peaceable and lovely (James 5) and they have the fruit of heaven on them" (AF18), "It was just so positive and it led me to relationship" (A11) and "it was happy, hopeful and loving." (C12). So, "if it is based on fear or if it is limiting me, or if it is not honouring the plans God has for me, it's not from God" (A16) and, "If I hear anything that produces feelings of guilt or fear, it's not him." (A14).

The ability to discern was linked to knowledge of God's nature. For one individual who reported to hear God's voice as a child, it wasn't until she received "years of teaching" about God as love that she was able to properly discern it (CF6). Two individuals suffering with mental illness reported that it was teachings about God's nature that allowed for discernment (A11, A17). For A11, "I knew it wasn't "God's voice" telling me to lie down on the train tracks." A6 described what aided her growth in discernment: "Probably getting to know God's nature better, so looking at the things that shape your hearing God's voice when you were growing up – like the filters that were normal to you then." (A6). It was also the criterion of God's character that provided discernment in experiences that involved rebuke and correction. AF6 explains: "Normally a rebuke sounds so kind and so soft and so full of the heart of God, that you do actually turn around and start to face the right direction. The hallmarks of hearing are not just the words of God – but actually the heart of God the father, like feeling the love of God first."

This criterion was particularly important when revelatory experience appeared to contradict certain interpretations of Scripture. This was the case for one individual who heard God say he was going to "take her mother" instead of bringing the healing others were praying for (A2). In another case, A19

heard God telling her she was released from her abusive marriage. As C6 explains: “Someone could prophesy over you and it can be consistent with Scripture, but you don’t hear the same characteristics of his voice” (so you know it wasn’t from God).

Emotional Impact

Linked to the criterion of God’s nature was the emotional impact of the experience. Over half of respondents referred to this dynamic in their testimonies. This involved a sense of peace, hope, conviction, joy and/or excitement. Thus, experiences were discerned not just in *what* “God said” but in *how* it was said: “When he speaks to you, it’s very comforting, it’s very loving. It’s very soft and gentle. He’s in a good mood. He is ridiculously optimistic. You know it’s him because there’s a lot of peace that comes when he speaks to you.” (A8). For C5, the emotional change wrought by a visionary experience became the major identifying factor for its source: “I felt complete peace, whereas before I had so much anxiety, I was losing sleep. My hair was falling out and it was just this whole world of anxiety. After that (the experience), I fell asleep straightaway. I woke up next morning going ‘oh my gosh, I feel like I’ve got my hope back.’”

This was in contrast to times when negative or troubling emotions indicated a message that was *not* from God. These included a strong sense of discomfort, blinding headaches, a “tight knot in my gut” (C14), guilt, fear and repulsion “like something is twisting in my spine” (AP22). For C12, a shift in emotions during a dream clearly indicated the origins of the experience. When a voice told her to get rid of her astrology books, she felt full of joy and excitement compared to when had earlier felt “frozen” and “oppressed.”

“Otherness” of the Voice

In over a third of testimonies, the “otherness” of the voice was used as a way of identifying the experience as divine. Here, the voice was seen to be from God when it was *different* to the participant’s own and contrasted in some way with their existing knowledge or experience. This voice was described as “random” (A13, B8, C1, CF3, C4, C6, A20, AF5), “sudden” (B14) and “coming out of the blue” (A12). For interviewees, it was clear that the voice arose from outside of them, rather than from within (C14, C9): “It’s not your normal train of thought. It gets your attention. It’s like; ‘that’s too weird.’ I call him the ‘God of the Random’ because the things he tells you do – they’re not your general type of thinking.” (AF4). In some cases, the vocabulary in the experience was reported to be “not words I’d say” (C6) and, the tone “didn’t sound like mine which ebbs and flows.” (C3). Novel information led AF7 to be surprised or taken aback: “I’d never thought of going to university” (AF7), or for A14 quitting his job. When creative forms of speech were used, A5 reflected: “I could never have imagined that on my own.”

Substantiation of Previously Unknown Information

One third of interviewees reported that the substantiation of previously unknown information acted as a “sign” to confirm divine origins. This included future-oriented information that later came to pass (A16, AP21, C4, A6, A14). For example, when A4 was visiting a new church, he recounted seeing a vision of an unknown man with a large “staff” who was later recognised to be the Senior pastor. This acted as divine confirmation for his place in the church. Similarly, C4 saw herself at an unknown scene of a church in a dream that came to pass three years later, confirming divine origins for the experience. Another had recurring dreams of women with “dust and dirt everywhere” and an accompanying voice that said, “Prepare yourself to go.” (C8). Later she was given a book on the “forgotten” tribes of China and opened it to a photo of the same women pictured in her dream. This along with a number of other “signs” affirmed the source of her experiences and triggered the move to work in China for ten years. Other examples involved the provision of specific sums of money that later manifested “just as God had spoken” (C7, A12, A14). The original experience was deemed to be of God because there was no “natural explanation” for it (A6).

To a lesser degree, a “sign” involved the repetition of the revelatory message in a subsequent sermon, conversation or book: “There will be 3 or 4 messages – it’s like multi-media – it’s coming through in different voices or different things – there might be something you see on Facebook or whatever and then someone preaches about it, and you think “God’s trying to teach me something.” (B4). In two cases, an interviewee put out a “fleece” (Judg 6:36-40) to test the word and when subsequent circumstances lined up favourably, this provided confirmation of the experience (BP16, A1).

Secondary Revelatory Experiences

In a significant number of cases, a secondary revelatory experience via another party that echoed the original experience acted as a means of discernment. This second experience came through a variety of people – both within the church community and outside of it. For example:

I saw this big bowl of incense in the middle of the room and all these prayers are going into heaven. Then the guest speaker says, “Let's pray about the meeting,” and his first words were: “I see a big bowl of incense in the middle of the room and the prayers are going up to heaven.” So, I thought, “Okay, something is happening – God is showing things and communicating with me in a way that I haven't had before.” (A4)

In one case, a revelatory message to go on a mission trip to India was paired with a friend’s vision of the respondent dressed in an Indian sari (C7). In another case, a husband and wife received a message

simultaneously about a second child neither intended to have (AF5, AF6). Similarly, a dream about refusing condemnation was followed up by a personal prophecy in church the next day (B5), and a vision of a sword in C12's mouth was followed by a personal prophecy that referenced words coming out of her mouth "like a sword." A call to ministry for A7 was confirmed by a visiting pastor who prophesied a similar message, and AF7's dream was paired with a second experience from a colleague at the interviewee's workplace.

Agreement of Friends, Family and Leaders

The agreement of family, friends and leaders was a criterion in discernment among one third of respondents. A5 explains the importance of this:

That's where it's so important to be in body, because that's where the manifold wisdom of God resides – especially if you're in a healthy relationship with leaders and friends and you're accountable to them vulnerably. You're open with your relationship with them and God.

In these cases, the people consulted were typically those who were in direct relationship with the interviewee and included marriage partners, close friends and to a lesser degree, small group and pastoral leaders. Knowledge of the person's history and character provided context for the consultant to judge the experience from a more objective stance. One interviewee recounted her friend's opinion about the call to go to India, "She just laughed and said, 'Of course it's right!' because she knows who I am. She sees me spiritually and she knows my gifting." (C7). Senior leaders were only consulted by those who were in direct mentoring relationship to them (A5, A4, A12) or when an experience was unusual in some way (A10, AF3, A5).

The choice of consultants was important in the discernment process. Indiscriminate consultation was not generally effective. As a starting point, consultants needed to hold to the legitimacy of revelatory experience. Also consulting multiple people sometimes only resulted in multiple opinions (B13). Further, objectivity was not always possible when the revelatory message did not serve the consultant well (CP16).

The failure to involve others in the discernment process was identified as a factor in cases where participants "got it wrong" (AP21, B12). B12 reflected on her lack of discernment in receiving a prophetic message as a teenager to stop playing drums. For her, the problem lay in her vulnerability as a young person and the fact that she had failed to discuss it with others. The process of consultation also required openness to correction. Sometimes when advice was given, participants refused to

accept it. As CP16 explained, “I’ve come to realise how you can use ‘God said this’ to shut people down very quickly, because if I say to my friends, ‘Well, the Holy Spirit said it to me,’ they don’t know what to say.”

5.1.5.3 Responsibility for Discernment

In all cases, the responsibility for testing a revelatory experience was understood to lie with the individual concerned even when the community was consulted. The exception to this occurred when the content of a message involved more than one individual. For example, when revelations were delivered as prophecies at a midweek prayer meeting in Church A, the hosts of the meeting judged the revelatory material. As the pastor explains: “It depends on the scope of who is being impacted by that (the message), so if it’s in a public meeting, then we have to do it publicly. But if it’s private, then we do it privately. It’s always about the scope.” (AP21).

In sum, it was clear for all in the sample that discernment was a necessary and important part of revelatory experience. In particular, respondents were aware of the challenge in separating divinely sourced experiences from the influence of human agendas. While respondents did report errors of judgement, the majority revealed a confidence that recognising God’s voice was possible. Time and practice was seen to improve the process. A small number of individuals expressed scepticism about being able to discern God’s voice and were cynical towards those who made emphatic declarations about their experience.

In some cases, experiences were instantly recognised as divine, given the “otherness” of the voice. Discernment was not always straightforward however and involved the use of a variety of criteria. The most important criterion was “Scripture” – at least in theory. In practice, the personal and particular subject matter of the experience fell outside the scope of the text and participants drew conclusions based on their general understandings about the character of God.

Finally, discernment was widely understood to be the responsibility of the recipient, however close friends, family and to a lesser degree (for more extreme cases) leaders in the church were usually consulted in the process. To neglect consultation with others was seen as unadvisable, especially when significant decisions were being made.

5.1.6 The Process of Revelatory Experience: Responding to God’s Voice

The “response” phase in the study involves the anticipated response to the revelatory experience as well as expectations for divine fulfilment.

5.1.6.1 Anticipated Response

Once experiences were recognised to be divinely sourced, respondents unanimously affirmed the requirement of obedience. The question, “If God speaks, should you obey it?” was met with an emphatic “yes” and was considered somewhat obvious (“Is this a trick question?” (A13)). As A12 explained, “God delights in obedience. As soon as you feel God say something, you step out in faith and do it instantly, as quick as you can.”

This response of obedience was seen to be challenging as divine directives were reported to shape existing habits, values and decisions – calling respondents to do things they didn’t “want to do” (C8) and taking them “out of the comfort zone” (C8, B4, C10). Oftentimes God was seen to be persuasive in bringing recurring admonitions, so obedience came over time and through a process that individuals strived to improve. The struggle to obey was interpreted as a wrestle against the “flesh” (B7, C7) that sometimes involved cost and sacrifice and was therefore seen as an act of worshipful submission to the ultimate authority.

Along the same lines, it was understood that there were consequences for disobedience to the revealed message. References were made to the narrative of Jonah as an example of one who did not obey and to the Macedonian call of Paul who did (A4, B3). Since God knew what was “best” (A8, A12, A19, B15), resisting the revealed message was held to be counterproductive to spiritual growth and had detrimental ramifications for interviewees’ personal lives.

The requirement of “obedience” was also understood in the context of a relationship that allowed for a level of human autonomy. God was not seen to be a dictator, regulating every decision. For A10: “Are we slaves or are we friends? I think every time God speaks to us about something, he's calling us into relationship. So, it's not necessarily a “yessir” – it's more, what is your heart?” For A5, a directional message from God was rare: “All the other times it’s usually conversational. It's very light-hearted and easy to understand and connect with him.” Therefore, directive experiences did not mitigate the need for free will in decision-making. AF9 explained this dynamic by telling a joke: “A preacher was trying to decide which suit to wear: the blue, the black or grey suit? As clear as a bell, he heard the Holy Spirit say to him, ‘I’m your father not your mother. Make a choice.’”

For many, revelatory experience led to blessing that was understood not to have occurred without it. One pastor reflected on the impact of directive experiences on his life: “I could be bored at home right now, have two houses paid off, running a business and that's it. I'm so glad that I heard his voice and was obedient to it.” (BP16).

5.1.6.2 Expectations for Fulfilment

The vast majority of respondents affirmed that the declared intent of revelatory messages *would* be fulfilled in their lives. While it was understood that the timing of fulfilment may be unknown and the outcomes may be different to their expectations, the conviction was that divine origins represented a guarantee of fulfilment. In a significant number of experiences (18), future-oriented messages were seen to come to pass. In some cases, partial fulfilment led to expectations for future fulfilment. A9 reports the fulfilment of his vision:

I had an impression of a female with blonde hair. I saw her nature. I saw her personality. I also saw her two little children. I was told that I would meet her on the X Coast. So, I told all my friends about her and the children. Consequently, I didn't knuckle down with other girls because I knew this was what I had been shown.

About four months after the impression, I was on the X Coast visiting a friend whose name was Therese. There was a girl leaning against the car and I looked at her and said, "That's the girl in my vision." I looked for the two little boys, but they weren't there, so I said, "maybe it's not." I drove up and attempted to talk to her. That was a total failure – she thought I was a loony.

But the next day I was having lunch with Therese and she said, "I've got someone coming to lunch and I have a really good feeling about this girl. She's a really good friend of mine." So this girl pulls up, gets out of the car and it's the same girl I saw in the car park and out comes two little boys: "Hi Liz, this is John." Therese looks at me funny. I said, "Hi, how are you going?" "So, have you guys met?" Liz was very uncomfortable because she thought I was a bit of a weirdo.

I didn't tell Liz about the dream. I just romanced her and she fell in love with me. After we were engaged, I told her about the dream. We've been married for 10 years and get on famously (A9).

Even though sometimes fulfilment came without human participation, respondents usually emphasised the need for co-operation. "Faith" evidenced by action was seen to be the appropriate response: "Lord, you want me to have this, great? Let's run after that. What do I need to do to participate in the journey of getting that or doing it?" (C3). The interaction of free will and divine authority in prophetic fulfilment was noted by one third of interviewees. For A9, cooperation with a promise for healing from terminal cancer involved active intercession for three nights. For A14, a

message about the restoration of his marriage required moving out of his parents' home to independent living. For AP22, a message about her songs becoming known "among the nations" required time spent in composition and the establishment of a bank account titled "Songs of the Nations."

This understanding of *conditionality* meant that revelatory messages could fail when there was a lack of human cooperation. Scriptural accounts were often cited to illustrate: "It's tricky because there's an infinite ability for me to cock it up – do you know what I mean? I might not step into that promise. I might do a Sarah." (A15). A lack of fulfilment for predicted church growth in one example was explained using Old Testament narratives: "Abraham was going to have a thousand sons, but had two. David was going to build the temple, but his son did." (A13, C2). Delays in fulfilment were also possible: "God promised people in the Bible lots of things, but did they see the fulfilment of the promise? Not always on earth. So, to me, he might promise me something, but it may not be fulfilled within this lifetime." (C3).

The uncertain nature of fulfilment was made more complex in instances that relied on the participation of a third party. This dynamic was present in a number of cases involving relationships. In one case, an interviewee experienced a vision of a future boyfriend (A16). The scene included a foreign city, an unknown church and details about the man's features. Two years later the dream unfolded with extraordinary precision. However, after a time, the relationship broke up due to a variety of interpersonal issues. In explanation for the failed prediction, A16 acknowledged the interaction of human will and divine sovereignty. In a similar case, the interviewee concluded that when another party does not co-operate, God still honours his promise through providing an "upgrade" (C4).

In sum, respondents understood that once revelatory experiences were discerned to be of divine origin, they required immediate and active co-operation. Responses to revelation may be challenging as they often called for sacrifice and faith, but these were generally understood to be necessary in bringing about the fulfilment of divine intentions. However, this call to obedience was not understood to limit human autonomy, but to reflect the dynamic of two-way relationship in which human input was valued.

5.2 REVELATORY EXPERIENCES IN COMMUNITY

This section presents data relating to the revelatory experience in its communal context. For each of the three churches, I detail the background and description of the community, their general approach

to revelatory experiences as well as how the experience is facilitated and managed in the congregation through training and regulatory processes.

5.2.1 Church A

5.2.1.1 Background and Description

Church A was founded in the mid 1990s on the basis of a visionary experience and has a strong emphasis on the “work of the Spirit.” Every aspect of the church reflects its stated aim to facilitate spiritual encounters amongst its congregation including “signs, wonders and miracles.” As the pastor explained, “God is not a theory; we experience him.” (AP21).

Approximately 400 people call Church A their home, with a wide age-range from children to middle age to a smaller number of elderly. Three services are held every Sunday in a consistent format: worship in song, announcements, offering, sermon and prayer ministry. Evening services are open-ended to allow extended prayer ministry at the close. Church A also hosts a variety of mid-week programs including a well-attended prayer meeting, small groups and healing ministry. Located in a beach suburb not far from central Sydney, services have a bohemian inner-city vibe; a cross between a hippie style of church and football match with exuberant cheering and a rollicking atmosphere. Leaders and pastors are dressed casually in t-shirts and ripped jeans and services are sprinkled with down-to-earth humour. For the uninitiated, services may be confronting and unpredictable with highly expressive worship and frequent “manifestations” of laughter, tears and bodily movements. As one church member stated, “We have the reputation of being the crazy church – of being a bit out there” (A16).

Church A is an independent Pentecostal church with relational links with like-minded churches across Australia and the world. They are part of the “Australian Prophetic Council,” a loosely held network of prophetic leaders across a range of Pentecostal churches. The church is led by a husband and wife team and a small team of staff.

5.2.1.2 Approach to Revelatory Experiences

The experience of hearing God’s voice in Church A is a high priority, permeating every part of the community from the leadership to the fringes of the congregation. All public services and events were imbued with the expectation that God can and will speak to its members. In Church A, hearing God’s voice was normal and reference to the “word of God” was made repeatedly in public gatherings.

In interviews and focus groups, answers to questions about hearing God's voice were given confidently and with ease. Experiences were clearly recounted and showed considerable depth of reflection (such as in the area of use of the Old Testament in discernment and the interaction between free will and divine sovereignty). Testimonies were well-articulated with a common language shared by interviewees. The orientation to revelatory experience in the community was observed to be linked to heightened occurrences. As a long-term congregation member reported, the atmosphere itself became a trigger and she and her husband became "more prophetic" after they spent time in the church (A20).

The church reflected an approach that anticipated experiences to be analogous with the biblical experience in everyday situations. References were repeatedly made to the biblical narratives as models for hearing, recognising and responding to the divine voice. The language used to describe the experiences echoed biblical forms and terminology.

5.2.1.3 Facilitation and Training

Interviews with the pastors of Church A revealed a high priority for revelatory experiences in the congregation as well as a clear and well-articulated theology for encounters. For AP21, God doesn't do anything unless he tells his prophets first (Amos 3:7). Both senior leaders recognised their own prophetic gifts and recounted high-level revelatory experiences in their personal lives. This intention for promoting hearing God experiences in the congregation was outworked both formally and informally. Formal training occurred through specific training courses. A 10-week "School of Encounter" that was open to all included a strong component on hearing God's voice. The course included teaching on all phases of the experience. Learning to hear God's voice was also a foundational element of the weekly healing ministry and was used in counselling and prayer.

This formal training was reinforced informally in public gatherings through various rites and practices including public prophecy, testimonies and prayer ministry. Public prophecy was common at both the prayer meeting (where it was open to all) and the Sunday services (where it was limited to those in recognised leadership). Prophetic messages addressed both individual and corporate concerns. The practice of public prophecy was extended across the age-groups, with a young child and older teenager observed prophesying in one of the services.

Testimonies featured regularly in the Sunday services and nearly always involved reports of a revelatory experience. These testimonies were often used by the pastor to create learning opportunities for the congregation. The revelatory experience was also incorporated into the prayer

time at the close of the service where leaders anticipated revelation of previously unknown knowledge about the person they were praying for.

Finally, the language of the congregation was saturated with expectations about “words from God.” The more declarative phrase “God spoke to me” or “Jesus/the Holy Spirit said” was frequently employed by both leaders and members, while at other times, a caveat was applied: “I feel God might be saying...” Such language was performed in every facet of the public gatherings: in sermons (“I feel the Spirit spoke to me about this passage”), ministry times (e.g. “God wants to heal sore backs today”) and in worship. Songs (largely composed by the worship team) were laced with first person language that drew heavily from the vocabulary of prophetic books of the Bible and regularly invited communication from God.

5.2.1.4 Regulatory Processes

The dangers of high-level revelatory experiences were well-known in Church A and clear strategies were in place to minimise the risks through training and regulatory protocols. Some damaging experiences were recounted in interviews but were rare. This is likely due to the explicit attention given to the management of revelatory experience in the church.

A strong component of the training in Church A related to the evaluation of revelatory experiences. In small group settings, the revelatory experience was spoken of with ease, allowing for reflection and discernment when necessary. In the public setting, members were regularly reminded of the need for confirmation of their experiences via Scriptural parameters and the community. In the Training School, instruction in neuroplasticity was included so that members could learn to discern divine messages by filtering out the “soul stuff they’ve carried in” (AP22). The principle of accountability was strongly adhered to with the Bible acting as the ultimate standard by which all experiences were judged. During the School, people were also strongly exhorted not to speak directly on behalf of God to another person in sensitive areas like marriages, births and careers. Instead, individuals were encouraged to hear from God for themselves in these areas. Where public prophecies were given, these were often recorded on a portable device for review. In the public service, only pre-approved leaders were permitted to prophesy. So-called “car park prophecies” (given without accountability) were strongly frowned upon. Correction did occur where necessary – and sometimes publicly, although this was extremely rare (AP21). In such cases, the goal was always to “keep the meeting safe” and the whole “environment conducive to the sound of God’s voice” (AP22).

At the same time, a relaxed approach to regulation by the leadership was evident. The freedom to learn and grow was valued and leaders rejected a strict authoritarian approach. In response to the

question of how experiences were tested, the senior pastor laughed: “Sometimes I wish they would tell me. We don’t usually hear about it until after they’re on the plane!” (AP22). At the same time, the senior leaders were careful to be available for consultation and made a practice of lingering for an hour after Sunday meetings. The risk of unchecked experiences was acknowledged, but mistakes were considered to be an opportunity for discipleship. As the Senior Pastor explained, “Although this is messier, it’s almost easier than the other way when everything goes under the surface. This way we can just get a broom and together clean it up.” (AP22).

5.2.2 Church B

5.2.2.1 Background and Description

Church B is a well-established church that was founded in the early 1970s and is located in middle class suburbia. Finding its place most naturally in the classical Pentecostal stream, Church B experienced somewhat of a revival at its inception. Church B’s founder was a travelling evangelist considered by some to be a “patriarch” of the Australian Pentecostal movement. Healing, evangelism and miracles were hallmarks of the church in its beginnings. Church B is part of the *Australian Christian Churches* denomination (ACC).

The congregation of Church B is highly multicultural with a membership of approximately 300 and a strong legacy of cross-cultural mission that has extended its influence beyond local borders. There is a high proportion of longstanding members who attend faithfully each Sunday. The younger generation is well represented with a good spread of families, teenagers and young adults. Services follow the Pentecostal pattern of worship in song, announcements, offering, teaching and corporate prayer with the added distinctive of a weekly communion service. Remnants of an “old school” Pentecostal style exists with plenty of exclamations of “hallelujah” and “glories to God” punctuating public services.

In Church B, there was a strong emphasis on Bible teaching, with the majority of small groups participating in some form of in-depth Bible study and sermons heavily saturated in Scripture readings. The congregation exuded warmth and openness as well as a deep sense of spiritual maturity and grounding.

5.2.2.2 Approach to Revelatory Experiences

Revelatory experiences were present in Church B, but were considerably less prevalent than in Church A. A clear age separation was identifiable, with the older generations reporting significantly more revelatory experiences than the younger age-groups. Many of the older generation reflected on the intense experiences of their “early days” with frequent references to the founding pastor. It was

also reported that the church had experienced a cultural shift from emphasis on the “prophetic word” to the “written word” when new leadership came in: “When Pastor X took a backward step, Pastor Y came in with the Word (the Scriptures)” (BP16).

In contrast to the older generations, a number of younger interviewees reported the complete absence of revelatory experience (B11). Generally, the language surrounding experiences was tentative: “I got the sense that God was saying” or I felt that God was saying...” were commonly used phrases.

Hearing God’s voice was predominantly experienced through reading the Scriptures and hearing sermons rather than through unmediated modes like D/Vs and voices. As one interviewee reported, “We do hear from God in the group, but it tends to be more through the Word” (BF3). Experiences typically related to the mundane (such as to take care on the stairs (B2) and a lost personal item (B9)), contained minimal previously unknown information and were rarely directional in nature.

5.2.2.3 Facilitation and Training

Hearing God’s voice was considered to be an essential facet of the spiritual life by the Senior Pastor of Church B. He described plentiful reports of revelatory encounters in his own life and expressed a clear intention to facilitate similar experiences in the congregation. At the same time, he had recently identified a surprising lack of experience among his members: “It’s like I thought they were a great mechanic when in actual fact, they’re just an apprentice” (BP16). He suggested that this was due to a “culture of elitism” where congregation members had been over-reliant on the prophetic abilities of the founding Senior Pastor as well as visiting preachers. Acknowledging this to be a problem, BP16’s goal was to provide more training, and a “Holy Spirit seminar” had been scheduled in the ensuing months. He was also keen to encourage prophecy during the service and prayer ministry times: “We’re giving them the freedom, the okay, to step out, but they’re very shy because ministry has always been a one-person show and I’m trying to smash that.” (BP16).

Apart from the one-day scheduled seminar, there was no regular or formal training for revelatory experience in Church B. While it was considered to be important, there was little demonstration of this in the services during the research period. Inspiration for sermons and events was sometimes attributed to the Holy Spirit speaking and on one or two occasions, the time of singing was interrupted with an invitation to prayer prefaced by what the pastor “sensed” God was saying. Prayer ministry (and its related opportunity for prophetic experience) was always offered as an option post-service but was only taken up sporadically by the congregation.

5.2.2.4 Regulatory Processes

In Church B, testing processes were firmly centred on Scriptural parameters. The plan was to shift the responsibility for regulation and management to the community via the small groups. Work had begun on this, but there was a recognition that it would take time. In terms of regulatory protocols, there were none that specifically addressed this area, either spoken or unspoken. Few instances of damaging experiences were reported in Church B. The senior pastor was willing to correct public prophecies if needed but this was uncommon.

5.2.3 Church C

5.2.3.1 Background and Description

Church C is an inner-city church that was birthed in the early 1980s in a revivalist environment, but experienced a shift part way in its history towards a “seeker-friendly” style.¹ Church C had a good representation of all age-groups and a highly multicultural congregation that reflected its urban demographic. Services were presented in a theatre style arrangement, featuring multi-media elements and following the common Pentecostal format: worship in song followed by announcements, offering and sermon. In keeping with its seeker-friendly style, teaching messages were topical and conversational with application for outsiders and congregants alike. Church C had a full program of mid-week activities including small groups, teaching courses and welfare initiatives within the local community. Like Church B, Church C is part of the ACC denomination.

5.2.3.2 Approach to Revelatory Experiences

Although espousing a Pentecostal belief in revelatory experiences, this was not generally evident in the activities of Church C. An older member bemoaned the state of things: “The young people don’t even know how to hear God’s voice” (C7). Another observed: “We don’t talk about it much around here. We wouldn’t say; ‘this is God speaking.’ It’s not really a thing.” (C15) Among interviewees and focus groups, a good number of high-level revelatory experiences were reported, but these appeared to occur in “pockets” of informal social groups. The vast majority of individuals in these pockets had learnt to hear God’s voice in other churches prior to attending Church C. One leader reported a complete absence of revelatory experiences amongst their small group members (C13). Another focus group revealed very few revelatory experiences (CFG2).

At the same time, hearing God’s voice for personal matters was deemed important – even essential by senior leadership. For example, the need for fresh revelatory experience was a key message in one

¹ See Ch. 2.2.2.3.

sermon about Hannah's experience receiving the "word of the Lord" for a child (1 Sam 1). However, revelatory experiences in Church C were more commonly associated with mediated modes such as teaching and preaching, reading Scripture and providential circumstances rather than the unmediated forms of voices, D/Vs and sensory impressions. One sermon for example, highlighted the importance of being led by the Spirit in the story of Philip and the Ethiopian, which was later applied to God speaking through the sermon. The preferred way to receive divine messages was through reading "the Word of God" – the Bible (CP16).

The use of language and terminology surrounding revelatory experience was somewhat mixed, with the phrase "word of God" carrying multiple meanings. These included the spoken word of the Spirit, the written Scriptures and a general word of "godly" encouragement. There were also clear instances of inconsistency in the theology of the experience among focus groups. One interviewee showed resistance to the possibility of specific and commissioning words (since "the will of God is not narrow") yet followed it with a personal testimony that involved specific direction (CF3).

5.2.3.3 Facilitation and Training

There was no formal training for revelatory experiences in Church C apart from a single session in an Evangelism course that functioned as an introduction to new believers. The pastor reported that hearing God's voice occurred organically in the context of discipleship – you learn by "watching and gleaning" (CP16). As noted, the majority of interviewees who had experienced higher-level cases in their own lives reported that the bulk of their learning took place outside the Church C community. Some exceptions were present, including two cases where mention was made of the prayer ministry as a place of learning and a certain staff member who was seen to be a source of encouragement. One interviewee reported feeling isolated and misunderstood by his revelatory experiences (C1).

In the public forum, hearing God's voice was mentioned occasionally and public prophecy did occur, but only on seldom occasions. References to the Spirit speaking were also made in the lyrics of a number of songs composed by the worship team. It appeared that the experience was valued by leadership in theory, but this was not outworked through practical facilitation or training in the life of the church.

5.2.3.4 Regulatory Processes

The interview with Church C leadership revealed clear trepidation about the dangers of hearing God's voice. Although holding to some convictions about the experience, the senior leader was concerned with the pastoral challenges it brought and expressed hesitation in embracing it fully. References were made to those suffering with mental illness and pastoral situations where a "failed" word had brought devastation and disappointment (CP16). Lack of accountability was also a concern, particularly where a prophetic message was brought by someone outside the community and was at odds with local

leadership. Use of the phrase “God said” was seen as being tinged with rebellion and spiritual immaturity (CP16). One admonition in preaching included the need to hear God speak, but gave a caution not be “weird or spooky about it.”

A testing process for the experience was alluded to from the platform on one occasion, when a warning was given about the untrustworthy prophecies of a stranger. For interviewees, the most notable means of testing came from the Scriptures.

5.3 SUMMARY

The data revealed a significant amount of consistency in the themes and patterns of individual revelatory experience in the sample. Revelatory experience was frequently understood within the context of divine-human *relationship* and often drew on parallels with human communication. The revelatory experiences that were typically cited in testimonies involved the unmediated modes of D/Vs, voices and sensory impressions. Mediated forms also presented occasions for revelation, but to a lesser degree. Experiences contained plentiful instances of new, future-oriented and previously unknown information. Experiences that came via mediated modes such as sermons, books and nature typically involved the reinforcement of known information. These required less discernment because they were based on established understandings about Christian faith and practice. This was also the case when experiences involved “hearing God” in Scripture. However, in some cases, “hearing God in Scripture” deviated widely from the historical-cultural setting of the text.

In all cases, epistemological reliability was held to be achievable and a process of careful discernment required. In some cases, discernment was straightforward; in others, it was made complex by the influence of human desires and agendas. The process involved an interplay of criteria including the character of God in Scripture, consultation with others, various signs of substantiated information and secondary experiences as well as the “otherness” of the voice. Scripture was seen as the unequivocal measure for all experiences, but in most cases could not be directly applied due to the particularity of subject matter. Instead the criterion “character of God” was used. While many spoke of hearing from God with an ease that seemed to reflect the biblical appearance, others struggled with the experience and epistemological certainty was looked upon with suspicion. In such cases, “hearing God in Scripture” was the preferred approach.

Genuine experiences were understood to be authoritative and called for active response in order for divine intentions to be fulfilled. Revelatory experiences were almost entirely related to personal matters and functioned to build relationship with a God who was interested in the individual’s concerns and needs. It was in this context that revelatory experience provided a trigger for personal

transformation as well as a vehicle for ministry and mission. These understandings about experience were directly and literally aligned to the patterns of selected narratives in Scripture.

At a communal level, the three churches revealed different approaches to revelatory experience, which in turn appeared to have consequences for their practise and theology. High-level revelatory experiences were considerably more apparent in Church A than B or C. Reflections on the experience were also more uniform in Church A, where careful attention had been given to their training and facilitation. In both Church B and C, a mixture of experiences and attitudes toward revelatory experience was present. In Church B, revelatory experience was accessed more easily by the older generation. In Church C, training and facilitation was largely absent – those with more frequent experiences and clearer reflection on them had been “trained” outside the congregation.

The data from the sample provides plentiful insight into the dynamics of individual Pentecostal revelatory experience, particularly with regard to high-level extra-biblical experiences, the main locus of this study. The three churches also reveal a contrast in their approach to revelatory experience and provides insight into how the local community shapes and informs understandings. These themes and patterns will be analysed in dialogue with various theorists in the next three chapters (6, 7, 8).

6. SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS OF REVELATORY EXPERIENCE

This chapter presents a sociological analysis of the revelatory experience, firstly at an individual level and secondly, within the context of its community. The discussion allows social science theory to illumine the ordinary narratives and reveal how the Pentecostal expectation for revelatory experience that is phenomenologically equivalent to Scripture functions in the local church. Two social science theories are engaged to analyse the data from Chapter 5. These have been selected because they provide an appropriate lens through which to understand the workings of the individual revelatory experience in the context of the local church community.

In the first section (6.1), Charles Glock and Rodney Stark's taxonomy of religious experience is used to explore the sociological dynamics of the individual religious experience. This allows the themes common to individual cases across the churches to be investigated. In some cases, additional testimonies are included in more detail in order to explore the issues at hand.

In the second section (6.2), the analysis "zooms out" to focus on the broader sociological environment that sustains the revelatory experience. This allows for a "cross-case analysis" (Ch. 2.2.2.4) whereby themes *across* the three cases can be highlighted and differences explored. First, the data from Glock and Stark's taxonomy is used to explore the nature of revelatory experience in each church. This is followed by an overview of Peter Berger's theory of the "sacred canopy" and a reflection on the data in dialogue with Berger.

6.1 THE INDIVIDUAL REVELATORY EXPERIENCE IN SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

The sociological analysis begins with an examination of the individual revelatory experience. In this section, I provide an overview of Glock and Stark's taxonomy of religious experience and then use it to reflect on the testimonial data from Chapter 5.1. I conclude with a reflection on Glock and Stark's theory.

6.1.1 Charles Glock and Rodney Stark's Taxonomy of Religious Experience

Glock and Stark drew on the findings of a landmark study in American churches to develop a taxonomy that is useful for analysing the revelatory experiences in this study. They investigated the religious experiences of Protestant and Catholic Church members in the San Francisco Bay area.¹ Experiences were described in social terms as interpersonal encounters between two persons – the

¹ Glock and Stark, 39.

divine and human actor – with the essential element being “some sense of contact with a supernatural agency.”² These were then categorised into four main types and arranged along a continuum of increasing relational intimacy.

According to the taxonomy, religious experience begins with Type 1 “confirming” experiences where the human actor feels the presence of the divine actor. Experiences move towards the Type 2 “responsive” category when the divine actor is perceived as noting the presence of the human actor. From there, Type 3 “ecstatic” experiences include those in which the sense of mutual presence is replaced with affections resembling love or friendship. The taxonomy reaches its highest Type 4 “revelational” form when the human actor perceives themselves as a confidante or participant with the divine actor.³

Type 4 experiences are delineated further by three “distinguishing characteristics”⁴:

1. Orthodox and Heterodox. “Orthodox” refers to information that is consistent with existing interpretations of the divine nature, will and desires. “Heterodox” includes the introduction of new creeds or culturally innovative information that contradicts standard orthodoxy in some way. Lower forms of experience on the taxonomy tend to confirm pre-existing beliefs and interpretations, while the higher forms include the possibility of heterodox information.
2. Enlightenment and Commission. “Commission” includes instructions to “take particular actions to further divine designs.” Information is offered so that the recipient may take on a divinely inspired role in human affairs. “Enlightenment” refers to the provision of information concerning ultimate truths.
3. Prophetic and Theological. “Prophetic” refers to messages that bring enlightenment concerning future events and states in the empirical world. “Theological” refers to information regarding theological verities of a timeless, other-worldly kind.

General and Personal. A further characteristic refers to the scope of revelation. Personal revelation is significant for the recipient and/or for some of his/her associates compared with revelation for “all people” (or at least for significant numbers).

² Ibid., 41.

³ Ibid., 39-55.

⁴ Ibid., 58.

Glock and Stark used the taxonomy to show the *frequency* of different types of experiences in the sample. They found that the propensity for spiritual experience was greatly influenced by the social setting and more specifically, the denomination of the church.⁵ Lower “confirming” and “responsive” levels of experience were most common and the higher-level ecstatic and revelatory experiences less so. This pattern was paralleled in the approach of religious institutions towards the experience. Confirming experiences were *encouraged* by most religious institutions, while higher revelatory experiences were *discouraged* or even opposed.⁶ Glock and Stark argued that this was due to the disruptive nature of high-level revelatory experiences and their threat to institutional stability.⁷

Use of Glock and Stark’s Theories in Pentecostal Studies

Glock and Stark’s theories have been incorporated into Pentecostal studies in the UK and Canada. Philip Richter reflected on the so-called ‘Toronto Blessing’ in the United Kingdom in light of the taxonomy.⁸ He observed frequent and intense ecstatic activity that held significant religious meaning for participants. These included revelatory encounters comprising announcements from God, insights into the future, deep insights into theirs or another’s problems, visions and “out of body” mystical experiences. In contrast to Glock and Stark’s research with Protestant and Catholics, Richter found that experiences in the Pentecostal setting were *predominantly* ecstatic and, in some cases, revelational in form.⁹ Richter concluded that such findings should not be surprising since they reflect the aspirations of Pentecostals to “higher” experiences associated with “revival” (the preferred state).

Poloma also engaged Glock and Stark’s taxonomy in her study of the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship (TACF) church in Canada. It was here that the “Toronto Blessing” began in 1994. Poloma examined a range of mystical experiences including those relating to hearing the voice of God.¹⁰ She found that in line with Glock and Stark’s taxonomy, the revelatory experience began with many “ordinary, even mundane” experiences that confirmed biblical truths or personal insights during prayer. From there, progress was made to higher levels in the taxonomy. Poloma aligned the taxonomy with Pentecostal understandings of prophetic development from “simple prophecy” to the

⁵ Ibid., 162.

⁶ Ibid., 60.

⁷ Glock and Stark, 56. Stark further explored the nature of revelatory experiences in his study: “A Theory of Revelations,” *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religions* 38, no. 2 (1999): 287-308.

⁸ The “Toronto Blessing” refers to a movement characterised by unusual charismatic phenomena in Pentecostal and mainline churches across the world, Phillip Richter, “Charismatic Mysticism: A Sociological Analysis of the ‘Toronto Blessing’ in *The Nature of Religious Language: A Colloquium*, ed. Stanley E. Porter (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 100-130.

⁹ Richter, 101.

¹⁰ Poloma, *Main Street Mystics*, 115-131.

“gift of prophecy” to the “prophetic office.” The first three stages on Glock and Stark’s taxonomy were regarded as a “prelude to the prophetic” with simple forms of prophecy emerging at Stage 3 and the fourth type providing the main category for prophetic utterances.¹¹ For Poloma, the revelatory experience involved “another way of knowing,” such that the supernatural and the natural flow together to form an alternate worldview. In TACF, Type 4 experiences were deemed “normal” spirituality.¹²

6.1.2 Reflection on Glock and Stark’s Taxonomy and Pentecostal Revelatory Experience

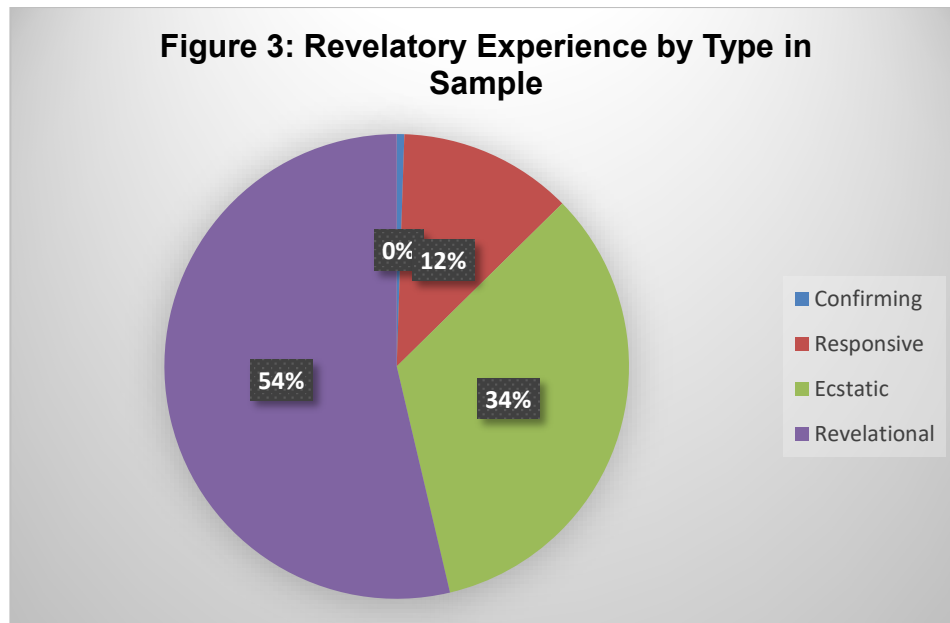
Glock and Stark’s taxonomy provides a framework by which to investigate the individual revelatory experiences in the sample from a sociological perspective. It also allows for an examination of the dynamics of discernment so central to theological and ecclesial concerns.

All forms of experience on Glock and Stark’s taxonomy were present in the sample. From 190 experiences across the three churches, 1% were designated confirming, 12% responsive, 34% ecstatic and 53% revelational (Fig. 3). As qualitative data in a small sample, these proportions do not offer insight into the frequency of the revelations in individuals’ lives or more broadly in Pentecostal churches, but rather indicate the types of experiences offered in response to the question: “Tell me about a time you heard God’s voice.” As in Richter’s study, the high-level Type 3 (“ecstatic”) and 4 (“revelational”) experiences were represented more strongly than Type 1 or Type 2 experiences. As Poloma has noted, revelatory experience may not be as rare as scholarly skeptics assume.¹³

¹¹ Poloma, “Millennialism,” 166-186.

¹² Poloma, *Main Street Mystics*, 121-2.

¹³ Poloma, “Millennialism,” 12.



Five themes arise from the data that are pertinent to this thesis and are explored here in relation to Glock and Stark's theories: the relational progression of revelatory experience, the frequency and disruptive nature of revelatory experiences, power shifts in relational development, the role of discernment in maintaining stability and discernment as an act of power.

6.1.2.1 The Relational Progression of Revelatory Experience

Glock and Stark's taxonomy enables revelatory experience to be understood in terms of a progression in relationship between the divine and human actor. At the first *confirming* stage, experiences are compared with the relationship of an acquaintance. These Type 1 experiences offer a sense of divine presence, a "generalised sense of sacredness" and a "sudden conviction that the beliefs one holds are true."¹⁴ In the study, the few experiences that fell into this category referred to general, established information about God and acted to strengthen the participant's faith.

The next *responsive* phase refers to experiences that occur when a person feels that the divine has taken "specific notice" of the individual's existence. These Type 2 experiences act as an "introduction" to the divine actor.¹⁵ In the study, they included instances of affirmation relating to divine truths such as "I'm with you", "I am the Lord your God", "I'll take care of you" and "You are loved." This category also included moral admonitions, such as "forgive your (annoying) grandmother" and practical advice, such as "have a shower" and where to find a lost wallet. As in the

¹⁴ Glock and Stark, 44.

¹⁵ Ibid., 46.

Type 1 category, such experiences could be described as “mundane,” and acted as personal confirmations of established theological teachings.

The third *ecstatic* phase includes components of the confirming and responsive types, but with additional affective elements and/or sensory manifestations associated with a personal relationship akin to friendship or even courtship.¹⁶ These Type 3 experiences indicate movement from “being chosen” (as in responsive experiences) to feeling “embraced.” Glock and Stark suggest that ecstatic experiences include feelings of belonging, security and love.¹⁷ However in my study, it was difficult to differentiate between a Type 2 responsive and a Type 3 ecstatic experience. Respondents reported enhanced feelings of value, reassurances of personal identity and loving provision at *all* categories across the continuum (albeit to varying degrees). Many of the experiences had long-lasting emotional impact that was still felt in subsequent years.

The fourth and final *revelational* category includes experiences that reflect a deepening friendship with God that culminates in partnership. The Type 4 experience involves the recipient receiving messages of divine wishes and intentions such that he/she becomes a *partner* in a shared vision.¹⁸ Glock and Stark further characterise this category by highlighting a *commissioning* dynamic whereby information is offered so that the recipient can take a divinely inspired role in human affairs.¹⁹ This is contrasted with *enlightenment* which emphasises the provision of information involving ultimate truths (although the two may occur together). The commissioning dynamic was strongly evidenced in the study. Some experiences called for minor directives, such as talking to a stranger, praying for a family member or giving away a sum of money. Others were more dramatic and involved life-changing decisions, such as relocation to another country, marrying a particular person, quitting a job or changing careers. In some cases, the message included specific and time-bound instructions. In others, the experience acted as an invitation to initiate a process that subsequently guided decision-making. All directives, however, were understood to be attached to divine purpose. Further, human co-operation with the revelatory message was understood to be necessary for divine purposes to be achieved. Thus, commission acted not just to stimulate performance, but to create intimacy through a shared sense of purpose.

Glock and Stark suggest that Type 4 revelational experiences typically include confidential information about the future, divine nature or divine plans. A significant number of experiences in the

¹⁶ Ibid., 51-52.

¹⁷ Ibid., 54.

¹⁸ Ibid., 54.

¹⁹ Ibid., 58.

study contained such information. For respondents, intimacy provided the context for this new information and a sense of privilege in sharing in it. The information was also seen as necessary to allow for intelligent human co-operation in the plan and provided specific direction for action. In this way, new revelation served divine purpose.

Glock and Stark describe their taxonomy in terms of the discrete stages through which persons pass in order to develop greater intimacy with divinity.²⁰ The data supports this dynamic as interviewees reflected on the role of revelatory experience in their lives. Revelatory experience found their primary function in building relationship with recipients (Ch. 5.1.3.1). Recognition of God's voice was seen to improve as the relationship developed over time. Low-level experiences acted as a means of getting to know God in the early stages and progressed to a place where respondents could be entrusted with divine plans: "He's taken me on a journey of trust. Trusting that his voice is true and real." (C7). The value of low-level experience lay in its capacity to build a foundation on which high-level experiences could be borne. The high-level experiences become aspirational because of the relational strength with which they are associated.

This contrasts with the idea that higher-level revelatory experiences are for the spiritually immature, an idea that has been promoted by a number of charismatic church leaders.²¹ Indeed, a number of respondents suggested that the high-level revelatory experiences were *necessary* for a "partnership" dynamic to occur. While lower level experiences acted to confirm pre-existing truths and were associated with stability, the higher-level experiences pointed to more intentional and active change. The greater the action compelled by the experience, the more distinct the experience needed to be. As AP21 explained:

I think to do something like planting a church or moving countries, you need a very specific word. God seems to come with such a clear loud booming voice and vision in a theophany because there's always going to be tests and trials and setbacks and adversity. If you haven't got it really clear in your mind that you've encountered God for yourself, you can't go on third-hand information. You can't go because it was a good idea or someone told you to go. (AP21).

²⁰ Ibid., 60.

²¹ Meyer, 45, 48; Joyce Huggett, *Listening to God* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1986), 115; Williamson, *Hearing God*, Location 571, 716, 2885; Mark Batterson, *Whisper: How to Hear the Voice of God* (Colorado Springs, Multnomah, 2017), 119.

Hence the experience of AP21 and others suggests that “high-level” Type 4 experiences are associated with *maturity* in the divine-human relationship.

6.1.2.2 The Frequency and Disruptive Nature of Revelatory Experiences

Glock and Stark’s work indicates that in most churches, Type 3 and 4 experiences are less frequent than Type 1 or 2 experiences. They propose that higher level experiences are actively discouraged because the newness of their content makes them potentially disruptive to the institution. Low-level experiences, on the other hand are encouraged because they reinforce established information and confirm existing realities. The data in this study signifies somewhat of a departure from these findings. Indeed, high-level revelatory experiences were dominant in two of the three churches (A and B) and were actively *encouraged* by leadership. This was because they were seen to be evidence of the Spirit’s work and represented successful emulation of the biblical experience – a goal Pentecostals strive for.

Sociologists have identified three sources of instability for the revelatory experience. For Glock and Stark, the primary trigger lies in the potential of revelatory experience to deviate from doctrinal orthodoxy. “Heterodox” revelations pose a serious threat to religious institutions. Hence, many revelations that do not involve anything “new” and cultural innovation is seen to be a relatively uncommon activity. Coleman is cited:

One consequence of the ‘communication with God’ is that every man who so indulges is in communication with a different “person” outside society; a person he has in part shaped with his own thoughts. That is, whenever a mystic or a monk or a devout believer engages in meditation and interpretation of the scripture, he can create a new creed. This possibility poses a constant threat of cleavage within a religious group.²²

A second source of instability lies in the Weberian tension between the charismatic authority of experience and the established authority of leadership. This phenomenon has been investigated by both Stark and Poloma.²³ Their work confirms Weber’s thesis that the high-level type of religious experiences that serve to initiate a movement are actively discouraged as institutions become more established. This is because of the disruption to existing bureaucracies and the possibility of schism rather than challenges to orthodoxy.

²² Coleman, 49-50.

²³ Stark, “Theory of Revelations,” 304; Poloma, *Crossroads*, 77.

A third source of potential instability in Pentecostal churches relates to inappropriate affective expressions in public gatherings.²⁴ Poloma observes that behaviours become increasingly regulated over time such that guidelines eventually harden “into well-known and accepted mores, often leaving the shell of prophetic belief without the prophetic content.”²⁵ A similar process has been noted in the practice of public prophecy in Australia by Cettolin.²⁶

In the study, it was clear that Type 4 revelatory experiences *were* associated with disruption and instability in the study. However, these occurred largely in personal contexts such as the home and workplace rather than in the church setting and were related more to internal attitudes and mindsets than beliefs. Here, the “newness” of revelatory content usually represented a significant departure from the individual’s frame of reference. New information acted as an impetus to trigger *changes* in behaviour and was enhanced by the belief that the experience was divinely authoritative and required active response. Respondents frequently referred to the “otherness” of the divine voice that confronted, agitated and sometimes commanded change. Many of the predictive and directive experiences acted over time to produce life-altering behaviours and actions that were unanticipated, unplanned and initially undesired.

While Type 4 experiences often contained elements of previously unknown information, the vast majority did not challenge existing Christian teachings. Rather, experiences affirmed and applied existing doctrine to the individual’s situation. The exception to this was in three cases where revelatory messages challenged existing church teaching on the role of women in ministry, divorce and remarriage and the initiation of a new church plant. In each case, shifts in understandings led to a break with the respondent’s institution. At this point, the matter became a theological one, provoking a choice between the voice of human authority and the voice of the divine. In all cases, obedience to the Divine trumped institutional loyalty.

Given the disruptive nature of Type 4 experiences, the question arises as to *how* they are managed in light of the increased risk of instability. Here, there were significant differences between the churches.

²⁴ Poloma, *Crossroads*, 77.

²⁵ Poloma, *Main Street Mystics*, 127.

²⁶ Cettolin, *Spirit, Freedom and Power*, 66. Cartledge identifies the numerical size of the gathering acting as another reason for restriction to spontaneous utterances, Mark J. Cartledge, ed., *Speaking in Tongues: Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), 211. Margaret M. Poloma identifies a desire to “fit in” with mainstream churches, “Glossolalia, Liminality and Empowered Kingdom Building,” in *Speaking in Tongues: Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Mark J. Cartledge (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2006), 158.

In Church A, change and risk were understood to be “part and parcel” of the revelatory experience: “When you invite the Holy Spirit, you invite higher levels of risks.” (AP22). Any instability arising from *authentic* experience was understood in terms of theological understandings about the Spirit’s work and seen as positive development consistent with ministry goals. As Van Gelder notes, disruption in the biblical narratives was often central to growth: “The actual growth and development of the church under the leading of the Spirit was often introduced as a result of conflict, disruption, interruption and surprise.”²⁷ Such theological understandings equipped leadership to manage any fallout from the experience. Thus, the level of “disruption” depended on whether the revelatory experience was held to be valid in which case the Divine was the source of disruption. Like Church A, Church B were aware of the risk of promoting high-level revelatory experiences and reported problems in the past, but remained committed to the practice.

In contrast, revelatory experience posed a significant threat for the leadership of Church C who held deep concerns for pastoral fallout. Instances of individuals defying leadership decisions were cited, causing breakage and fallout on both sides (CP16). This approach confirmed the expectations of Glock and Stark that high-level revelatory experiences are generally discouraged. While Pentecostal revelatory experiences were valued in theory in Church C, in practice they were downplayed. Members were encouraged to hear God’s voice in more “stable” mediated modes through Scripture and sermons. This scenario highlights the essential role of the pastor for the ongoing viability of the experience in Pentecostal communities noted by Poloma and Cettolin.²⁸

6.1.2.3 Power Shifts in Relational Development

The threat to institutional stability posed by revelatory experiences in Pentecostal churches may lie less in possibility of *heterodoxy* of their content and more with the dynamic of relational development. McGuire has observed that hearing the divine voice is an act of power whereby individuals receive divine authority directly via their experience.²⁹ In the study, as individual experience progressed through the taxonomy to the place of “partnership” at the fourth stage, an increasing divesting of power *away* from the pastor to the divine was evident. As revelatory experiences called for greater levels of participation, more responsibility fell on the individual to act. “Relational maturity” equated to less dependence on the pastor and more dependence on the divine “voice.” This set up a potential power transfer from the senior leader to the Divine. One pastor

²⁷ Craig Van Gelder, *The Ministry of the Missional Church: A Community Led by the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 2007), 158.

²⁸ Poloma, *Crossroads*, 139; Cettolin, 111.

²⁹ McGuire, 90-92.

acknowledged the process, aligning it with parenting a child where maturity brings new levels of independence;

We need to teach people independence, maturity and the freedom to make mistakes. We don't mother them or over-protect them like helicopter parenting. We don't control them. We don't say 'that can't be God' and make them stay. We are not mediators. We are fathers in the faith. We say: "You make your choices and live with the consequences. We will love and bless you anyway." (AP21).

The process that promotes increasing levels of autonomy for the individual also creates the possibility of dissension with leadership when individual revelatory messages depart from corporate goals. It also provokes the theological question, *who does one follow when the instruction of the pastor and God are in conflict?* In Church A and B leadership, the answer was clear – allegiance to God was the top priority. Once discerned to be of God, the individual should follow the directive even when it contravened the pastor's opinion. For BP16: "I'm not gonna argue with God, however they've heard it. I respect the possibility it could be God. It could be wrong, but what if I was wrong?" In Church C however, there was more emphasis on submission to the leader's authority.

6.1.2.4 The Role of Discernment in Maintaining Institutional Stability

While revelatory experiences may cause some degree of institutional disruption, Scripture indicates that divine revelation is by nature beneficial (1 Cor 14:3-4). This makes the process of discernment crucial for the viability of Pentecostal communities. Poloma and Hood's study reveals a lack of discernment as a key variable in the disintegration of a church community.³⁰ In the study, the social controls and protocols referred to by Glock and Stark³¹ acted to facilitate discernment. Various correctives operated in the communities to determine the validity of an experience and whether any new information was considered orthodox. This enabled a level of stability in the three churches.

At a base level, the Scriptures were used to define the parameters of revelatory experiences in all the churches. The "heart of God" (as expressed in Scripture) was identified as a further criterion, as in one case in which a medically diagnosed schizophrenic was able to distinguish "God's voice from the voices in her head" (telling her to lay on the railway tracks). As Luhrmann notes, P-C Christians have little difficulty distinguishing between spirituality and psychosis.³²

³⁰ Poloma and Hood, *Blood and Fire*, 106, 168.

³¹ Glock and Stark, 56-57.

³² Luhrmann, 233.

However, as noted (Ch. 5.1.5.3), the Scriptures alone were limited as a means of discernment since most Type 4 experiences lay outside the direct scope of biblical testimony. In these cases, the church community provided the primary means by which the experience was judged. As Poloma states, “prophecy is not truly prophetic” unless it is “socially sanctioned.”³³ In the sample, the community functioned to aid discernment of the individual experience in two ways. Firstly, individuals reported consulting with other members in their immediate relational circle. Here the ability to articulate experience and raise it into common discourse became essential.³⁴ The second way was through a separate revelatory experience of another party that concurred in some way with the original message. These communal mechanisms were effective in regulating most experiences to the degree that people were in close relational proximity to the community. In the study only a few cases were reported to be poorly discerned and led to pastoral damage and fallout. Here, the problem was attributed to a lack of conversation with others or a refusal to listen to their counsel. Type 4 experiences are not as institutionally dangerous *when* experiences were maintained by a common and clear understanding about the limits and type of revelation that should occur.

6.1.2.5 Discernment as an Act of Power

Sociologists have previously recognised the democratic nature of Spirit encounters.³⁵ The Pentecostal belief that all believers have access to revelatory messages grants power directly from God to the individual and bypasses any human authority. As such, the revelatory experience acts as a symbol of individual empowerment. At the same time as Stark, Poloma and others have noted, the direct access to charismatic authority poses a threat to institutional authority. For the Pentecostal who holds to the legitimacy of authentic revelatory experience, the threat is dependent upon whether the message originates in God, the self or a diabolic source. Thus, the matter of *who* is responsible for discernment becomes primary.

Numerous studies have shown that the regulation of revelatory experiences in Pentecostal communities typically falls to senior leadership. Albrecht and Lum have noted the role of the pastor in bringing guidance and correction to prophetic experiences in the public service.³⁶ Similarly McGuire shows how the leader maintains institutional stability via the act of discernment. She observes that the role of discerner becomes the most powerful one in the group in a way that limits the democratic process.³⁷ However, these findings all relate to the public setting. In this study, revelatory experiences occurred largely in private locations outside the reach of liturgical structures and institutional

³³ Poloma and Hood, *Blood and Fire*, 106.

³⁴ Parker, 193.

³⁵ McGuire, 90; Albrecht, 243; Luhrmann, 35.

³⁶ Albrecht, 244; Lum, 225.

³⁷ McGuire, 99, 105, 119.

leadership. In these cases, the responsibility for perceiving divine intentions lay primarily with the individual. The vast majority of experiences were not “approved” by senior leadership. This was either due to pragmatics (it was not logistically possible for leadership to monitor every situation), the fact that the leader was relationally distant or that it was felt to be unnecessary. Instead, most discernment occurred in conjunction with the individual’s inner social circle. Furthermore, the ability to discern the divine voice improved with relational development. As before, progress from “acquaintance” to “friend” to “partner” meant that less reliance on the pastor was required.

In a few cases, the senior leaders were consulted during the discernment process. This occurred where the revelatory experience was more radical in nature and bore consequences for a wider audience (Glock and Stark’s “general” compared to “personal” characteristic.)³⁸ Thus, the involvement of leadership in the discernment process was related to the *sphere of influence* the experience pointed to. If the matter was personal, it was usually left to the individual and their immediate circle. Where wider issues were at stake, it was taken to higher levels of leadership.

The benefit of individual responsibility for discernment meant that the democratic intent of the Spirit access was maintained. At the same time, the individualised dynamic of the experience means that there is less opportunity for leadership to *reject* the revelatory message if it contravened institutional needs. This scenario was of particular concern to Church C leadership where claims to revelation were associated with those who had an “independent spirit” and “would not come under authority” of the leader” (CP16). Indeed, Pentecostal practitioners frequently lament the isolated prophetic figure who operates outside the accountability structures of the community. When the leader is not present to regulate individual revelatory experience, the frameworks available to empower the individual to discern their own experience becomes vital. These are investigated in Sections 6.2.3.3 and 6.2.3.4.

6.1.3 Reflection on Glock and Stark’s Theory

The conceptualisation of religious experiences by Glock and Stark in terms of relational development is an apt framework for Pentecostal revelatory experience. Pentecostals speak of God in highly personal terms and express their faith in terms of friendship and relationship. As Luhrmann describes it, this version of Christianity presents God as personal and intimate – like “a supernatural buddy with a thunderbolt.”³⁹ In the study, Pentecostals participated in all of the types of religious experience on Glock and Stark’s taxonomy. Though Type 3 and 4 experiences were especially valued, Type 1 and 2

³⁸ Glock and Stark, 58.

³⁹ Luhrmann, xix, 38.

experiences proved their value in establishing the foundations of relationship between the human and divine actors.

The weakness of the taxonomy for this study was the categorisation of Type 3 experiences and the use of affections as a distinctive. In the study, feelings of belonging and love were felt to varying degrees in all types of the experience. While sensory feelings were important in establishing the human-divine relationship, they tended to act as a by-product rather than the substance of the experience. Instead, it was the *content* of revelatory messages (including the revelation of previously unknown information and explicit directional nature) that tended to move it from one level of the taxonomy to another.

In addition, the findings of this study – and in particular, two of the churches – represent an exception to Glock and Stark’s theory that high-level experiences in the latter stages of the taxonomy are actively discouraged by churches. While revelatory experiences were found to be potentially disruptive due to the “newness” of their content, discernment processes were employed to ensure these conformed to orthodox teachings. Once discerned, the perceived benefit and spiritual value outweighed any risk of disruption and instability. Indeed, the presence of Type 4 revelational experiences were often an indicator of spiritual growth and vitality, representing increasing levels of trust and intimacy in the divine-human relationship.

On the other hand, the findings of Church C conformed to Glock and Stark’s theory that revelatory experiences were discouraged due to their potential for institutional instability. When Pentecostal churches encourage participation in revelatory experiences, they inevitably put themselves at risk of disruption and instability. As the individual progresses in their relationship with the Divine, revelatory experiences increasingly contain elements of new information that shift the individual from acquaintance to partnership and independence, effectively shifting reliance and power away from the pastor to God. The privatised nature of the experience also means that discernment tends towards to the individual and less dependence on the senior leader is required as the divine-human relationship progresses. High-level revelatory experiences eventually lead to questions about the ultimate governing authority, an issue that for churches, must be addressed theologically. Conclusions regarding this may challenge authoritarian models of church leadership, such that the leader moves from “director” to “facilitator.”

The analysis reveals the importance of discernment procedures to maintain a measure of institutional stability. Here the frameworks by which high-level revelatory experiences are regulated in the community become crucial. The theories of Peter Berger are engaged to explore this process.

6.2 THE PENTECOSTAL COMMUNITY AND REVELATORY EXPERIENCE IN SOCIOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE

This section provides a sociological analysis of the revelatory experience from a communal perspective. While hearing God's voice is largely a private practice for Pentecostals, the community plays an essential role in facilitating, modelling and defining its use. As Poloma reminds us, understanding the context of religious experience is crucial to understanding the experience itself, since the practices of individual communities are always "embedded in a larger worldview with its accompanying narratives and meta-narratives."⁴⁰ In this section, the findings (from Ch. 5.1) are first drawn upon to investigate the revelatory experience in light of Glock and Stark's categories. This is followed by a summary of Peter Berger's "sacred canopy" theory of social worlds. Berger's theory is then used to interact with the study data (from Ch. 5.2). The section concludes with a reflection on Berger's theory, discussing whether the collective case study modifies it in any way.

6.2.1 Revelatory Experiences in Church A, B and C

As noted, all four types of revelatory experience were present in the three communities. However, there were clear differences in their distribution and intensity (Fig 2, 3, 4). Church A revealed a significantly greater proportion of high-level experiences than Church B. These were relatively uniform across ages and genders in Church A, while Church B revealed a less even spread with significantly more high-level experiences in the upper age brackets. Church C showed a high number of Type 4 experiences akin to Church A, however, these were confined to isolated "pockets" or small groups where the leader had expertise. The vast majority of these individuals had been trained to "hear God's voice" outside the Church C community.

Clear links have been found between groups that are organised towards religious experience and incidences of experience.⁴¹ As Poloma states, a world organised towards spiritual experience is more likely to experience it. Stark proposes that the sociological contexts most likely to sustain revelatory activity involve a supportive environment and the presence of a role model.⁴² Similarly, Poloma found that not all Pentecostal congregations were equally "charismatic" with the key predictor for the degree of corporate charisma being the level of the pastor's personal experience of such phenomena.⁴³ The question of how the Pentecostal community *specifically* functions to facilitate and regulate

⁴⁰ Poloma, "Glossolalia, Liminality," 156; Poloma, "Sociological Models," 177.

⁴¹ Ralph W. Hood Jr, "Normative and Motivational Determinants of Reported Religious Experience in Two Baptist Samples," *Review of Religious Research* 13, no. 3 (1972): 193.

⁴² Stark, "Theory of Revelations," 289.

⁴³ Poloma, *Crossroads*, 86.

revelatory experience will be addressed by comparing the three communities in light of Peter Berger's theory.

Figure 4: Revelatory Experiences by Type in Church A

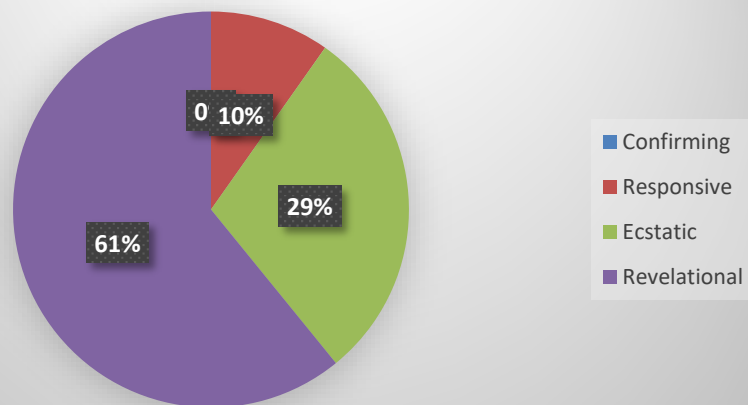


Figure 5: Revelatory Experiences by Type in Church B

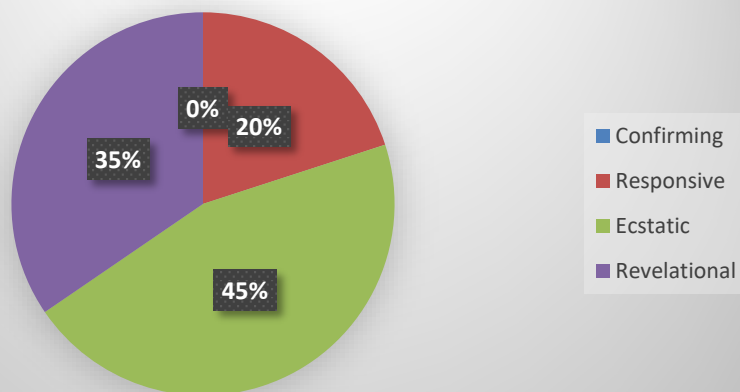
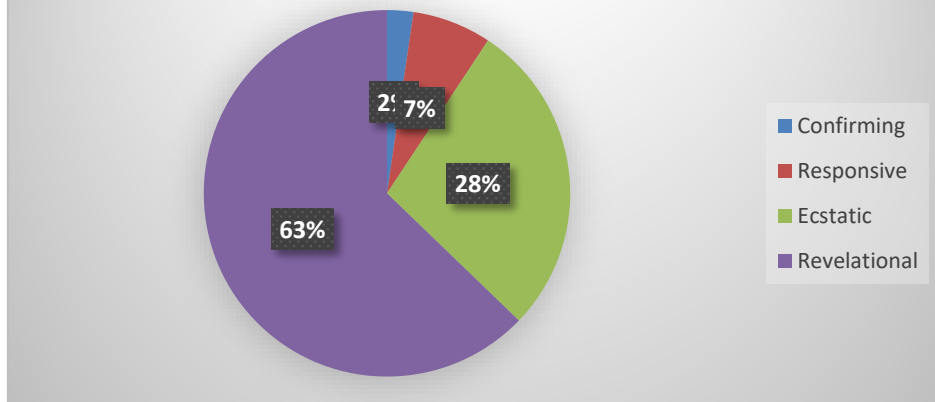


Figure 6: Revelatory Experiences by Type in Church C



6.2.2 Peter Berger's Theory of the Sacred Canopy

The theories of renowned sociologist Peter Berger provide a theoretical framework by which the revelatory experience in Pentecostal community can be analysed. Berger's ideas on social construction and the sociology of knowledge were first presented in collaboration with Thomas Luckmann in *the Social Construction of Reality* (1966).⁴⁴ Berger later applied these concepts to religious communities in *The Sacred Canopy* (1967), specifically in his investigation of secularisation. This work was published as *The Social Reality of Religion*. Berger's work is a classic in sociological theory and has been applied to multiple studies in religious communities in the fifty years since *The Sacred Canopy* was published. According to Woodhead, Berger has arguably contributed the most to the study of religion at the level of what might be called "meta-theory."⁴⁵ Horrell suggests that the wide-ranging ongoing utility of Berger's theory is partly due to its capacity to bring together theological and sociological concerns.⁴⁶

Berger described the social world of religion as a "sacred canopy" under which individuals could flourish. According to Berger, it is humans themselves who construct this society through the use of

⁴⁴ Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City: Doubleday, 1967).

⁴⁵ Linda Woodhead, ed., *Peter Berger and the Study of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2001). Hjelm names him one of the most influential sociologists of the last century, Titus Hjelm, ed., *Peter L. Berger and the Sociology of Religion* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 1.

⁴⁶ David G. Horrell, "Berger and New Testament Studies," in *Peter Berger and the Study of Religion*, ed. Linda Woodhead (London: Routledge, 2001), 142-53.

various tools and processes, such that we live in a world of our own making.⁴⁷ Berger described this process in three moments or steps. The first step, known as “externalisation,” occurs as humanity acts to shape and form their environment. The second phase, “objectivation,” refers to the process whereby cultural structures become an object existing in their own right. Termed the “nomos” by Berger, this includes the knowledge of a society about “how things are” and comprises its values and beliefs, ethics and patterns of living as well as its institutions. The third phase termed “internalisation” occurs when the *nomos* acts back on the person.⁴⁸ This final step is essential for the maintenance of the community. It allows society to transmit its objectivised customs and ideas through the generations.⁴⁹ Thus, humanity both shapes society and becomes a product of society. In Berger and Luckmann’s words; “*Society is a human product* (externalisation). *Society is an objective reality* (objectivation). *Man [sic.] is a social product* (internalisation).”⁵⁰

It is from these socially constructed worlds that systems of meaning arise. Termed “plausibility structures” by Berger, the systems provide the means through which experiences are defined and supported as having a particular validity. As Ammerman notes, plausibility structures are not the ideas themselves, but the relationships and social structures/networks that are form around those ideas.⁵¹ “Plausibility” is thus provided by belonging to a community of like-minded people and engaging in the rituals expressed by the community.⁵² For Berger, these plausibility structures allow for both “objective” and “subjective” elements: personal experiences are understood within a collectively recognised frame of reference and it is within this “objective reality” that the individual locates and interprets his/her own story.⁵³

In this way, humanity creates stability for themselves in a social world or “culture” of their own creation. The culture appears to be “second nature,” providing a firm set of structures to operate within. For Berger, this fulfils humanity’s primary need for meaning and order in society.⁵⁴ However, although these social worlds take on the appearance of stability and objectivity, they are in fact,

⁴⁷ Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 4-16.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 4, 37.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 47.

⁵⁰ Berger and Luckmann, 61 (emphasis in original).

⁵¹ Nancy T. Ammerman, “From Canopies to Conversations: The Continuing Significance of ‘Plausibility Structures,’” in *Peter L. Berger and the Sociology of Religion*, ed. Titus Hjelm (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018), 28.

⁵² Hjelm, 6.

⁵³ Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 13.

⁵⁴ Gary Dorrien in Linda Woodhead, ed., *Peter Berger and the Study of Religion* (London: Routledge, 2001), 32.

precarious.⁵⁵ Plausibility structures may be challenged by competing explanations and therefore require *maintenance* to continue. This is achieved through the process of “legitimation,” whereby the use of socially objectivated “knowledge” acts to explain the social order and reinforce the plausibility structures. These social controls mitigate against potential threats and provide ongoing perpetuation of the social world.

In religious communities, the *nomos* of the social world is understood to be rooted in the cosmos. Religion thus fulfils a social function by offering a protective “canopy” under which humanity can operate in stable and predictable ways. This canopy is “sacred” and anchors this world in the next.

6.2.3 Reflection on Berger’s Sacred Canopy and Pentecostal Revelatory Experience

Having provided an outline of Berger’s theory, this section reflects on the concepts of the sacred canopy in relation to the data in order to investigate how revelatory experiences are facilitated and regulated in community. This is achieved by comparing the social worlds of the three churches as one that aims to be in continuity with the early church and then by exploring how language, legitimations and regulatory controls work to maintain the Pentecostal world even as high-risk revelatory experiences threaten to de-stabilise them.

6.2.3.1 A World in Continuity with the Early Church

As noted (Ch. 3.1.1), the ideal community for the Pentecostal is one that operates in continuity with the first century church and it is upon this basis that it constructs itself. Emile Durkheim reminds us that what is defined as ‘normal’ is determined from within the group.⁵⁶ In the world of the Pentecostal, supernatural miracles, healings and revelation are normalised. As Poloma describes it, the lines between the supernatural and natural are “fudged” in a way that “is at odds with the materialism, scientism and instrumental rationality of the Western world.”⁵⁷ It is from this underlying worldview that the Pentecostal community creates plausibility structures for revelatory experiences. In accordance with Berger’s theory, these provide the basis for members of the community to hear God’s voice.

The Pentecostals in the study largely operated from the belief that God speaks in supernatural ways that are analogous to the experiences recorded in Scripture. The activities and experiences of the

⁵⁵ Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 6.

⁵⁶ Emile Durkheim, *The Rules of Sociological Method*, ed. Steven Lukes, trans. W.D. Halls (New York: The Free Press, 1895), 85-107.

⁵⁷ Poloma, “Glossolalia, Liminality,” 156.

biblical players provide the pattern by which contemporary Pentecostals play their part. As in Poloma's research, the ideas, concepts and practices of hearing God's voice in the study were modelled on the biblical experience, with the ultimate goal to create a community where "hearing God's voice is normal spirituality."⁵⁸ In creating these communities, the Scriptures functioned as the basis for the plausibility structures in hearing God's voice. Personal experience interacted with biblical experience to provide and reinforce the parameters for contemporary revelatory experience. As Ellington notes: "The Bible is the basic rule of faith and practice and supplies the corrective and interpretive authority for all religious experience."⁵⁹ The Bible was read with deliberate naiveté, an approach which constructs biblical experience as immediate and personal. The narratives of Scripture allowed individuals to directly correlate their individual story to the collective one. In this way the biblical experience formed part of Berger's "objective reality" by which private experience was understood.

Although all three churches generally expressed a historically primitivist view regarding contemporary revelation, there was significant variation in the level and intensity of experiences in their communities. Although it is not possible to compare the communities statistically in a qualitative study such as this, general themes and patterns can be identified. Differences are best explained in terms of Berger's theories of world construction and maintenance and the language, legitimations and regulatory controls in operation.

6.2.3.2 The Language of Pentecostal Revelatory Experiences

Berger has shown language to be an essential building block in creating and reinforcing the plausibility structures of social worlds.⁶⁰ Language both articulates our experience and then acts to change it.⁶¹ As Berger describes it, "Man produces tools of every conceivable kind, by means of which he modifies his physical environment and bends nature to his will. Man also produces language and, on its foundation and by means of it, a towering edifice of symbols that permeate every aspect of his life."⁶² The essential role of language was evident in the study, both in creating the possibility of revelatory experience and in its discernment.

⁵⁸ Poloma, *Main Street Mystics*, 121.

⁵⁹ Ellington, "Authority of Scripture," 21.

⁶⁰ Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 15-16.

⁶¹ Vivien Burr, *Social Constructionism* (London: Routledge, 2004), 34.

⁶² Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 6.

Pentecostal communities are known for their oral practices and cultures.⁶³ Poloma has noted the crucial function of language, showing how religious experience is partially dependent upon it in AG and Episcopalian communities.⁶⁴ In the study, the language used reflects the church's beliefs about the possibility of divine communication. In all three churches, the experience of hearing God was articulated in the public services. Revelatory language was "performed" in testimonies, public prophecy and the use of the first person in song. These practices are consistent with other Pentecostal studies.⁶⁵ Furthermore, participants drew on biblical language to frame their own experience. While evangelical theologians question the legitimacy of using the biblical messenger formula "Thus says the Lord,"⁶⁶ its modern equivalent "God says" and phrases such as 'the word of the Lord',⁶⁷ these are used freely by Pentecostals to model the accessibility of the encounter. Albrecht observes how the phrase "the word" is used in North American Pentecostal services to symbolise the belief that God speaks today as in biblical times.⁶⁸

At the same time, there was variations in the type of language used in the study.⁶⁹ In Church A, references to God's direct speech was frequent and unapologetic, particularly in the public setting. Similar language was used in Church B and C, but with a tendency towards the softer phrase: "I feel" or "I think that God is saying." In Church C, the phrase "God says" was cautioned against by leadership and was associated with rebellion and spiritual immaturity. As Turner observes, this preference for more tentative phrases may convey the tenuous and error-prone nature of the experience.⁷⁰ It may also reflect the increasingly popular notion that hearing God's voice requires *learning*, and therefore there are levels of competency and accuracy in the experience.⁷¹ Notably, language surrounding the revelatory experience was far more prevalent in Church A than B or C, suggesting that an available public language serves to increase the likelihood of revelatory experience occurring.⁷²

Variation in the use of language among the three churches was also observed outside the liturgical setting. In Church A, there was a consistency in vocabulary surrounding revelatory experiences that

⁶³ Ch. 6.2.1.

⁶⁴ Poloma, "Sociological Models," 178.

⁶⁵ Parker, 9; Cartledge, "Charismatic and Empirical Perspectives," 53.

⁶⁶ Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, Location 997.

⁶⁷ Cartledge, "Definition and Description," 90.

⁶⁸ Albrecht, 228.

⁶⁹ Albrecht, 230.

⁷⁰ Turner, *Holy Spirit*, 317.

⁷¹ Cartledge, "Definition and Description," 90.

⁷² Poloma, "Sociological Models," 178.

was not present in either Church B or C. In Church A interviews, respondents articulated their experiences with ease and confidence and the experience was common to their spiritual conversations. This gave opportunity for participants to test their experience for validity and to inspire it in others. The significance of this kind of everyday conversation outside of formal teaching and liturgy has been highlighted.⁷³ Ammerman emphasises the importance of spiritual conversations that meld with the family and work activities of ordinary life for the reinforcement of plausibility structures. Similarly, Luhmann noted how the revelatory experience was modelled and encouraged in conversations with friends.⁷⁴ This dynamic was clearly present in Church A where revelatory experiences were referenced freely and easily in the intimacy of mid-week gatherings. The frequent and public use of revelatory language in Church A can be positively correlated to its extensive private use. These findings support Berger's emphasis on the role of language in creating and sustaining plausibility structures. As Berger notes, "The world begins to shake in the very instant that its sustaining conversation begins to falter."⁷⁵

6.2.3.3 Legitimations in the Pentecostal World

Berger reminds us that "socially constructed worlds are inherently precarious" and must be maintained through legitimations.⁷⁶ In the study, public rites, testimonies and the use of Scripture were key legitimators for the revelatory experience.

Public Rites and Rituals

In the study, public rites and rituals acted to reinforce plausibility structures and remind participants of the accepted "nomos" that God continues to speak as in biblical times. Rites modelled the practice of hearing God's voice and included sermons, public prophecy and worship songs where lyrics included divine speech. In particular, public prophecy provided a model for the tone, language and content of private revelatory experience. These findings reflect other Pentecostal studies.⁷⁷ As Albrecht shows, while experience with the divine is primarily individualistic, Pentecostal rites allow it to be shared within a highly social context and "provides for a 'confluence of experience' where the multitude (of experiences) merge into one corporate expression (experience)."⁷⁸

⁷³ Ammerman, 32.

⁷⁴ Luhmann, 47-54.

⁷⁵ Berger and Luckmann, 21.

⁷⁶ Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 28.

⁷⁷ Albrecht, 137-8, 172-3; Poloma and Hood, *Blood and Fire*, 213.

⁷⁸ Albrecht, 243.

These public rites were present in all three communities, but varied in degree. In Church A, public prophecy occurred weekly. Regular prayer ministry was frequently initiated with a “word from the Lord,” and the annual conference featured a specialist “prophetic” ministry. Songs were often in the first person and echoed the prophetic monologues of the Bible. All of these rites were considerably less common in Churches B and C. In Church C, they rarely occurred.

Testimonies and the Use of Scripture

Testimonies are a distinctive feature of Pentecostal communities.⁷⁹ In the study, testimonies formed an effective means of legitimation for revelatory experience and were a regular, if not weekly, feature of Church A. In contrast, testimonies regarding revelatory experience were rare, if not completely absent in Church B and C. The retelling of personal experiences within the community facilitates understandings about how God speaks and provides opportunity to assess private experiences against the accepted *nomos* of the community.

The significance of testimonies as a public rite is that they modelled the revelatory experience in ways that could be applied in private use. Their use reinforced the idea that God *is* speaking (outside Scripture) as much as God *has* spoken (in Scripture). Lewis points to the role of testimonial narratives as an essential source of knowledge and understanding in Pentecostal churches.⁸⁰ As Bridges-Johns has observed, it is in the process of “sharing testimonies” that the subjective pre-understandings of Pentecostals are expressed and claims to objectivity are made.⁸¹ In the study, testimonies demonstrated the form and content of revelation as well as its limits in ways that could be emulated in private settings. In Church A, their effectiveness as legitimators was enhanced by the theological reflections of the pastor that often followed them. Testimonies were carefully exegeted and linked to the Scriptures, allowing them to become a powerful teaching tool. Thus, they provided plentiful opportunities for informal training.

Formal Teaching and Training

Formal training also acted as a legitimiser of revelatory experience in the study. As before, this formed a considerably higher priority in Church A than B or C. In Church A, all members were exposed to some sort of explicit teaching through a 10-week “Encounter” school. Training in

⁷⁹ Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatological Theology*, 6; Kenneth J. Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic for the Twenty-First Century: Spirit, Scripture and Community* (London: T & T Clark, 2004), 188.

⁸⁰ Paul W. Lewis, “Towards a Pentecostal Epistemology: The Role of Experience in Pentecostal Hermeneutics,” *The Spirit and Church* 2, no. 1 (May 2000): 99, 108.

⁸¹ Bridges-Johns, *Pentecostal Formation*, 28; also John C. Thomas, “Women, Pentecostalism and the Bible: An Experiment in Pentecostal Hermeneutics,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 5 (1994): 55.

revelatory experience was also incorporated in the healing ministry. This compared to a one-day event in Church B and virtually no training in Church C.

6.2.3.4 Regulatory Controls

Berger reminds us that when under threat, specific social processes operate to reconstruct and maintain the particular world in question.⁸² These forces work coercively to impose themselves on the individuals through sanctions, controls and punishment.⁸³ In other words, the group works to disenfranchise and isolate those who engage in experiences that may be deemed illegitimate and reinforce those who serve the status quo. The community makes decisions as to the validity of experience through drawing on the *nomos*. This requires that individuals submit to regulatory controls and engage with the activities of the community. Hood has noted the negative correlation between the intensity of mystical experiences and institutional commitment.⁸⁴ Regulatory protocols and training do not always ensure testing takes place.

As noted, revelatory experiences may cause institutional stability through challenges to orthodox doctrinal teaching, defiance of institutional structures and creating the potential for pastoral damage. The possibility of poor discernment is also a key factor. All three churches were aware of the potential for disruption caused by revelatory experiences, but responded differently to the risk. In Church A, the issue was specifically and intentionally addressed by policies and practices. In Church B, regulatory controls were alluded to, but not fully implemented. In contrast, Church C worked to construct a world where God's voice was heard through less disruptive mediated forms (eg. sermons, books). However, this may have unwittingly created an even greater threat to stability since the possibility of phenomenologically equivalent experience was still alluded to (at least in theory), but without practical instruction given as to its discernment. This had the effect of weakening the plausibility structures for high-level revelatory experiences and appeared to lead to a level of confusion around the experience that was not as apparent in Church A or B.

In Church A, regulatory controls operated formally through the guidelines in the training school and informally, through constant modelling and teaching. Accepted understandings about the *nomos* were clearly and frequently articulated and created the framework by which private experience was judged and assessed. Even though formal correctives were available, they were rarely implemented due to

⁸² Berger, *Sacred Canopy*, 45.

⁸³ Ibid., 11.

⁸⁴ Ralph W. Hood Jr, "Forms of Religious Commitment and Intense Religious Experience," *Review of Religious Research* 15, no. 1 (1973), 35.

adequate training. It appeared that in Church A, regulation lay more in the provision of training than in policies and autocratic supervision.

In sum, the data revealed that while all three churches expressed the typical Pentecostal identity as continuous with the early church, they presented a different approach to revelatory experience. Two of the three churches appeared to actively embrace the goal of constructing a community that practised phenomenologically equivalent revelatory experience. Church A was effective in constructing this social world through a common language and intentional commitment to public rites, training and the implementation of regulatory processes. While Church B was committed to the same goal, it was not as active in constructing the plausibility structures for revelatory experience. In Church C, little attention was given to creating a world where supernatural experiences were normalised through language and legitimations even though it was still occasionally communicated as possible. This may have inadvertently contributed to a greater risk of institutional stability.

6.2.4 Reflection on Berger's Theory

Berger's concepts of world construction, maintenance and plausibility structures provide an effective framework by which to understand the social world of Pentecostal communities. In particular, the concept of legitimation provides a useful tool to explain how Pentecostal communities facilitate and regulate revelatory experiences through their language, rites and correctives. These help to create and reinforce plausibility structures for the experience and provide clear and predictable boundaries for how they occur.

At the same time, Berger's theory is built on the supposition that humanity values stability and order as the first need of all. Religion's primary social function then, is to order experience such that meaning can be found. Horrell expresses a concern that the focus on stability means that change may be portrayed as a threat and there is little room to show how social worlds shift and evolve.⁸⁵ He argues that Berger's emphasis on stability does not make provision for how social worlds may be critiqued because it may inadvertently legitimise and sustain the particular interests of certain social groups or classes.

It is clear that high-level Type 4 revelatory experiences represent a challenge to the stability of the Pentecostal world. The need for stability highlighted by Berger is clearly seen when revelatory experience challenges existing bureaucratic structures. However, rather than being perceived as a

⁸⁵ Horrell, "Berger and New Testament Studies," 149.

threat, communities that embrace the Pentecostal vision may anticipate this reality and view it as a force for positive change. For Pentecostals, such experiences are consistent with the shift from the human world to creation of another world in parallel to their own. This new world is based on “kingdom” values where the Divine is the ultimate authority and social arrangements reflect his *modus operandi*: “Your kingdom come; your will be done on earth as it is in heaven” (Mt 6:10). As *divinely initiated instability*, authentic revelatory experiences may therefore be welcomed even as they disrupt the status quo. The value of “stability” is no longer a driver for world construction and maintenance. “Stability” is found not so much in *human* social constructs as much as it is in divine personhood and other-worldly constructs. This provides the potential for revision and critique of the social world itself.

In the study, high-level revelatory experiences often challenged the status quo, initiating changes personally and to a lesser degree, corporately. For example, a revelatory experience in Church A led to a shift in gender roles amongst the leadership towards an egalitarian model and an eventual break from their denomination to a different network. The understanding that this was a part of the Spirit’s work in “your kingdom come” had the effect of reducing the tension around the change (at least for one party). This same shift in breaking down social barriers as a result of revelatory experience has been evidenced in Pentecostalism (in relation to gender and race).⁸⁶ The *nomos* of the Pentecostal sub-world contains ideas about a divine person who constantly challenges the norm. In this respect, revelatory experience acts as key driver for reform.

Horrell asks further ideological questions about how the stabilising forces of the social world can act to protect the power of particular social groups and classes. Pentecostal revelatory experience can be viewed as a corrective to this process as the democratic experience acts to constantly shift authority back to all its members, irrespective of their educational background, gender or social status. For example, the revelatory experience challenges the role of the senior pastor and potentially shifts their role from “director” to “facilitator.” A similar dynamic was observed by Richard Fenn in the work of David Martin in Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union. As Fenn states, “Pentecostals have the ability to see this world in terms of an other-worldly one – one that is far more stable and inviting than this one.”⁸⁷ Fenn particularly points to the value of charismatic gifts in providing inspiration and authority *outside* of the institutional structures, therefore allowing for the disbandment of old

⁸⁶ Cox, 131; Andy Lord, “Spirit-Driven Gospel Communities of Transformation,” *Mission Studies* 34 (2017): 183.

⁸⁷ Richard K. Fenn, “Berger’s Vision in Retrospect,” in *Peter Berger and the Study of Religion*, ed. Linda Woodhead (London: Routledge, 2001), 133.

traditions and the rise of new movements. Revelatory experiences thus carry the potential to become significant drivers for social change.

6.3 SUMMARY

Berger's theory provides a framework by which the revelatory experience is facilitated in community. The Pentecostal world provides a "sacred canopy" for the engagement, testing and response to revelatory experience. In turn, these revelatory experiences play an important part in the maintenance and innovation for which the "worlds" are known. Experiences of hearing God's voice are understood by Pentecostals to be historically primitivist and mediated through participation in the Pentecostal community. The facilitation and regulation of revelatory experience is dependent upon the creation of a world that sustains it. These experiences have the potential to build individuals and their communities or destroy them. Pentecostal Christians are likely to experience God's voice in keeping with the plausibility structures created by various legitimations and correctives. The data in this study shows that:

1. The evidence points to a correlation between the institutional intention for the facilitation of God's voice experiences and the number and intensity of revelatory encounters. Such intentionality is seen in the shared theology, practice and language, formal training and informal reinforcement through public demonstration and reflection.
2. Revelatory experiences that are analogous to the biblical experience present a strong risk of disruption in Pentecostal communities at a corporate and personal level. This is due to the "newness" of their revelatory content as well as their commissioning nature. Such risk is mitigated by a conceptual framework that anticipates their potential for kingdom purpose and adequately regulates them for maximum benefit and minimal fallout.
3. Training for appropriate discernment based on an adequate theology minimises the risk of damaging experiences and may be more effective than engaging regulatory protocols.
4. Community participation provides access to important social correctives. Interaction provides a common language, reinforced by the leadership and in public forums, such that "testing" can successfully occur and where there is language and context that is conducive to consultation.
5. The democratic nature of the revelatory experience to all members of the Pentecostal community has implications for the role of leader in the community. Human authority becomes increasingly

divested by the experience as authority moves from leader to the Divine in the manner of parenting. This acts to shift the role of the pastor from director to facilitator.

7. THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS PART 1: THE REVELATORY EXPERIENCE IN RELATION TO SCRIPTURE

This chapter and the following (8) provide a theological analysis of the revelatory experiences in the study. The discussion allows both the ordinary theology of Pentecostals in the sample to inform the scholarly debates and the work of scholars to reflect on ordinary theology. This is achieved by bringing the testimony data into dialogue with selected theological voices and the voice of Scripture. Themes and patterns that from the data will be drawn upon to engage the theological questions in focus. In some cases, additional testimonies are included in more detail in order to explore the issues at hand. This allows for any dissonance between the ordinary theology of those in the sample and the voices of the academy to be articulated and then addressed through the process of rescripting against the “script” of Scripture and various theological frameworks (Ch. 3). From there, theological insights and recommendations for renewed practice are made (Ch. 9).

To begin the analysis, this chapter investigates the contemporary revelatory experience in relation to Scripture as a whole. This allows the theological problems arising from Pentecostal revelatory experience in relation to Scripture to be addressed. The analysis is set against the backdrop of the four theological frameworks that arise from the different ecclesial traditions (1. Contemporary revelatory experience as *ceased*; 2. Contemporary revelatory experience as *phenomenologically inferior* to the biblical experience; 3. Contemporary revelatory experience as *phenomenologically equivalent* to the biblical experience with Scripture as *unnecessary* and, 4. Contemporary revelatory experience as *phenomenologically equivalent* to the biblical experience with Scripture as *final and permanent testament to revelation*).

Two primary theorists are employed to engage the data: anthropologist Charles Kraft and philosopher James Smith. These voices have been selected because they assume the phenomenologically equivalent perspective of the Pentecostals towards revelatory experiences and then consider the theological implications for understanding Scripture as a whole. The voices of Grudem and other P-C authors are also incorporated into the discussion. This allows comparisons to be made with the phenomenologically inferior framework of the Pentecostal-Charismatics and the phenomenologically equivalent approach of the Catholic tradition.

The analysis is divided into three sections. To begin with, Charles Kraft’s communicational model is brought into dialogue with the testimonial data in order to explore the *nature of inspiration* in contemporary Pentecostal experience in relation to the biblical experience. This is followed by a discussion with James Smith on the *site of divine authority* of the “word of God” and the impact of

textualization in oral communities. A third section furthers the dialogue with Smith by focussing on the epistemology of Pentecostal experience compared to Scripture. The analysis reveals how existing P-C bibliologies are incompatible with the practice of phenomenologically equivalent revelatory experience and revised understandings are needed. The next chapter (8) will complete the analysis with a closer examination of the individual experience in dialogue with a third theorist Niels Hvidt.

7.1 THE WORK OF CHARLES KRAFT AND THE NATURE OF INSPIRATION

Beliefs about the inspiration of Scripture *as a whole* (2 Tim 3:16) tend to find their basis in understandings about inspired experiences *within* Scripture (2 Pet 1:20-21).¹ In this section, the work of anthropologist Charles Kraft enables an in-depth comparison of the nature of inspiration in the testimonial data compared to the biblical experience. This then impacts on understandings concerning doctrines of Scripture as a whole. I begin with an overview of Kraft's theory, followed by a rescripting of the data in dialogue with Kraft.

7.1.1 Kraft's Communication Theory

Kraft's study, *Christianity in Culture* draws on a communication model to develop a theological interpretation of contemporary revelatory experiences.² As an anthropologist, Kraft's perspective is grounded in the conviction that culture should be taken seriously. He uses cross-cultural concepts to develop a theory of divine-human communication that allows comparisons to be made between the experiences of contemporary Pentecostals and that of the biblical characters.

Kraft argues that the manner of inspiration in the biblical experience is best understood in communicational terms.³ This model is then applied to contemporary experience. Kraft's perspective focuses on the similarities between the divine-human activity that produced the Scriptures and contemporary experiences of Spirit-leading.⁴ He describes contemporary experience as "dynamically equivalent" to God's revelatory workings in the past.⁵ The key features of his theory are outlined here.

Firstly, revelation is *receptor-oriented*. The *form* of divine communication is designed to bridge the supra-cultural gap between God and humans by adaption to the cultural and linguistic frame of

¹ Goldingay, *Models*, 242.

² Charles H. Kraft, *Christianity in Culture – A Study in Dynamic Biblical Theologizing in Cross-Cultural Perspective*, 2nd ed. (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2005), 133-168.

³ *Ibid.*, 133-34.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 160.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 147.

reference of the audience. Thus, God communicates through vehicles his audience believes in – including inspired “words” and D/Vs.⁶

Secondly, divine messages are *specific* rather than generic. They deal with particular people and groups rather than the whole scope of humanity. Kraft bases this notion on Scripture, where revelation always occurred in context and was occasioned by the needs of human beings as much as on God’s desire to reveal himself.⁷ This localised specificity is seen to maximise the relevance and impact of communication, both to the original recipients and to those who read them later as case histories.⁸

A third feature of Kraft’s model is that revelation is *interactional and learner-centred*.⁹ Whenever God interacts with recipients, he reveals something of himself. The experience creates meaningful discovery because it is based not simply on knowledge *about* God, but on experience *with* him. In this sense, *every* communicational event is *new* as it “stimulates genuine revelation in the recipients in a way that had never happened before.”¹⁰ The newness lies in the *kind of stimulus* revelation brings, rather than in the information itself. Thus, it carries significant impact on the receiver – revelation is only “revelatory” when it is received.

Finally, Kraft’s model for divine-human communication is seen to echo the approach of the *Incarnation*.¹¹ Jesus lived as a man among the people and used their frame of reference to communicate. Contemporary revelatory messages are seen to reflect Christ, whose life and teachings have been recorded and transmitted to us in biographical, “casebook” fashion. For Kraft, this approach is intentional and allows for significant communicational impact of Jesus’ life and teachings even at a far distance from first-century Palestine.

Kraft’s theory has implications for the view of Scripture and the nature of biblical inspiration. He argues that the language of Scripture may not be perfectly inerrant, but it is accurate and “adequate enough” to communicate. Kraft affirms the full inspiration of Scripture, but argues that inspiration should *not* be equated with verbal inerrancy, since God does not perfect human language in the Scriptures – just as he does not today. The emphasis is not on each precise *word*, but on the inspired *meaning*. As in the case of Old Testament usage by New Testament authors, there is an “allowable

⁶ Ibid., 134-5.

⁷ Ibid., 153.

⁸ Ibid., 135-6.

⁹ Ibid., 134-7.

¹⁰ Ibid., 140-146.

¹¹ Ibid., 136-140.

range of variation.” This is reflected in the style of Scripture that is largely nontechnical, informal and descriptive rather than hortatory.¹² As such, Scripture is viewed as “God’s inspired casebook.” It includes “a collection of descriptions of illustrative real-life exemplifications of the principles to be taught” rather than “a textbook of abstractions.”¹³ The value of this casebook is its ability to allow the reader to enter into the experience of others analogically. In this way, the Scriptures act as a powerful teaching tool.

For Kraft, the basis for this position is evidenced within the text itself.¹⁴ It is clear that the Scriptures are *both* a human word and a divine word. Unlike the view that sees divine-human relationships in terms of an either/or competitive model (i.e. God’s words are either fully and perfectly divine or completely human and therefore flawed), Kraft argues for an “interaction-participation” model that allows for a measure of fluidity. Albeit a risky approach, Kraft shows that it has always been the nature of God to invite human beings to participate with him in redemption (2 Cor 5:20; Jn 17:18, 20-21). As it was in biblical times, so it is today.

Using this understanding as a basis, Kraft describes how the Scriptures become a “yardstick” or “tether” by which contemporary revelation is assessed. In the same way that a tether provides both “a circle within which one moves and a point at the center of that circle to which one is tied,” the Scriptures provide a set radius within which contemporary revelatory experiences can occur.¹⁵ In this model, ongoing revelation does not add to the canon – *not* because inspired things are no longer happening or because they are unimportant or qualitative lesser – but because the Scriptures are *adequate* in fulfilling God’s purposes for them.¹⁶

The value of Kraft’s work to this project is in his position of “dynamic equivalence” as well as his interaction with the pragmatic dimensions of revelatory experience. Kraft’s theory was largely derived from reflection on actual revelatory encounters in cross-cultural situations. In response to criticism, it is to this experience that he appeals, calling for testimonies to be incorporated in the discussion.¹⁷

¹² Ibid., 148-150.

¹³ Ibid., 155.

¹⁴ Ibid., 160-63.

¹⁵ Ibid., 147-151.

¹⁶ Ibid., 162.

¹⁷ Ibid., xxii.

7.1.2 Rescripting Ordinary Theology

Kraft's communicational model enables the nature of inspiration in Scriptural experience to be compared with contemporary settings. Three themes arise from the data and are relevant to the discussion: the efficacy of divine communication, the personalised nature of revelatory messages and the use of narratives as models. In this section, these themes are brought into dialogue and rescripted with Kraft.

7.1.2.1 The Efficacy of Divine Communication

Participants in the study revealed the effectiveness of inspired experience to communicate divine will and intentions (Ch. 5.1.5.1). The communicative power of these experiences was associated with the creative ways in which they were expressed and the fact that they were tailored to the recipient (5.1.4.1, 5.1.4.3). Consistent reference was made to the variety and novelty of divine communiqués – God was understood to be a masterful communicator who had original and diverse forms of expression at his disposal. This variety was likened to the multi-faceted nature of human communication and the experiences of characters in Scripture (eg. Elijah (B12, C2, C4, C8), Ezekiel (A4), Isaiah (AP22), Paul (A4), Peter (A4)).

These understandings align closely to Kraft's idea that the efficacy of divine-human communication is due to its receptor-orientation and incarnational nature. In the study, revelatory messages were not limited to verbal forms – modes of divine communication were reported to be multi-sensory and wholistic, engaging all the faculties of sight, hearing and emotion. Respondents *heard* the Spirit speaking via an inaudible/audible voice, *saw* the Spirit message via a dream/vision, *felt* a message via their emotions and in a few cases, *smelt* or *tasted* a Spirit message. Thus, the efficacy of the message is best conceived by its *inspired meaning* rather than precise wording. Words were often included, but not always. In one case, the scent of talcum powder communicated God's comfort (A6). In another, the scene of a recipient's grandmother as a young girl in heaven communicated her death (A6) and a wild, unsaddled horse signalled a man's reluctance to commit to a relationship (A12). In dreams, AF3 saw a graph of rising oil prices and B3 saw himself singing in a nursing home. Each experience communicated divine intention *without* the use of words. Indeed, imagery may be even more powerful than words as a communicative tool. Walton suggests that "word pictures" were used by God in Scripture to engage the right side of the brain.¹⁸ Similar ideas are expressed by A15:

I think it's like any language. When you talk to me, I take visual cues from your body language, from the environment, from your tone, so there's multiple behaviours that are

¹⁸ John Walton and Brent Sandy, *The Lost World of Scripture* (Downers Grove: IVP Academic, 2013), 264.

going on right now that enable me to understand and communicate. There's no one or singular or unilateral way, so it is the same with God. When God speaks, I'll often get an emotion; it comes with pictures, his words make pictures sometimes for want of a better way to explain. There's not one layer – it's not just a blank word. My preference is that it is multi-levelled. It's more believable.

Many experiences in the study also came purely in verbal forms – some as short emphatic sentences in the first person with clear, direct and precise wording (Ch. 5.1.4.1) – others were nuanced by symbolism, irony and metaphor and required a time of extended reflection to be fully understood. The data revealed considerable diversity and creativity in form.

These experiences reflect the pattern of Scripture that shows divine communication to come in wholistic and multi-sensory ways. Revelatory messages were “incarnated” in both verbal *and* non-verbal forms. While there *are* many instances of precisely worded inspiration described in Scripture (e.g. Ex 4:12; Num 22:38; Jer 1:9; Ezek 2:7), there are equally numerous cases of a more nuanced form of inspiration whereby people received a non-verbal message as a D/V that was later reported in their own words (Jer 1:11-13; Ezek 1:4-9; Zec 3:1-5). *All* the senses are engaged. For example, under the Old Covenant, God's “word” was *felt* in the heartbreak of Hosea as he was betrayed by his prostitute wife (Hos 1-3). It was *seen* in the exposure of Isaiah's nakedness as he paraded around the city (Is 20:1-6). It was *smelt* in the vile defilement of Ezekiel's cooking fire (Ezek 4:12-13). This wholistic approach is further demonstrated by Jesus, who as the Word “in flesh” (Jn 1:1, 14) communicated powerfully without words – as he touched a leper (Mt 8:3), interacted with an adulterous woman (Jn 8:1-11) and multiplied bread to feed the hungry (Mt 14:13-21). Anderson notes the effectiveness of this type of communication: “When Jesus forgave the sin of the woman caught in adultery and refused to sentence her to death – which the law of Moses demanded – his act of ministry taught something about God that even the law did not teach.”¹⁹ Divine communication comes in multi-layered forms in Scripture as it did in the study. Acts of communication are by their very nature complex and interactional.²⁰

This multi-sensory and meaning-based view of inspiration contrasts with the perspective of divine inspiration advocated by Grudem (and Cessationist authors). As noted, Grudem's argument is based on the concept of *verbal* inerrancy in the canonical experience – the “very words of God” – in contrast

¹⁹ Also Ray S. Anderson, *The Soul of Ministry* (Louisville: Westminster, 1997), 8.

²⁰ Thomas W. Overholt, *Channels of Prophecy: The Social Dynamics of Prophetic Activity* (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 17.

with the “ordinary” post-apostolic experience as a “report of human words.”²¹ The reduction of divine communiqués to verbal forms by Grudem is both limiting to the manner of communication and unfaithful to the biblical experience.

In addition, Grudem claims that clear and “accurate” revelatory encounters are simply not accessible today is also contestable in light the data. While participants do report “weaker” forms of revelation, they also testify to the *potential* for higher-level experiences that have been discerned to be *essentially accurate*.²² Grudem makes no attempt to address these scenarios and dismisses them as unimportant and inconclusive.²³ In contrast, Kraft’s theory proposes that there is an “allowable range of variation” in biblical (and contemporary experiences). Experiences *do not need* to be verbal or “exact” to communicate effectively. This approach was consistent with the empirical data. Participants in the study were fully aware that their experiences were not perfect, exact or “inerrant.” However, they were *clear enough* to be identified as divine (Ch. 5.1.5.1) and therefore *reliable* enough to be acted upon, often in significant ways (Ch. 5.1.6.1).

The Pentecostal experience supports Kraft’s theory that divine inspiration does not *need* to be “verbally inerrant” in order to be understood and responded to. Grudem’s focus on verbal communication denies the inspired forms of the biblical experience, especially the D/Vs of biblical characters and the actions of the embodied Jesus who *demonstrated* the gospel as much as declared it in speech. The question may be asked as to how “verbal inerrancy” applies to a non-verbal experience. As Kraft suggests, this terminology is fundamentally unhelpful.

7.1.2.2 The Personalised Nature of Revelatory Experiences

The revelatory experiences of participants in the study were highly personalised in terms of their content, with the vast majority referring to individual needs and concerns (Ch. 5.1.2.1). In addition, revelatory messages were framed in ways that were seen to be oriented to aspects of the respondents’ personality, lifestyle and desires. So, A4 heard from God about his self-image through a message about a Gucci suit since he “enjoys fashion.” A5 learnt about God’s provision via a dream of a rose since God “knew it was her favourite flower.” The Spirit spoke in “childish language” in order to be understood by C6 as a five-year-old. There was no “preferred form” for messages – rather recipients

²¹ Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, Location 132, 489.

²² Similarly, popular Pentecostal leaders Cindy Jacobs and Mike Bickle also wrestle with the experiential claims of Grudem’s position, Jacobs, *The Voice of God*, 175-178; Bickle, *Growing in the Prophetic*, 38.

²³ Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, Location 130.

explained that the divine mode of communication was selected for its ability to cater for their unique personality and learning style. For example:

He's a very personal god to each of us. I don't want to hear from God with Rob's voice. He's my God and he speaks to me in a way that I might understand. I imagine he's tried all sorts of ways to speak to me over the years – to try to find the place that works. Is there a right way to slice bread? It's very personal and intimate. Each of us has their own walk. (BF6)

Kraft describes revelatory experiences in Scripture as *receptor-oriented and incarnational*. He notes that through revelatory experiences, God enters into relationship with people in terms of their frame of reference. This dynamic is seen repeatedly in the testimonies, and was recognised as an expression of God's detailed concern for and knowledge of the individual, enhancing the understanding of relationship with God as *personal* (Ch. 5.1.3.1).

Kraft's concept of *incarnation* is also an appropriate descriptor for the testimonies in the study. Respondents insisted that the form of revelation was specifically *adapted* to their personal needs and situation (Ch. 5.1.4.3). In the same way that Jesus presented as a first century Jew, Spirit messages in the sample were expressed in forms that related to the audience's particular situation. For example, a beach lover reported a vision of Jesus dressed as a lifesaver as she contemplated suicide in the surf (AP22). The Apostle John, known to AP22 as the "one whom Jesus loved" was the image used to call a divided church to "love one another."

The incarnational nature of revelatory experience in the sample was further evidenced in a testimony involving two linked experiences. A9 received a message that his uncle would be healed of terminal cancer via a vision of Jesus. In the same period, a family friend received an identical message regarding the uncle's healing via a vision of St. Francis of Assisi. In each case the message appears to have been tailored to the audience in a way that enhanced its communicative power. "Jesus" acted as the messenger for the Protestant (A9), while "St Francis" was the messenger for his friend – a devout Catholic who revered the great mystics. Although as a Protestant, this was confusing to A9 at the time, he concluded that ultimately the outcome was effective in giving glory to God.

Kraft also notes that revelatory experiences in Scripture are *learner-centred* and *specific* rather than *generic*. These features also align well with the testimonies in that learning opportunities came in response to particular situations. An individual's immediate concern became the occasion for a new learning opportunity and the application of a particular tenet of faith. Doctrinal truths were taught in personal context rather than as propositional abstractions. In this way, the information was "new" to

the recipient even though it was not “new” universally. For example, the truth of God as provider was established in A5’s life as she grappled with her financial needs as a student. The call for A4 to move in with his mother reflected the importance of surrender to heavenly plans. The message to stop running from a potential marriage partner communicated the goodness of God to A12. In each case, the use of personal context strengthened the emotional import of the message and reinforced the truth of the revelation even years later. Thus, the experience acted as a stimulus to instil new understandings and enabled the recipient to “know” God “personally.”

These dynamics challenge the idea proposed by Robeck and others that contemporary experience should be distinguished by its particularity, temporality and subjectivity compared to the objectivity, eternality and universality of the biblical experience.²⁴ Contemporary experiences are based on biblical experiences which are *themselves* are characterised by a subjective and particularised dynamic (eg. Gen 16:13; 22:14, Rev 1:1-3). This approach enhances their communicative and transformative power.

7.1.2.3 The Use of Narratives as Models

The reflections of respondents on their experiences consistently revealed an alignment with the experiences of the biblical characters. When interviewees recounted their experiences, they made references to the narratives to make sense of their own (eg. A16, AP22, A12, A4, B3). This connection to the biblical accounts meant that theological understandings about the nature of God and expectations for behaviour were affirmed in contemporary experience. For example, the call to ministry as a child was seen by A16 to model Samuel’s experience. The apocalyptic-type experiences of AP22 were explained in reference to Ezekiel: “If the Lord picked Ezekiel up by his hair and sucked him up into heaven, then it’s okay for me to be taken into heaven.” As God’s instructions to Phillip to speak to the Ethiopian were authoritative, God’s words to attend a particular conference redirected A12. A4 explains:

It’s like in Acts 10, with Peter sitting on the roof minding his own business. He goes into a trance on the earth, and he’s having this incredible encounter that was different to what he grew up with and learnt. So, for me, it was a similar experience in the sense of how God saw me. (A4)

This perspective aligns well with Kraft’s “case study approach” to Scripture, which views the biblical accounts as “models” for contemporary experience. Here, the *concreteness* of the biblical cases

²⁴ Robeck, “Canon, Regulae Fidei,” 65-92; Robeck, “Written Prophecies,” 39, 43; Clark, 211.

enabled connections to be easily drawn in the contemporary setting. Participants made direct and literal correlations with the biblical stories. This was particularly the case for *how* God's voice was heard, and to a lesser degree, the revelatory content. Visions and dreams were understood to be the "language of the Holy Spirit," reflecting their prevalence in Scripture as the "accredited media" of prophetic revelation (Num 12:6) since the time of Moses.²⁵ Just as these may have been symbolic and requiring interpretation in Scripture, they required it in contemporary settings (A5, AP22, AP21, A20).²⁶ Hence the narratives set the expectations for the kinds of experiences that were possible in contemporary settings.

The use of narratives as a source of theology by Pentecostals has been noted in the scholarly literature. With their emphasis on shared experience with the biblical characters, Pentecostals tend to align their testimonies with the stories of Scripture as "types and patterns to learn from" (1 Cor 10:11) as they enter the biblical story.²⁷ Warrington shows that the narratives form important "conversational partners" for Pentecostals and that they typically *prefer* stories of encounter with God rather than didactic passages that explore the theology of the encounter.²⁸ This applies particularly to the narratives of the New Testament and more specifically, to the Acts accounts, which become the ideal model for Pentecostals with repeatable patterns to follow.²⁹

Although the legitimacy of using narratives as a source of theology over the epistles has been debated in the P-C literature,³⁰ the study reveals the advantage of using them for understanding revelatory experience. The narratives and particularly, the book of Acts provide multiple instances of revelatory experiences set against the backdrop of the larger story,³¹ whereas details about the revelatory experience in the Paulines are scant. Indeed, it has been noted that Luke-Acts gives considerably more

²⁵ Stronstad, *Prophethood*, 69.

²⁶ Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: Introduction and 1:1-2:47*, Vol. 1 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Press, 2012), 915.

²⁷ *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 158-163; Scott A. Ellington, "'History, Story and Testimony': Locating Truth in a Pentecostal Hermeneutic," *Pneuma* 23, no.1 (2001): 245-64; Warrington, 191; Archer and Ross, "Bible in Pentecostal Traditions," 141.

²⁸ Warrington, 191; also Lewis, "Pentecostal Epistemology," 115.

²⁹ Clark, 147; Martin, *Pentecostal Hermeneutics*, 7.

³⁰ Ellington, "'History, Story and Testimony,' 245-64. Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 113-114; Stronstad, *Prophethood*, 14-18, 23-24; Roger Stronstad, "Pentecostal Hermeneutics: A Review of Gordon D. Fee's *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in Pentecostal Hermeneutics*," *Pneuma* 15, no.2 (1993): 220; Menzies, "The Spirit of Prophecy," 53; Archer, "Retrospect and Prospect," 141.

³¹ Miller, *Convinced*.

profile to the revelatory Spirit than the epistles.³² These plentiful examples of the form, content, function and processes involved in revelatory experience mean they can be effectively used as reference points for contemporary experience.³³

The use of narratives as models further means that contemporary experiences remain “tethered” to the Bible (using Kraft’s terminology). It is this tethering connection that has been lost in the case of the Friday Apostolics in Zimbabwe (Ch. 3.2.3). In the study, the Scriptures retained a formative place in establishing expectations about the forms and patterns of experience in contemporary settings. This allowed the Pentecostals in the sample to participate in phenomenologically equivalent revelatory experiences while maintaining dependency on the Scriptures.

7.1.3 Summary

The testimony data illumines the nature of inspiration in Pentecostal practise and aligns closely to several aspects of Kraft’s communication theory. Pentecostals in the sample assumed the forms of inspiration to be phenomenologically equivalent to the biblical experience, offering the same ability to communicate the divine will and intentions. Contemporary experience reflected the nature of revelatory experience in Scripture as receptor-oriented, incarnational, specific and learner-centred. Revelatory messages were experienced in multi-sensory forms which enhanced their communicative impact. Emphasis was on communication of inspired meaning rather than exact wording. Scripture maintained its formative place by providing a *model* for contemporary forms of inspiration. Because of their concreteness, participants could reflect upon their own testimonies in analogous ways.

These findings are incongruent with the phenomenologically inferior position which applies the category of “inerrancy” to the biblical experience and limits divine-human communication to verbal forms. Instead, inspired experiences in contemporary settings – as in the biblical text – are *adequate* enough to communicate and *reliable* enough to be acted upon. In addition, respondents “heard” God’s voice in particularised and subjective ways, reflecting the patterns of Scripture. Hence the idea of contemporary revelation being distinct from the Scriptures by its particularity does not hold.

³² Stronstad, *Prophethood*; Keener, *Acts*, Vol. 1, 523; Forbes, *Prophecy and Inspired Speech*, 219-220; Ahn, “Prophecy in the Pauline Communities,” 90.

³³ While Aune identifies 59 possible cases of “prophecy” in the New Testament (248-268), both he and Forbes, 222 highlight the problems associated with making theological conclusions from 1 Corinthians, 238.

7.2 THE WORK OF JAMES SMITH AND THE AUTHORITY OF SCRIPTURE

The authority of revelatory experience in relation to Scripture is one of the theological concerns of this thesis (Ch. 1.4.1, Ch. 3.2.2.4). By their claim to phenomenologically equivalency, Pentecostals are accused of placing their own experience on the “same level” as Scripture. The work of James Smith provides a philosophical lens through which to explore the testimonial data in relation to this issue. This section provides an analysis of the authority of contemporary revelatory experience via a closer examination of the dynamics surrounding the site of authority in oral communities. It also investigates the authority shifts in the process of textualization and how these impacts understandings of contemporary revelatory experience. The section begins with an overview of Smith’s theory followed by a rescription of the ordinary theology in the sample.

7.2.1 The Site of Authority in Oral Communities

Smith addresses the dynamic of Pentecostal revelatory experience in light of the orality of early church communities and the impact of textualization in the wider culture.³⁴ Although a sociological phenomenon, the process of textualisation has theological consequences for understandings about the authority of contemporary experiences in relation to Scripture.

Smith argues that the early Christian communities were primarily oral in nature 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 meant that access to written texts was limited to the literate elite.³⁵ Although early church communities inherited the canonical consciousness of their Judaistic predecessors as “people of the book,” Smith argues that a more appropriate identifier would be “people of the Spirit” since their primary text was the *spoken* rather than the *written* “word.” In the church, prophets *spoke* and were *heard*. Faith came from *hearing* “the word” rather than *reading* a text (Rom 10:17). This approach did not displace the presence or value of texts in the church, but rather located their status as *derivative*.³⁶ Divine authority lay first and foremost with the spoken word.

Smith notes that at the beginning of the second century, a shift occurred whereby literacy began to be favoured over orality and the written word gained credibility over the spoken. This process of textualization brought about a change in how sacred texts were seen. Authority moved from the

³⁴ James K. A. Smith, “The Closing of the Book: Pentecostals, Evangelicals, and the Sacred Writings,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 11 (1997): 49-71.

³⁵ Also, Walton and Sandy, 111-120.

³⁶ Smith, “Closing,” 56.

people who transmitted the tradition to the *text* that recorded it. Texts were now seen as *sites* of authority as well as the lens through which life was viewed. As Smith describes it: “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.”³⁷

Smith shows how the adoption of a textual approach that locates authority in the written text mitigates *against* the practice of ongoing revelatory experiences. Tension between the written and spoken word arises since “part and parcel of canonical thinking is the restriction of normative revelation to a past period.”³⁸ The result is a dilution or even rejection of contemporary revelatory experience. He argues that this process was apparent in the Second Century church and is now being repeated in the adoption of the Evangelical tradition by Pentecostals.³⁹ Smith notes that Evangelicalism is a textual community that largely “organises its experience against the horizon of the text.”⁴⁰ Authority is seen to lie in the *text* rather than the *person*, and in the *written* word rather than the *spoken*. Thus, experience always falls *under* the authority of the Scriptures. Smith warns that this not only threatens ongoing revelation but culminates in a view of Scripture that leads to bibliolatry – a love of the Scriptures more than God.⁴¹

Smith’s solution to this dilemma is an alternate bibliology. He proposes that revelatory experience can still operate successfully in a textual environment, but only when the text functions in a *different genre*. Here, the Scriptures must *not* act as “locations of the divine presence,” but rather as “testimonies to the power of God present in the church.”⁴² Thus the authority of the text is *derived*

³⁷ Smith, “Closing,” 66.

³⁸ Ibid., 64.

³⁹ Biblical scholar William M. Schniedewind highlights a similar dynamic in the Old Testament with the rise of textualization at the time of Chronicles. Pre-exilic biblical literature points to the “word of God” as 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. This transition saw a replacement of the prophetic office with teachers and scribes and a shift in authority from the oral to the written word (Jer 8:7-9), a move that favoured the literate elites and betrayed the egalitarian nature of the oral tradition, *The Word of God in Transition: From Prophet to Exegete in the Second Temple Period*, (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995). As with Smith, Schniedewind highlights the competing claims of orality and textuality, *How the Bible Became a Book* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 114. Goldingay shows that all major religions seem to emphasise the oral for its lively power and originality, *Models for Scripture*, 112.

⁴⁰ Smith, “Closing,” 58.

⁴¹ Albrecht has identified this trend among Pentecostals, 246.

⁴² Smith, “Closing,” 67.

rather than inherent – it is not embedded in the text, but in the one “to whom the text points.”⁴³ As the testimonies within Scripture point to the power of the God in biblical times, contemporary testimonies point to the power of God in the church today. This approach means that contemporary prophetic experiences are not subject to the canon of Scripture per se, but to the *Spirit of Christ* who is just as present in contemporary communities as he was in the time of the apostles:

The canon – that which keeps our weaving straight – I would propose is the Holy Spirit, not a collection of writings. The Spirit of Christ is the norm or standard for faith, and that Spirit stands in authority over both Scripture and prophecy. It is not Scripture that is the ultimate norm, but Christ. As such, prophecy is not subject to the standard of written Scripture, but rather to the *kanon* [sic.] of the Spirit as it operates in the discernment of the community. Or, stated more radically, it may indeed be the case that prophecy could diverge from Scripture.⁴⁴

In this understanding, the church operates as an “oral community with texts” rather than as a “textual community.”⁴⁵ Scripture is still crucial as a guiding norm; however, this norm is subject to the Spirit of Christ. Christ remains the overarching authority in contemporary contexts as he was in the ancient context. Smith recognises that this approach is inherently risky and calls for a fundamental “hermeneutic of trust” that emphasises faith in the ongoing guidance of the Spirit.

7.2.2 Rescripting Ordinary Theology

In exploring the authority in contemporary experience in light of Scripture, three themes from the data are highlighted for rescription with Smith: the authority of revelatory experience, the orality and textuality of Pentecostal communities and the meaning of the phrase “word of God.”

7.2.2.1 The Authority of Revelatory Experience

In the study, genuine revelatory experiences were understood to be divinely authoritative. This perspective was particularly apparent in Type 4 cases, where the authority of the experience was seen to extend to both the recipients’ behaviour and the circumstances to which it referred (Ch. 5.1.6.1, 5.1.6.2). Once discerned, authentic contemporary revelatory messages were to be promptly submitted to, in line with the biblical characters (A4, A15). As Robeck and Grudem have observed in other settings, the Pentecostals in the study treated their experiences *as authoritative* as those in the text.

⁴³ Ibid., 69.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 66.

Smith's work highlights the question of where divine authority ultimately lies. In the study, divine authority was seen to rest squarely with the spoken word. This replicates the orality of the first century community where divine authority is embedded in the *spoken* word of the Spirit as much as in the *written*. The position of phenomenological equivalency means contemporary experience must be as authoritative ontologically as the biblical experience since the same God inspires both. This stance is in conflict with the vast majority of P-C scholarship who place the "authority of contemporary experience" *under* the "authority of Scripture" (Ch. 3.2.2.4). Smith attributes the disconnect to the adoption of a certain evangelical bibliology that locates divine authority *within* the text rather than in the *person* who inspired it.

Smith shows that the position of equivalency requires an alternate understanding about the authority of Scripture. In this view, the authority of the Spirit is neither "above" or "below" the Scriptures, but *equal* to it. This conclusion has been made by a small number of Pentecostal scholars, including Steven Land, Sang-Whan Lee and Simon Chan.⁴⁶ Land states; "The Word as living Word of God in Jesus is, of course, equal with the Spirit. The person and work of the Spirit is in salvific continuity with the person and work of Christ."⁴⁷ Lee further recognises this same necessity:

The emphasis on a theocentric assessment is a vital basis for us to repudiate any suggestion of inferiority of the prophetic revelation of the Spirit to the biblical revelation of God's Word... The former cannot be, however, inferior and subordinate to the latter in truthfulness, credibility, and authority for the triune God Himself, for He is the author of these revelations.⁴⁸

This position does not mean contemporary revelation either *diminishes* or *replaces* the scriptural experience – rather it is *consistent* with it. In the testimonies, the attribution of authority represented no conflict with Scripture. Experiences were authoritative *because* they were in line with the Gospel, and did not compromise its formative place. In fact, the ongoing reality of revelatory experience reinforced the *importance* of Scripture as a template for setting the pattern of obedience to the divine voice.

It is interesting that several charismatic scholars have recently proposed understandings of the "authority of Scripture" that are more amenable to Pentecostal practice. This is because they are based

⁴⁶ Chan, *Pentecostal Theology*, 21.

⁴⁷ Land, 39.

⁴⁸ Lee, 166-7.

on experiential realities *within* the text. Like Smith, these insights recognise the text's "authority" by pointing to the God who is above it. For example, N.T. Wright argues that the Scriptures speak little of their own authority, but point consistently to the authority of Father, Son and Holy Spirit.⁴⁹ From there, divine authority is mediated to *persons* via their calling and relationship – the prophets, apostles and to the gospel itself. As McKnight asks: "Instead of asking 'What' is authoritative? Maybe we need to ask 'Who' is authoritative? Scripture is authoritative in that it mediates the authority of God in Christ through the Spirit. Our authority then is God."⁵⁰ Wright conceives Scripture as a "theodrama," showing that the nature of Scripture as "storied" means it is more appropriate to speak of the "authority of story" than the "authority of Scripture." This approach allows for new revelation to be innovative, but only to the degree that it is consistent with the original story.⁵¹ "Authority" is thus conceived in more complex ways that give due attention to the nature of the text itself.

Similarly, Goldingay shows that while authority in Scripture acts differently for each genre, ultimately all authority is seen to lie with the Godhead.⁵² He shows that Scripture does not use the term "authority" in reference to itself and that this was a modern category superimposed on the text in order to counter the claims of the 18th Century Enlightenment period.⁵³ Ultimately the "authority of Scripture" derives from the authority of the Gospel.⁵⁴ Thus the message of revelatory experience is authoritative because of its *source*. It bears weight irrespective of whether it is written in the Canon.

Smith proposes a solution that views the Scriptures as a *witness* to divine authority rather than the actual *site* of authority. In this way, the Scriptures act in a genre that points to the site of authority in the living Godhead. This resembles the theology of Barth, who advocated for the idea of Scripture as testimony or witness to Christ⁵⁵ and (rightly) made an ontological distinction between Scripture and the person of the Word of God.⁵⁶ This approach maintains the place of the Scriptures as the *guiding*

⁴⁹ Norman T. Wright, "How Can the Bible Be Authoritative?" *Vox Evangelica* 21 (1991): 7-32.

⁵⁰ Scott McKnight, "The Emperor and Inerrancy," <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/jesuscreed/2014/08/20/the-emperor-and-inerrancy> [accessed Dec 21, 2019].

⁵¹ Cartledge draws on Wright's model for assessing extra-biblical phenomena, "Empirical Theology," 115–26.

⁵² Goldingay, *Models*, 3.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 4-11.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 109, 196.

⁵⁵ Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics*, ed. Geoffrey W. Bromily, Thomas F. Torrance, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1956) I/1, 88-124. It is unsurprising that Kraft was accused of Barthian tendencies, *Christianity in Culture*, xxi.

⁵⁶ Lee, 147-71, 165.

norm while still allowing for revelatory experiences to be authoritative in Pentecostal practise. It also reflects the derivative status of the Scriptures in the early church and acknowledges the source of authority in the Godhead.

7.2.2.2 The Orality and Textuality of Pentecostal Communities

Like the early church community, contemporary Pentecostal churches are known for their “oral way of being,”⁵⁷ whereby spirituality and theology is expressed orally through song, dance, prayer, prophecy and testimonies.⁵⁸ In the study, this type of orality was strongly evidenced in Church A (5.2.1.3). Here, the use of prophecy and testimony in the public service occurred as regularly and prominently as exposition of the written word. Testimonies made frequent reference to revelatory encounters and public prophecy constantly affirmed the belief that the God who spoke in the past continued to speak in the present. The use of the written text was still prominent, but functioned primarily to situate contemporary experience in its divine purpose, reinforce its validity and provide guidelines for its practice. This dynamic was also apparent in small group settings and mid-week gatherings where prophecies and testimonies of private revelations were regularly shared. These rites affirmed the *consistency* of the Spirit’s work from biblical to contemporary times. Indeed, the orality of the Pentecostal community may well have arisen *because* of an underlying belief in the continuing voice of the Spirit.

This “oral way of being” was less evident in Church B and Church C where public prophecy and testimonies were rare and emphasis fell on the written text (Ch. 5.2.2.2, 5.2.3.2). These communities revealed the signs of textualization in Smith’s description, whereby authority is confined to the written word and becomes pre-eminent over the spoken. As in Smith’s proposal, the result was a tension between orality and textuality that tended to mitigate against ongoing revelatory experience. Indicators of this dynamic were seen among some interviewees in Church B as “Spirit” and “Scripture” were pitted against each other. For example:

I take most of my direction from the Bible, so I guess if I didn’t have the Bible, I’d probably be more reliant on hearing God’s voice. I guess because God’s spoken in the Bible, it makes it less necessary or urgent, because we’ve got different places, we can hear God’s voice from. The good thing about that is that there is no uncertainty there – because you know it’s coming from a trusted source; it’s black and white – I don’t have

⁵⁷ Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, 18-139; also, Land, 26; Albrecht, 246; Spittler, “Spirituality,” 1099-1102; Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatological Theology*, 4-6.

⁵⁸ Albrecht, 246.

to deal with my subjective feelings getting in the way. I know even then you can read through subjective lenses, but I guess it's less fuzzy in my mind. (BF9).

BF9's testimony reveals a textual approach, where the written words of Scripture are deemed a higher form of revelation and therefore the preferred vehicle for hearing God's voice in contemporary situations.⁵⁹ This approach meant that BF9 did not consider it necessary to seek out personal revelatory experiences. Because the Scriptures were understood to be more reliable than his own experience (reflecting the phenomenologically inferior position), the latter was deemed less necessary and perhaps redundant. As in the experience of the Friday Apostolics in Zimbabwe, Scripture unwittingly acted as a "mediating obstacle" to the unmediated, spoken word of God.

Further signs of the negative impact of a textual approach on Pentecostal revelatory experiences could be detected in the history of Church B. As reported (Ch. 5.2.2.2), the church had experienced a shift in emphasis on the "prophetic word" to the "written word" with new leadership a generation earlier. This shift may be correlated with the disparity in the practice of revelatory experiences between the older and younger generations. A significant proportion of young people in Church B struggled to embrace revelatory encounters while the older generation reported them with ease. This suggests that increasing "Scripture-orientation" may be associated with decreasing "Spirit-orientation." In contrast, the relationship between Scripture and Spirit was addressed in Church A by the constant emphasis on *consistency* between the inspired experiences of Scripture and of the current day.

Finally, the scenario whereby the "ersatz presence" of God was believed to rest in the text was also observed in the study. In a somewhat magical approach to Scripture, "words from God" were found through haphazard encounter with texts that carried no meaningful connection to the original context. For example, the words of Jesus to his disciples, "Go to the other side (of the lake)" (Mk 4:35) were taken by C10 to mean, "go to another workplace." While the Spirit may 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." Lum has found that this type of hearing may be seen to be more valid, since it is "anchored on" Scripture.⁶⁰

⁵⁹ For Grudem, guidance should always be sought in Scripture, since it is *only* of "God's words in Scripture that we can with confidence say, 'Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path' (Ps 119:105)", *Gift of Prophecy*, Location 3785.

⁶⁰ Lum, 222.

This problem, characteristic of Pentecostals, has been observed by charismatic scholar Craig Keener. He laments the “unrestrained practices” of individuals 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.”⁶¹ Keener argues that experiential appropriations of Scripture require their own criteria and must not be disconnected from observing the “designed sense” of Scripture.⁶² It may well be the issue of textualization that is the cause of this problem. Pentecostals may be inclined to mix 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 then accepted without discrimination. The danger lies in the assumption of authority because it is “in Scripture,” even when it departs markedly from its historical meaning.⁶³ The experience must be tested against the same criteria as any other revelatory experience. Adopting a textual approach to Pentecostal revelatory experiences is not only counterproductive to the frequency of the experience, but to its safe practice.

7.2.2.3 The Meaning of the “Word of God”

The tension between orality and textuality was further evidenced in the study by the different meanings subscribed to the “word of God.” In all three churches, the “word of God” bore multiple meanings,⁶⁴ but varied in their usage for each. In Church A, “words of God” were most frequently associated with the spoken word in prophecies and testimonies (5.2.1.2, 5.2.1.3). In contrast, the primary meaning for the “word of God” in Churches B and C was the written Scriptures and to a lesser degree, preaching from the Scriptures (Ch. 5.2.3.2). The use of terminology *rhēma* and *logos* was also present in Church B and C (eg. CP16).

As Smith and others have noted, in oral communities, authority lies with the spoken word above the written word. Hence in biblical communities which were primarily oral,⁶⁵ the “word of God” referred predominantly to the *spoken* word. Under the Old Covenant, the “word of the Lord” or “word of God” specifically related to the word of the prophets, and to a lesser degree, the divine commandments.⁶⁶

⁶¹ Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics*, 269. David Cartledge describes the frequent use of Scripture by Pentecostals as a “promise box” or a sort of “horoscope,” 40.

⁶² Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics*, 19, 99.

⁶³ Jacqueline Grey emphasises the need for P-C readers to observe the historic context, *Three’s a Crowd: Pentecostalism, Hermeneutics, and the Old Testament* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2014).

⁶⁴ A similar dynamic has been observed by Albrecht in North America, 228.

⁶⁵ Walton and Sandy include a list of orality studies in the Hellenistic world in *The Lost World of Scripture*, 86.

⁶⁶ Colin Brown, ed., *New Testament Theology*, Vol. 3 (Exeter: Paternoster, 1978), 1087.

Under the New Covenant, the “Word of God” became equated with the person of Christ and his message.⁶⁷ As God’s word “in the flesh” (Jn 1:1,14; Heb 1:1-3), Jesus came as a *living text*, embodying the divine message through his life and teaching. Christ’s message continued to be communicated via the Spirit after the ascension and in Acts, the “word of God” most often represented the good news about Christ.⁶⁸ Thus for the early church, the “word of God” was equated with the living and authoritative “Word” who *had spoken* and *continued to speak*, irrespective of whether those words came to be enshrined in Scripture. This understanding of orality renders the *rhēma* /*logos* schema linguistically inaccurate and anachronistic.⁶⁹ The words “*rhēma*” and “*logos*” are used interchangeably in the text of the New Testament and *both* were seen as authoritative.⁷⁰ Indeed, scholars have made a strong case for *both* *rhēma* and *logos* to denote *spoken* words in the first century context (which carried *more* authority than the written).⁷¹ The *rhēma*/logos paradigm also overlooks the fact that all inspired messages were *spoken* before they were *written* down. Authority was derived from the divine *source*, irrespective of whether messages were enshrined in Scripture.

As Smith describes it, the process of textualization displaces the authority from the spoken to the written word. This shift can be seen in the study by the use of the phrase “Word of God” to describe the entire Scriptures. While the designation may be helpful in preserving beliefs about its inspiration, the descriptor becomes problematic when applied to the practice of revelatory experience. In the study, problems arose when respondents assumed a consistency of revelatory experience with the Bible characters without applying the same language to describe it. The conflation of individual experience with the entire Scriptures resulted in confusion around the source of authority as well as the process of discernment. B8’s testimony illustrates:

B8: I’d always pin my hopes on the Word of God (Scripture), because that is infallible and that is not going to change and I know that’s God’s Word. But as to an audible voice – I remember we were at youth – and someone’s like: “God’s going to provide this amazing man for you,” and I’m like, “Ok that’s nice, but what does God’s Word (Scripture) say? God’s Word doesn’t say that, but God’s Word says that he leads us. God’s Word says that he supplies all our needs, he says that those who serve him lack no

⁶⁷ Smith, “Closing,” 53. Walton and Sandy, Location 1891-2068, 2117.

⁶⁸ Keener, *Acts* Vol. 1, 523.

⁶⁹ Turner, *Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts*, 313; McLean, “Pentecostal Hermeneutic,” 52.

⁷⁰ William, D. Mounce, *The Analytical Lexicon to the Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 303, 407.

⁷¹ Walton and Sandy, 123-124, 109, 140.

good thing. That's what his Word says, but his Word doesn't promise marriage. So, I think I learnt very early on not to pin my hopes on the things I think God has said.

TH: So, if God promises something, will it always happen?

[Long silence]. I suppose if I'm 100% I've heard from God, then I'm confident that it will always happen.

TH: Do you think what you hear from God today is less reliable than what the Bible says?

B8: Yes.

TH: Why?

B8: Because we can get things wrong.

TH: Do you think people in the Bible could get things wrong?

B8: Yes, they got things wrong too, but not the actual tangible word of God. But I feel like all Scripture is inspired by God so that is a non-negotiable, we can learn from things.

TH: Once it's been tested, and you know it is from God, is it as reliable as what it would have been for people in the Bible?

B8: Yes.

B8's testimony demonstrates the disconnect that results when the authority of the "word of God" moves from the divine source to the written text. Experience was deemed invalid – *not* because it was discerned to not be divinely inspired – but because it was situated *outside* the text, a position that belies the Pentecostal expectation for phenomenological equivalency. This misalignment had significant implications for the way revelatory experience was discerned and responded to. 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 mix of human and divine influence.⁷²

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. Most of the scriptural writings do not make a claim to inspiration for every word and sometimes stress their human origin (e.g. Lk 1:1-4; 1 Cor

⁷² Goldingay, *Models*, 10.

7:10). Goldingay suggests that designating “word of the Lord” for passages such as the agonising of Job or the questioning of Ecclesiastes for example, represents a “category mistake.”⁷³ 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.” Not only does a textual approach mitigate against revelatory encounters, it creates theological confusion in the practice of the same.

Herein lies the problem of the “Evangelicalisation of Pentecostalism” highlighted by Smith as well as a number of other Pentecostal scholars.⁷⁴ The approach to Scripture (that Smith identifies with Evangelicalism) that fixes the site of authority in the text belies the validity and safe practice of contemporary revelatory experiences. The study shows how this dichotomy sets up a competitive stance between the biblical and contemporary experience and as such, threatens to undermine the distinctive of the Pentecostal experience. Smith states, “Pentecostals have uncritically accepted the rules from Evangelical theology, but have failed to realise that such a framework is detrimental to the community's mode of being before God, confining the period of revelation to a past epoch, and thereby undermining the continuing revelatory ministry of the Spirit.”⁷⁵ Unsurprisingly, Kraft’s work concurs with Smith’s line of thinking. He shows that the Euro-American cultural emphasis on *print* is the primary reason for the (conservative) evangelical view of revelation as static rather than dynamic. The result is a shift in focus from the inspired *event* itself to the *record* of that event. As Kraft concludes, “We’ve become fixed more on the written (biblical) descriptions of divine-human interactions than on the dynamics of the interactions themselves.”⁷⁶

7.2.3 Summary

The phenomenological equivalent perspective of Pentecostals in the sample meant that contemporary revelatory experiences were understood to bear the same authority as the inspired experiences of Scripture. While this perspective challenges the majority of P-C thinking that places the authority of revelatory experience “under” the authority of Scripture, it is consistent with experiences *within* Scripture that point to the authority of the divine speaker. These experiences pose no threat to the canon when they are consistent with the Gospel “story.”

⁷³ Ibid., 5.

⁷⁴ Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatological Theology*, 8; Lewis, “Pentecostal Epistemology,” 119; Clark, 59.

⁷⁵ Smith, “Closing,” 59.

⁷⁶ Kraft, *Christianity in Culture*, 205.

The process of textualization that shifts divine authority from the spoken word to the written word has consequences for ongoing revelatory experience. When the authority of the “word of God” becomes situated in a text, it displaces authority from the divine speaker and in doing so, de-emphasises the weight of contemporary revelatory experiences. Ruthven argues that this is the approach that Jesus warned the religious leaders of his day against (Jn 5:37-40).⁷⁷ An acceptable view of Scripture for Pentecostals must allow for the perspective that God has spoken authoritatively and continues to speak in like manner.

The analysis affirms Smith’s proposition that an alternate bibliology is necessary in order to facilitate ongoing phenomenologically equivalent revelatory experiences among Pentecostals. This perspective views Scripture as a *witness* to divine authority and points to the ultimate source of authority in the triune God (Jn 5:39; Lk 24:27).

7.3 THE WORK OF JAMES SMITH AND THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF EXPERIENCE AND SCRIPTURE

The Pentecostal emphasis on Spirit experience as an epistemological source has been widely criticised.⁷⁸ It is often argued that Pentecostal reliance on experience has supplanted the study of Scripture as an epistemological source. Indeed, the phenomenologically inferior perspective views revelatory experiences as a relatively inconsequential supplement to spiritual growth and equates Scripture’s “sufficiency” with all that is needed for spiritual life and practice (Ch. 3.2.1, 3.2.2). Similarly, Cessationists complain that new revelation such as in D/Vs becomes as binding on the believer’s conscience as the teachings of Scripture (Ch. 3.2.1). This calls into question the epistemological role of experience in relation to Scripture. This section explores this relationship by examining how experience and Bible study produce spiritual knowledge and growth. The insights of James Smith in his later work, *Thinking in Tongues* facilitates the discussion.

7.3.1 The Affective, Narratival Epistemology of Pentecostals

Smith describes how the epistemology that arises from Pentecostal experience results in a particular type of affective, narratival knowledge. He shows how Pentecostals use testimony 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.” Experience leads to a form of *narrative knowledge* that is distinct from “run-of-the-mill knowledge,”

⁷⁷ Ruthven, *What’s Wrong*, 2.

⁷⁸ Eg., Cox, 313; Castelo, 99-100.

which is understood philosophically as “justified true belief” where “belief” is understood as assent to propositions or at least characterised by a propositional attitude.”⁷⁹ Because of their experience, Pentecostals “know what they know.”

Smith argues that the type of narrative knowledge that arises from experience may be contrasted with the knowledge that arises from study of a text. On its own, the latter can lead to a “limited stunted version or what counts as ‘knowledge’”⁸⁰ – and that which “can be reduced to ‘information’ or ‘data.’” This “propositional” knowledge relates to the “head” rather than the “heart.” Pentecostal faith and practice does not emphasize humanity as 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.”⁸¹ This does *not* devalue the place of propositional or “codeable” knowledge, but rather situates it as secondary.⁸²

Smith compares the Pentecostal way of *knowing* with the Apostle Paul’s epistemology as outlined by New Testament scholar Ian Scott.⁸³ He shows how Paul’s knowledge constituted not just a cognitive grasp of law, duties or moral principles, but rather “the employment of one’s life in the theological narrative.”⁸⁴ When Paul thought about theological matters, his thoughts had a “narrative structure.” This narrative knowledge was *embodied* in life, rather than understood as calculable information or data.

Smith further argues that the Pentecostal experience acts to bring knowledge that is affective and results in a kind of “emotional understanding.”⁸⁵ This knowledge extends beyond the intellectual and promotes conviction and transformation at the core of the person. It is not just a “change of mind”, but rather a “change of heart” that leads to reorientation of the person to the world.⁸⁶

⁷⁹ Smith, *Thinking in Tongues*, 64.

⁸⁰ Ibid., 53.

⁸¹ Ibid., 62.

⁸² Ibid., 64.

⁸³ Ian W. Scott, *Paul’s Way of Knowing: Story, Experience and the Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Press, 2009).

⁸⁴ Smith, *Thinking in Tongues*, 68-70, 118.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 65.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 71-72.

7.3.2 Rescripting Ordinary Theology

Smith's description of Pentecostal epistemology is valuable in rescripting the testimonies of Pentecostals in the study, particularly in relation to the function of revelatory experience. His work provides a vehicle by which the epistemological processes involved in revelatory experience and Bible study can be compared. Three themes are notable from the data (Ch. 5.1.3) and are used in rescription with Smith: the role of revelatory experience in relational and spiritual development, the element of divine authority in transformation and the epistemology of experience compared to Bible study. The Pentecostal voices of Jackie Johns and Cheryl Bridges-Johns are also employed in the discussion.

7.3.2.1 The Role of Revelatory Experience in Relational and Spiritual Development

The prominent role revelatory experience plays in building the divine-human relationship has been noted, particularly those reporting Type 4 experiences (Ch. 5.1.3.1, 6.1.2.1). This relational function aligns with Droll's findings for D/Vs in Africa and Muindi's work in Africa.⁸⁷ For respondents in the study, God is a deeply personal deity who uses the vehicle of revelatory experience to pursue greater levels of intimacy with humanity. As in human relationships, communication forms the basis of relationship. As such, revelatory experiences were regarded as *essential* by many and a core component, if not *the basis* for the development of their spiritual lives. A12 explains:

It's the premise of all of our Christianity (hearing God's voice), because the whole purpose of Jesus' death. The phrase that I have is that we are to have unhindered, unbroken union and fellowship with Christ and in God. So, it's all about relationship and fellowship. And in relationship and fellowship, you're talking; you communicate. So, surely Christianity is all about communicating with God.

This understanding of the role of Spirit experience harkens back to the intent of the Spirit's outpouring under the New Covenant. Davidson argues effectively for the "dynamic of intimacy" in Pentecostal experience in light of Peter's use of Joel 2 in Acts 2:16,17.⁸⁸ He shows that the goal of the Old Covenant prophetic promises is that Yahweh's people may *know* him. Davidson quotes Old Testament scholar Larry McQueen; "the result of the pouring out of the spirit [sic] of Yahweh will be

⁸⁷ Droll, 353; Also, Muindi, *Pentecostal-Charismatic Prophecy*, 196-200.

⁸⁸ V. J. D. Davidson, "Intimacy with God as an Inviting Aspect of Pentecostalism's Word, Deed and Power Expression of the Good News Gospel," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 16, no. 1 (2013): 61-75.

that everyone will stand in a relationship of immediacy with God.”⁸⁹ This relational framing of the Spirit’s work is also highlighted in the work of Simon Chan.⁹⁰

Smith’s work enables a closer examination of the epistemological process involved in producing this “intimate” knowledge of God. In Smith’s terms, individuals in the sample attained knowledge of God through the *narrative* of their own life. This was made possible through the personalised nature of revelatory messages (Ch. 5.1.2.1). Respondents testified to experiencing the veracity of propositional truths such as God’s goodness (A12), provision (A5) or power (A9) in their individual settings. Smith shows that the epistemological process follows the pattern of the biblical characters, specifically the life of the Apostle Paul. Like Paul, respondents in the study had a “narrative structure” to their reflections in a way that was “embedded in life.” Thus, God was “good” because he had spoken about a marriage partner (A12); God was a “provider” because he had spoken about a home to come (A1). Affections played their part in reinforcing newly acquired truths (Ch. 5.1.3.2).

However, this process extended beyond the acquisition of information. The testimonies affirm Smith’s observations about the epistemology of Pentecostals that revelatory experiences resulted in a type of knowledge that led to personal transformation (Ch. 5.1.3.4). As Wenk and others have noted, the goal of prophetic speech is to *transform* rather than to merely *inform*.⁹¹ Here, the divine-human relationship provided the *context* for personal and spiritual growth. As AP22 explained it, “It’s not the information he has given me that is as important as the process of my changing to accommodate what that will look like.” Hence, knowledge of God became integrated into life as the experience was responded to.

The transformational process is vividly demonstrated in the testimony of A4 (Ch. 5.1.3.4). Here revelatory experience allowed the proposition: “You are valued; you are made in my image” to be transferred from generic abstraction to personal reality. This was achieved through a vision that presented A4 with a mirror image of himself in an expensive suit. As A4 described it: “God took me to Heaven and I stood in front of a massive gold mirror, and I was dressed in a very dark navy pin-stripe suit and God said: “That’s who you are to me.” And I said, “You have to be kidding!” This new identity was subsequently reinforced when a second revelatory experience called him to try on a suit in the Gucci store. For A4, the meaning of the vision was intensified by its personalised nature since

⁸⁹ Larry McQueen, *Joel and the Spirit – The Cry of a Prophetic Hermeneutic* (Sheffield: Academic Press, 1995), 41-42.

⁹⁰ Chan, *Pentecostal Theology*, 46.

⁹¹ Matthias Wenk, “The Creative Power of the Prophetic Dialogue,” *Pneuma* 26.1 (2004): 118-129; Moore, “Revelation,” 55.

he appreciates fashion. The entire process allowed for the element of participation, exploration, testing and finally owning the proposition, so that it became an integral part of A4's identity. Each step represented significant moments of illumination in a narrative that allowed new self-understandings to deepen. Emotions also played an essential role throughout the process; A4 reported being surprised when first presented with the idea but this turned to confidence when he stepped out of the Gucci store. Later, the encounters acted as a reference point for him to build on and were actively rehearsed again and again. The result was significant transformation. A4 sums up the impact of the experience: "It's like coming in here as a child and then God significantly speaking into your life and growing you up. From having zero confidence, liking of myself – nothing, self-esteem just shot – to coming out now, it's the complete opposite." (A4). As noted by Warrington, for the Pentecostal: "one experience with God can be more life changing than an encyclopaedic knowledge of God."⁹²

The work of Johns and Bridges-Johns in Pentecostal hermeneutics provides further elaboration on the epistemological process. Like respondents in the study, Johns and Bridges-Johns situate the epistemology of Pentecostals in the context of the divine-human relationship.⁹³ Here, the Hebrew understanding of knowledge *yada* that comes via experience is contrasted to the Greek concept *ginoskein*, which involves a "standing back from something" in order objectively to know it.⁹⁴ Unlike the Greek approach, *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." Therefore, to know is to *encounter*.⁹⁵ For Johns, the Spirit teaches via experiential knowledge of God that comes through direct personal encounter with him.⁹⁶

The study further reveals the role of revelatory experience in *directing* the epistemological process. Respondents viewed their revelatory experiences as *central* to spiritual growth (Ch. 5.1.3.1, 5.1.3.6). Rather than acting as a lightweight spiritual "add-on," such experiences represented pivotal moments that triggered significant learning. Jackie Johns has identified the pedagogical role of the Spirit in the Johannine, Lukan and Pauline literature (as well as the Patristics). He shows that the primary role of the Paraclete in the early church was as teacher, whose most pervasive activity was speaking – the

⁹² Warrington, 26.

⁹³ Johns and Bridges-Johns, "Yielding," 109-34.

⁹⁴ Ibid., 112.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 124.

⁹⁶ Jackie David Johns, *Pedagogy of the Holy Spirit* (Jackie David Johns, 2012), 54.

Spirit taught “all things” (Jn 14:26) and guided God’s people into truth (Jn 16:13).⁹⁷ Hence the work of the Spirit is *central* to the process of Christian formation and learning.⁹⁸

In the study, the teaching role of the Spirit was evident in the tailoring of learning to the individual’s particular needs in the manner that Kraft described as “learner centred.” Respondents reported learning widely different aspects about the nature of God with no generic sequence evident (Ch. 5.1.3). One interviewee was learning about God’s provision (A5), another about self-esteem (A4); another forgiveness (A15), generosity (B14), healthy relationships (B13) and God’s heart for evangelism (C15). Particular situations triggered the learning process and prepared the respondents for new knowledge. The pedagogy of the Spirit was effective because it was personalised, non-systemised and occasional.

7.3.2.2 The Element of Divine Authority in Transformation

The effectiveness of the epistemological process was linked to the authority ascribed by respondents to their revelatory experiences. Interviewees were keenly aware that their experience carried divine authority and demanded acquiescence to them to be of value (Ch. 5.1.6). This was highlighted by the struggle reported by recipients in co-operating with the revelatory message. Individuals were asked to forgive when they were reluctant to, reconcile with those they disagreed with and be generous when they didn’t want to be (C8, B4, C10, B7, C7). For participants, when God spoke, obedience was required – God’s people heard his voice *and they followed* (Jn 10:27). As Kraft has noted, revelatory experiences provide a “stimulus to action.”⁹⁹ It was these acts of “followship” that enabled transformation such as in A4’s experience when he responded to the call to try on a Gucci suit. This dynamic appeared to intensify as individuals grew in their faith, with experiences requiring deeper levels of surrender to the divine purpose. The process wrought physical and emotional change and was seen to releasing individuals into their “purpose.” This emphasis on submission to the Spirit-inspired word reflects the pattern of Scripture. Goldingay shows that authority in the Scriptures emphasises calls to action and response rather than just the development of propositional belief.¹⁰⁰

Bridges-Johns and Johns further highlight the role of obedience in the development of experiential knowledge (*yada*). The understanding of *yada* is brought into dialogue with “praxis” defined as “reflection-action” that links knowing to doing.¹⁰¹ Johns and Bridges-Johns show that praxis

⁹⁷ Ibid., 54, 120.

⁹⁸ Ibid., 98-102, 132, 149; Johns and Bridges-Johns, “Yielding,” 114.

⁹⁹ Kraft, 133-6.

¹⁰⁰ Goldingay, *Models*, 97.

¹⁰¹ Johns and Bridges-Johns, “Yielding,” 119.

epistemology is useful for understanding the learning processes encapsulated by the notion of *yada*, but with one essential difference. Praxis is an insufficient means of knowing God and achieving human transformation without the input of a higher authority: “Human reflection-action, while important, is distorted and may become self-serving, and thereby hinder true knowledge of God. Without an authority beyond the self that transcends and even negates reflection-action, we are left, in spite of our worthy intentions for the transformation of society, with sinful praxis.”¹⁰² 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.”

This perspective contrasts with the phenomenologically inferior approach advocated by Grudem, who argues for contemporary prophetic experience to have *minimal* authority over the recipient akin to other church activities such as counselling.¹⁰³ The data indicates that if contemporary revelatory experiences are to have the epistemological outcomes of narrative knowledge or *yada*, they must be viewed as divinely authoritative.

7.3.2.3 The Epistemology of Experience and Bible Study

The testimonial material offers insight into the different epistemological processes involved in experience compared to Bible study. While participants did not negate the importance of learning from the text, it was clear that learning from experience was qualitatively different, in some ways preferable and even *necessary* (Ch. 5.1.3.1). The key distinction was the personalised 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.” (A13). For C4, “I got a good foundation as a child... like we were drilled in the Word, but it would be just the Word. If I couldn’t hear his voice, certain things wouldn’t make sense.” These testimonies point to experience’s experiential power and affirm Johns’ conclusion that “cognition and reflection are not, in and of themselves, adequate means of achieving full redemption unto God and therefore should not be the sole baggage in which pedagogical objectives are cloaked.”¹⁰⁴

As noted, Smith does not reject the value of propositional knowledge, but rather locates it as secondary over narrative knowledge. Here, narrative knowledge is seen to *precede* propositional knowledge. This type of patterning was evident in the data. Reflection on theological themes took place as a *result of* the experience rather than *prior* to it. Thus, A4 was able to declare his

¹⁰² Ibid., 122.

¹⁰³ Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, Location 660-663; also Bridge, 202-204.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 149.

(propositional) belief about the value of the human person *because* of his own story. The propositional statement became a *secondary reflection* upon the *primary* story. Jesus himself demonstrated this pattern when articulating propositional truths such as: “I am the bread of life” (Jn 6:26-35) only after personalising it through the multiplication of the loaves (Jn 6:1-15). Dowd has shown that propositional teaching has its place in synthesising ideas and doctrines, but on its own can reduce communication to transmission of information.¹⁰⁵

The experiential approach evidenced in the data is again in contrast with that of Grudem who advocates for Bible study as the primary source of epistemological knowledge and a lesser role for experience. Thus, the primary way to *know* God and develop spiritually is via study of the text and the associated development of hermeneutical skills. Grudem explains:

As we go through life, frequent practice in searching Scripture for guidance will result in greater and greater ability to find accurate, carefully formulated answers to our problems and questions. Lifelong growth in understanding Scripture will thus include growth in the skill of rightly understanding and applying the Bible’s teachings to specific questions.¹⁰⁶

This textual approach relies on adequate levels of literacy. Engelke shows that Protestant missions have traditionally focussed on reading because of the conviction that only a *literate* Christian can “fully enter faith.”¹⁰⁷ This approach places emphasis on cerebral knowledge, abstraction and theorising. In contrast, the testimonies revealed an emphasis on knowledge of a *person* rather than knowledge of a *text*. Relationship with God was based on response to the revealed message rather than access to hermeneutical skills. This reflects the emphasis of the text itself. As Clark states, the Bible is primarily the description of a Way” and “The Way is also the Truth, Which is a person.”¹⁰⁸

Smith, along with several other Pentecostal authors, have reflected on the textual approach advocated by Grudem and associate it with Evangelicalism.¹⁰⁹ While their categories for Evangelicalism may be

¹⁰⁵ Michael B. Dowd, “Contours of a Narrative Pentecostal Theology and Practice in the Distinctiveness of Pentecostal-Charismatic Theology,” 1985, E10, E22. Also, Walton and Sandy, 264-270.

¹⁰⁶ Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, Location 3049.

¹⁰⁷ Engelke, 53.

¹⁰⁸ Clark, 206.

¹⁰⁹ Castelo, 83-126; also Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Towards a Pneumatological Theology: Pentecostal and Ecumenical Perspectives on Ecclesiology, Soteriology, and Theology of Mission*, ed. Yong, Amos (Lanham: University Press of America, 2002), 8; Poloma and Green, 4-5.

too starkly drawn and the Charismatic stream tends to be neglected,¹¹⁰ they highlight the different priorities for experience compared with Bible study in epistemology.

The observations of Smith along with Johns, Bridges-Johns have implications for the role of revelatory experience in Pentecostal spirituality. Revelatory encounters were valued not only for their ability to build personal knowledge *of* God (in contrast with knowledge *about* God), but because they also fostered transformation. Because the experience was embodied in their own life, it tended to produce knowledge of a *person* over knowledge of a *text*. Further, emotion found its place as an integral part of the experience that contributed to its transformational agency. This provides renewed legitimacy for revelatory experiences and reorients learning from Bible study alone. It also highlights the role of the Holy Spirit as initiator and director of the pedagogical process.

7.3.3 Summary

The Pentecostal practice of Spirit-experiences in the study revealed an epistemology that provided an effective vehicle for personal transformation. In seeking to replicate the revelatory experiences of the biblical characters, Pentecostals emulate the same epistemological processes associated with their formation. Personal and particular subject matter provided the means for doctrinal propositions to become experiential knowledge. For revelatory experience to trigger the development of *yada* – the personal knowledge of God – co-operation was required and therefore, the element of divine authority in the experience was essential.

This approach positions revelatory experiences at the centre of spiritual growth and faith and represents a shift in emphasis from an evangelical approach that prioritises Bible study as the primary (and superior) mode of learning. For Pentecostals in the sample, the epistemological process that led to *yada* was seen to be essential for spiritual formation and required active obedience rather than just a shift in belief. The process still allowed for the development of propositional knowledge, but gave it *secondary status* as revelatory experience was reflected upon.

7.4 SUMMARY: THE RELATIONSHIP OF REVELATORY EXPERIENCE TO SCRIPTURE

Analysis of the inspiration, authority and epistemology of revelatory experience in the testimony data in light of Kraft and Smith's theories sheds light on the relationship of contemporary experience to Scripture as a whole. The practice of phenomenologically equivalent experience by Pentecostals

¹¹⁰ Andrew P. Rogers reveals the similarities between Charismatic and Pentecostal epistemology, *Congregational Hermeneutics - How Do We Read?, Explorations in Practical, Pastoral and Empirical Theology* (London: Ashgate, 2015), 135-137.

comprises several aspects of the experience depicted *in* Scripture, including the manner of inspiration, the location of authority in the Godhead and the epistemological processes that result.

The manner of inspiration in the revelatory experience of those in the study is best described as multi-sensory, receptor oriented and incarnational. As in the biblical experience, these inspired experiences reveal a dynamic-equivalent approach and communicate meaning effectively even without the quality of “verbal inerrancy.” Once discerned they are held to be divinely authoritative since authority is seen to originate with the speaker.

Where textualization was present in local church communities, a competitive dynamic tended to arise between the authority of Scripture and the authority of contemporary experiences. This may be traced to a mixture of phenomenologically inferior and equivalent approaches that has been brought about by the Pentecostal alignment to certain Evangelical bibliologies. When the discontinuous position was applied to Pentecostal practice, it mitigated against its ongoing use and led to confusion around discernment. Phenomenologically equivalent experiences were only possible when divine authority was seen to lie ultimately in the Godhead in keeping with the pattern of the text.

Finally, revelatory experience acted as an important vehicle in the epistemological process to develop a type of relational knowledge that was embedded in life and led to wholistic transformation.

Propositional knowledge maintained a secondary place as these experiences were reflected upon.

Here Spirit encounters found their pedagogical role in conjunction with the study of Scripture. These revelatory experiences functioned most effectively in producing transformation when they were held to be divinely authoritative as in the text and requiring active obedience. When appropriately discerned, such experiences could be authoritative *without* making claim to canonical status or displacing Scripture as the ultimate testament to faith.

The analysis highlights the problems of a bibliography that does not take into account the dynamics of revelatory experience depicted *within* Scripture. Thus, the relationship of revelatory experience to Scripture is only a theological problem with a certain bibliography. For phenomenologically equivalent experiences to be sustained in contemporary settings, an alternate view of Scripture is required. This conceives Scripture as a “model” for how God’s voice is heard in contemporary settings and a “witness” to the living Word of God who has spoken in the experiences of the biblical characters and continues to speak in the testimonies of the contemporary church.

8. THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS PART 2: A CLOSE EXAMINATION OF REVELATORY EXPERIENCE

This chapter presents part 2 of the theological analysis. Having explored the relationship of revelatory experience to Scripture as a whole in Chapter 7, this chapter provides a close examination of the experience. Here, the work of third theorist Catholic theologian Niels Hvidt is employed as the primary dialogue partner by which to analyse the testimonial data. The analysis provides a theological reflection on contemporary revelatory experience in light of the different theological frameworks outlined (Ch. 3).

I begin with a general overview of Niels Hvidt's work and the Catholic tradition. From there, I provide an analysis of the Pentecostal revelatory experience according to its constituent components: content, function and process in three phases (hearing, recognising and responding). For each component, I provide a summary of Hvidt's work, followed by a rescription of the ordinary theology in the sample such that similarities and differences between the Pentecostal lifeworld, the "system", and Scripture are highlighted. The discussion also incorporates the various P-C scholars. In some cases, additional testimonies are included in more detail in order to explore the issues. The entire process allows a careful exegesis of the contemporary experience in relation to the biblical experience.

8.1 THE WORK OF THEOLOGIAN NIELS HVIDT AND THE CATHOLIC TRADITION

Hvidt's 2007 multi-disciplinary study *Christian prophecy* is representative of the Catholic tradition. Based on his 2001 dissertation from the Pontifical Gregorian University, it is endorsed favourably by Joseph Card. Ratzinger (Pope Benedict XVI) and draws on the theological insights of two leading 20th Century Catholic theologians, Karl Rahner and Laurent Volken,¹ as well as the writings of the church's officially sanctioned "Doctor of Prayer" St Teresa of Avila.² It is a careful and comprehensive work that examines the revelatory experience from the perspective of theology, history and sociology. It also considers the developments of Vatican II and includes commentary on a number of important Protestant works.

¹ Karl Rahner, *Visions and Prophecies*, trans. Charles Henkey and Richard Strachan (New York: Herder & Herder, 1963); Volken, *Visions, Revelations and the Church*.

² Hvidt notes Teresa's extensive influence and authority in the area of mystical theology and mainstream prophetic theology, *Christian Prophecy*, 149; Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle or The Mansions*, n.d., <https://www.ccel.org/ccel/teresa/castle2.iv.html> [accessed Dec 21, 2019].

Even though Hvidt hails from an ecclesial tradition that is completely distinct from Pentecostalism, he is an appropriate dialogue partner in this study for three reasons. Firstly, and most importantly, Hvidt concurs with the phenomenologically equivalent paradigm of the Pentecostals. Several Pentecostal scholars (including Castelo, Cox, Albrecht, Smith, Poloma and Chan) have recognised the alignment between the Catholic and Pentecostal traditions through their shared embrace of spiritual experience.³ Castelo argue that Pentecostalism finds its place most comfortably in the Catholic mystical tradition in spite of the fact that most modern Pentecostals would hesitate to identify themselves as “mystics” in the Catholic sense. He shows that Pentecostal stress on “encountering God” finds convergence with the Catholic mystical stress on movement towards “union” with God.”⁴ Through Pentecostal experience, the God of mystery self-reveals.⁵ In his review of Castelo’s work, Alfaro suggests that he affirms the theological hunches about the mystical component of Pentecostalism of several in the theological Pentecostal academy.⁶

This general approach to Spirit experience applies to revelatory experience. Consistent with the Pentecostal approach, Hvidt is clear that there is no justification for a different treatment of contemporary and biblical revelatory experience from a phenomenological point of view and that “Old Testament and Christian prophecy share many common traits.”⁷ He argues for a dismissal of the idea of any “end” to revelation. Revelation *neither* ends with Christ, the apostles *or* with the close of the canon.⁸ Recent ecumenical dialogues on the work of the Spirit between Catholic and Pentecostal theologians has revealed further synergy between the two traditions.⁹ Catholic and Pentecostals shared common perspectives on prophecy including its nature, function and importance, discernment criteria and the need for ecclesial and pastoral oversight in the discernment process. Robeck describes

³ Castelo, 39; Chan, *Pentecostal Theology*; Dale Coulter, “What Meaneth This? Pentecostals and Theological Inquiry,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 10, no.1 (2001): 38-64. Poloma and Green, *Godly Love*, 145; Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology: Living the Full Gospel*, (London; New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2017).

⁴ Castelo, 80.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 54.

⁶ Kyle Smith, Leah Payne and Sammy Alfaro, “Author Meets Critics: Responding to Daniel Castelo’s Pentecostalism as a Christian Mystical Tradition,” *Pneuma* 40 (2018): 547.

⁷ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 6-7.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 209-216.

⁹ Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, ““Do Not Quench the Spirit’: Charisms in the Life and Mission of the Church - Report of the Sixth Phase of the International Catholic – Pentecostal Dialogue (2011-2015),” *Information Service*, 2016.

the practice of prophetic gifts among Classical Pentecostals and Catholic Charismatics as a place where “bridges may be built.”¹⁰

Secondly, although Hvidt’s work is titled “Christian *Prophecy*,” his discussion encompasses the broader revelatory experience at the heart of this study. As noted, this area has been largely ignored in P-C works, with revelatory encounters largely associated with the specialist gift of prophecy (Ch. 1.3.3, Ch. 4.1). Hvidt gives attention to both revelatory experience *and* prophecy, distinguishing them by their intended audience: revelatory experience (“private revelations”) is for the *individual* and points to the soul’s union with God – the *unio mystica* – while prophecy brings edification to the *church*.¹¹

Thirdly, Hvidt’s work draws on insights from actual *experience* in history. These include the testimonies of figures such as Hildegard of Bingen, Birgitta of Sweden and Teresa of Avila as well as the more recent experiences of Vassula Rydén.¹² Although these tend to focus on the experience of prominent figures rather than ordinary church members as in this study, Hvidt recognises the importance of incorporating experience into theological reflection. He cites Volken who observed that Catholic writings on this topic have all been *occasioned* by the occurrence of revelations.¹³

As in Protestant discourse, Hvidt notes that the study of revelations in Catholic theology has been largely neglected and cites methodological reasons.¹⁴ Historically, the Reformation is identified as having dealt a detrimental blow to prophecy, serving to assign it a “miniscule place in the church’s recognition of the truth.”¹⁵ This changed after Vatican II when the personalistic aspects of revelation were rediscovered and the prophetic vocation of all believers was affirmed.¹⁶ In spite of the neglect, Hvidt argues that revelatory experience has always been present in the Catholic Church, adapting its form to different times and contexts.¹⁷

¹⁰ Cecil M. Robeck Jr., “A Pentecostal Perspective on Prophetic Gifts” (The International Catholic - Pentecostal Dialogue, Round 6, Sierra Madre, California, 2014), 30. Also, Colt Anderson, “Discernment of Spirits in the Theology of John Cassian: A Potential Bridge for Dialogue.” *Journal of Ecumenical Studies* 53, no. 2 (2018): 303-11.

¹¹ Niels C. Hvidt, “Prophecy and Revelation: A Theological Survey on the Problem of Christian Prophecy,” *Studia Theologica*, no. 52 (1988): 157; Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 10.

¹² Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 98-111, 140-152.

¹³ Volken, 107.

¹⁴ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 23-25

¹⁵ Hvidt, “Prophecy and Revelation,” 148.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 155.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, *Christian Prophecy*, 35-6.

Hvidt provides an appropriate dialogue partner in this study because his perspective of revelatory experience assumes the same position of phenomenological equivalency as Pentecostals. No P-C author has elaborated on the theology and practice of revelatory experience from this starting point. At the same time, Hvidt has received little engagement or critique from P-C scholars because his work lies outside the tradition. This discussion provides an opportunity to engage the works of both traditions through the lens of revelatory experience.

8.2. THE CONTENT OF REVELATORY EXPERIENCE

This section addresses the question of how the content of Pentecostal experience is revelatory. I begin with an overview of Hvidt's work, followed by a rescription of the ordinary theology of study participants.

8.2.1 Material and Formal Revelation

Hvidt sees Jesus as the full and perfect expression of revelation as well as its limit. Any other revelatory works of God *prior to* or *post* Jesus are by definition less complete. Thus, there can be nothing new to add to the revelation in Christ in its material aspects since the Christ event is the climax and fullness of revelation.¹⁸ These understandings are situated into the larger eschatological picture. Before and up until the time of Jesus, revelatory experiences revealed new aspects of truth and the nature of God.¹⁹ This revelation was made complete in Christ, in whom God's nature is made perfectly and completely known (Heb 1:1-2). The church therefore exists in an intermediary state between the first and second coming and needs the constant presence, guidance and instruction of the ever-living Word until Jesus returns in fullness once more. Thus, while prophetic revelations can never *in themselves* express a new dogma, this does not negate the need for them. Instead they are defined in terms of their Christological quality and function.²⁰ This perspective allows for unity between what Christ did at his first coming, what the Spirit does in the intermediary period and what Christ will do at his second coming:²¹

This understanding of ongoing revelation is further defined in relation to the revelation of the apostles' teaching post-Christ. Here, Ratzinger's theological categories of "material" (*actu primo*) and "formal" (*actu secundo*) revelation are applied. Revelation finds its *material* completion in Christ and

¹⁸ Ibid., 217.

¹⁹ Ibid., 168.

²⁰ Ibid., 218.

²¹ Ibid., 219-221.

its *formal* expression in the faith of the apostles.²² These formal aspects are realised in *both* Scripture and tradition. Hvidt explains that the full revelation of Christ would have no meaning in history without its expression and communication by the apostles. Hence *both* the material revelation in Christ and the formal revelation in the Apostles are constitutive and form the “Deposit of Faith.” Both are essential since one is an expression of the other:

All later works of God, including his subsequent revelations, are necessarily less complete than his revelation in Christ, though this does not signify that from a material point of view that they have no relation to the Christ-event; given the oneness of God, they must basically express the same reality. The revelations that precede and those that follow are equally less perfect than the Incarnation, but at the same time they originate from the same mystery. Hence, from a material point of view, it makes little sense to speak of a growth of revelation that should have ended with Christ as prophetic revelations before and after Christ originate in the same reality of God’s word.²³

This approach allows for the continuance of revelation beyond the apostles as the insights of the material and formal aspects continue to be applied in new contexts. New revelation is limited to that which is consistent with the “Deposit of Faith,” also described as the “full revelation in the Logos” and the “conditions of salvation.”²⁴ In this way, the Scriptures become the “norm and criterion of what can be said and – in particular – of what *cannot* be said about revelation.”²⁵

Hence when it comes to the content of contemporary revelation, Hvidt shows that new and previously unknown information is possible,²⁶ but is careful to link it to the material revelation in Christ and its salvific function. He also shows that prophetic experience often looks to the future, but should be understood as more than prediction which has little “life-transforming momentum.” Rather it should be understood in terms of its function to edify in the present.²⁷

²² Ibid., 214.

²³ Ibid., 217.

²⁴ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 217; Rahner, *Visions and Prophecies*, 26. Volken, 179.

²⁵ Ibid., 307.

²⁶ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 149.

²⁷ Ibid., 181-3.

8.2.2 Rescripting Ordinary Theology

The “newness” of revelatory content presents two areas of theological concern: the first is the limits of new content in relation to past revelation (doctrine) and the second is how this new content relates to the future (“foretelling”). In addition to Hvidt’s work, Pentecostal scholar Crinisor Stefan’s insights is engaged here to rescript the ordinary theology of Pentecostals in the sample.

8.2.2.1 The Limits of “New” Revelatory Content

As revealed in the sociological analysis, “new” or previously unknown information was a distinctive feature of Type 4 experiences (Ch. 6.1.2.1, 5.1.2.2). This access to new information was seen to be the privilege of those in relationship with the revelatory God who shares divine “secrets” beyond humanity’s scope (C15) (Jer. 33:3). It was this *newness* of revelatory content that formed the basis of an apologetic and an enhanced awareness of God’s presence in participants’ lives (Ch. 5.1.3.2). These understandings concur with the Catholic tradition which validates new and previously unknown content in revelatory experience.

Hvidt describes the *limits* of new revelations through a Christocentric lens. While, the newness of this content is grounded in the “material revelation” of Christ, it also points to content *beyond* Christ and to the future. In the study, “new” content was evidenced almost entirely to be personal and particular (Ch. 5.1.2.2) and respondents indicated no expectation for new doctrines beyond the limits of the Bible or the conditions of salvation (Ch. 5.1.5.2). This is in keeping with other empirical studies that indicate the *personalised* and *particular* nature of Pentecostal prophetic experience. Studies in Singapore, the UK and Africa have all shown that doctrinal teaching is uncommon in contemporary prophetic experience.²⁸

Significantly, the Christocentric framework for revelatory experience has been echoed by several P-C scholars. Johns and Bridges-Johns term the Holy Spirit “a second Jesus”, guiding and directing his people as they pursue their mission.²⁹ Stefan shows that contemporary experiences allow for the Spirit-Paraclete to continue the revelation brought by the first Paraclete (Jesus).³⁰ The content of revelation is “consonant with the historic life and teachings of Christ,” but not limited to it.³¹ For

²⁸ Cartledge, “Charismatic Prophecy and New Testament Prophecy,” 77,87; Muindi, *Pentecostal-Charismatic Prophecy*, 103-4, 225; Lum, 136, 5644; Fourie, 9, 41-49.

²⁹ Johns and Bridges-Johns, “Yielding,” 114.

³⁰ Stefan, 283, 294.

³¹ Johns and Bridges-Johns, “Yielding,” 114.

Keener, the character of the living Word Jesus provides specific parameters for ongoing experiences (1 Jn 4:2).³²

At the same time, this did not mean that testimonies in the study were void of theological content. *All* experiences pointed back to established theological understandings in some way. This did not diminish the place of the Gospel in a person's life, but rather enhanced it. As C14 explains, "I think it (the experience) keeps you on the right path. I think it's interesting and exciting. And vital... not vital as in – I would never think that what he did at the cross was not enough to speak to me – but, how do you have a relationship if you don't hear from someone? It makes it deeper." Sometimes, the core tenets of faith were expressed in new and contextualised ways. When Jesus came dressed as a lifesaver as AP22 was contemplating suicide by drowning, AP22 was clear that Jesus was performing an act of "salvation" without diminishing the place of the cross. Jesus appeared in as a farmer to A5 to remove intimidation and point towards his provision, but this did not mean Jesus wore country clothing in his incarnation. As Hvidt describes it, "in Christ, prophecy becomes an immediate and continuous means of rephrasing the Word through which the church exists."³³

Thus, contemporary revelatory messages disclosed previously unknown content to recipients, but this did not extend beyond the limits of the material revelation in Christ and the formal revelation of apostolic testimony in Scripture.

8.2.2.2 The Future-Orientation of Revelatory Content

The study revealed a strong element of future-oriented information in revelatory experience (Ch. 5.1.2.2) included knowledge about God's future plans (Ch. 5.1.3.5). This "fore-telling" element is in line with the Catholic tradition, but in tension with the P-C literature. Future-oriented content is present in the Foursquare movement,³⁴ but is not emphasised in Hollenweger's observation of older Pentecostal denominations, Lum's findings on prophecy in Singapore and (to a lesser degree), Fourie's observations in South Africa.³⁵ Renowned Pentecostal scholar Gerald Sheppard insists that contemporary "prophecy does not typically predict the future, but gives assurance, confirmation,

³² Keener, *Gift Giver*, 41.

³³ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 236.

³⁴ Lee, 164.

³⁵ Lum, 188; Fourie, 31; Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, 345.

warning or spiritual encouragement."³⁶ Grudem allows for future-oriented content, but is careful to distinguish it from the “predictive pronouncements” of Scripture.³⁷

Crinisor Stefan discusses the nature of “new” revelation in the Johannine literature in ways that are helpful for this study.³⁸ The content of post-Pentecost prophecy as described by Jesus is divided into that which relates to the past – “reminders” of the truths taught by Jesus (Jn 14:26) – and to the future – “what is yet to come” (Jn 16:13-14, NIV). Stefan shows that this second designation could be understood in two ways. Since Jesus was unable to communicate all that was needed prior to his ascension, the “newness” of revelatory experiences points beyond the *established teachings* of Jesus. New revelation thus allowed the purpose of God to be applied to new contexts for future generations.³⁹ Additionally, this new revelation also included the possibility of fore-telling content. Stefan’s interpretation again appears to diverge from that of P-C scholarship. Turner and Carson for example, both place more emphasis on the Spirit’s revelation of *past* issues. John 16:13-14 should *not* be understood primarily in relation to the church’s future, but should include Jesus’ glorification and the “consequences for the church in different times and places later.”⁴⁰ For Turner, the Paraclete’s task is “not to bring independent revelation... The truth into which the Spirit guides is principally the truth Jesus has incarnated and taught, or things in continuity with it... and *perhaps*, some new truths” (*italics mine*).⁴¹

In the study, the testimonies are in alignment with Stefan’s and Hvidt’s conclusions. It was clear for participants that new revelatory content *would* and *could* refer to the future. These expectations are not surprising given the biblical testimony. In his survey of revelatory experiences in Luke-Acts, John Miller shows that numerous experiences in the text incorporated future-related elements⁴² and Forbes insists that, “it would be extraordinary if Paul did not think prediction was part of prophecy.”⁴³ Similarly, the book of Revelation contains multiple future elements (Rev 1:19).

³⁶ Sheppard, “Prophecy,” 64; Also, Gary Tyra, *The Holy Spirit in Mission: Prophetic Speech and Action in Christian Witness* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 2011), 41.

³⁷ Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, Location 1460-1468.

³⁸ Crinisor Stefan, “The Paraclete and Prophecy in the Johannine Community,” *Pneuma* 27.2 (2005): 273-96.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 276, 282.

⁴⁰ Turner, *Holy Spirit*, 82; Donald A. Carson, *The Gospel According to John* (Leicester: InterVarsity, 1991), 540.

⁴¹ Turner, *Holy Spirit*, 83.

⁴² Miller, *Convinced*. e.g. Acts 11:27-28; 13:2; 16:6; 20:23; 21:10-11; 27:22.

⁴³ Forbes, 244.

Finally, while future-oriented information was a strong feature of the testimonies, it was usually presented in “open-ended” ways that called for active participation by the recipient. Unconditional predictions were not a distinctive feature in the sample. Like Hvidt’s observations, the salvific function of future-oriented information pointed to the present. (See discussion in Ch. 8.6.2.2).

8.2.3 Summary

The ordinary theology and practice of those in the study regarding the content of revelatory experience aligns closely to the Catholic perspective of Hvidt and Pentecostal Stefan. As in the biblical narratives, the phenomenologically equivalent approach of the Pentecostals allows for previously unknown and future-oriented information. However, this ongoing revelation is always limited to the full revelation of Jesus and apostolic teaching found in Scripture.

8.3 THE FUNCTION OF REVELATORY EXPERIENCE

This section examines the revelatory experience functions for participants. In the previous chapter (7), I provided an epistemological analysis of experience, showing how it produced an experiential knowledge of God that resulted in personal transformation (Ch. 7.3.2.1, 7.3.2.2). In this section, the focus is on theological understandings about revelatory experience’s function in relation to doctrine. Hvidt’s work on the actualisation of doctrine is outlined and then used to rescript the ordinary theology of those in the sample.

8.3.1 The Actualisation of Doctrine

Hvidt’s understandings about the material and formal aspects of revelation form the basis for their function. For Hvidt, revelatory experiences post-Jesus serve to further the work of God’s salvific plan. They act as the “ever-inspired actualisation of revelation, adjusted to every particular time in history.”⁴⁴ Through revelatory experience, God calls and guides individuals to live out the reality of Christ’s work until the eschaton. There is therefore a consistency and unity between the work of the Spirit and the work of Christ since they are rooted in the same salvific plan.⁴⁵ At a formal level, this means prophetic revelations do not constitute new assertions beyond salvation in Christ, but the truths of salvation may be expressed anew in new contexts.⁴⁶ Thus, revelation acts to realise and re-actualise the fundamentals of faith as the Spirit continues to call the church to its purpose and identity.⁴⁷

⁴⁴ Ibid., 154.

⁴⁵ Ibid., 219.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 126.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 238-249, 268.

Practically this means that private revelations act to produce edification, encouragement and correction. They shed light on the past, present and future. Teresa of Avila shows how prophetic revelations affirmed doctrine and made “truth real” to her intellectually and emotionally.⁴⁸ Experiences should never be goals in themselves, but should lead to a closer relationship with God. They are seen to have a transformative effect, instilling humility, exposing the sinful nature and developing affection for God.⁴⁹ For the church as a whole, prophetic revelations serve to develop pious traditions, devotions and impact liturgies as well as provide correction.⁵⁰ They also provide guidance for the establishment of new ministries.⁵¹

Furthermore, while revelatory experience cannot include *new* doctrine beyond the Deposit of Faith, it can play a role in the *development* of doctrine by providing an “inspired hypothesis” for theologians to work with. Prophetic revelations enable the church to reflect differently on aspects of revelation in Scripture and Tradition and therefore form an imperative that shows Christianity how to act in certain situations.⁵² Hence, they become “new commands,” but not “new assertions.”⁵³

The idea that the revelation of private experiences may have relevance to the wider church is based on theological understandings of the church. Hvidt maintains that the charism is never private since Christ’s prophetic gifts are always given for the greater good (1 Cor 12:7). Private experiences *always* have communal implications due to the unifying Spirit in the “mystical Body of Christ.”⁵⁴ Hence, the content of a numerous private revelations have been applied across the wider church in Catholic history.⁵⁵

8.3.2 Rescripting Ordinary Theology

This section engages the work of Hvidt to analyse the function of revelatory experience in the data in relation to existing doctrine. Here, “doctrine” is understood to incorporate propositional truth *and*

⁴⁸ Ibid., 151-2.

⁴⁹ Teresa, *Interior Castle*, First Mansions, Ch.2, 5.

⁵⁰ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 170.

⁵¹ Volken, 228-230; Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 13.

⁵² Ibid., 244.

⁵³ Ibid., 26.

⁵⁴ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 11, 304.

⁵⁵ For example, subject matter included the indifference of Christians and the introduction of several new church practises, Volken, 82-87, 230.

practice in line with Vanhoozer's definition.⁵⁶ Two themes from the data are highlighted for discussion – the Christocentric function of revelatory experience and the role of experience in the revision of doctrine.

8.3.2.1 The Christocentric Function of Revelatory Experience

As noted, respondents viewed the function of their experience almost entirely to build a personal relationship with God (Ch. 5.1.3.1). In keeping with this relational focus, the Spirit was seen to speak about a variety of individual needs, revealing God's care, protection and comforting presence (Ch. 5.1.3.3, 5.1.3.2). From there, the Spirit's revelatory work called for the release of latent talents, gifts and skills reflecting the God who saw their creative potential. Revelatory experiences were understood in terms of revealing God's "plans" for their lives (Ch. 5.1.3.5) and often lead to ministry and missional endeavours (Ch. 5.1.3.6).

Hvidt's understandings of the role of revelatory experience in terms of Christ's ongoing salvific work provides an appropriate framework for conceptualising revelatory experiences in the study. It is clear that experience acted as a vehicle for the actualisation of Christ's work in participants' lives.

Doctrines such as the sovereignty of God, God as protector, healer, saviour and provider were all highlighted in the data as the Spirit contextualised these truths in the lives of individuals (eg. A5, A3, A9, A12, B1, C3, C5 etc). When experiences were appropriately responded to, they provided a vehicle for sanctification that included healing and changed moral behaviours. From there, experiences provided the motivation to mobilise respondents to ministry and mission-related activity (5.1.3.6) in ways that were often unplanned and unanticipated (C9, C6, AP22).

While the experiences in the study accorded with Christ's salvific function highlighted by Hvidt, this Christocentric perspective was not present in the ordinary theology of participants. Reflections on experiences were more likely to be explained in terms of divine affections and in response to personal needs, rather than the broader scope of Christ's ministry and mission. This orientation to revelatory experience may contribute to the misguided penchant for "personal oracles" that are sought "for their own sake" observed by Wenk (Ch. 1.4.2).⁵⁷ Tyra reveals a similar concern and calls for prophetic experiences to find their purpose in the mission of the church.⁵⁸

⁵⁶ Kevin Vanhoozer separates doctrine from theology and argues that it is best viewed as the "direction for the church's fitting participation in the drama of redemption," *The Drama of Doctrine* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005), 30.

⁵⁷ Wenk, "What Is Prophetic," 194.

⁵⁸ Tyra, *Holy Spirit*.

The absence of Christocentric understandings in the study is somewhat surprising given the Christocentric orientation of Pentecostals in general.⁵⁹ As noted, the link between the voice of the Spirit and Christ's ongoing work is rarely made in the scholarly or popular literature.⁶⁰ This may be due in part to the P-C preference for a Pauline understanding of prophetic experience from the epistles.⁶¹ Respondents readily referred to the rubric of "encouragement, edification and comfort" (1 Cor 14:3) to describe their experience. Though somewhat helpful, this perspective does not reflect the Spirit's work as an extension of Christ in the same way as the narratives. Stronstad has highlighted the pneumatological function of the Spirit in Acts in relation to the Christology of Luke, showing that effectively, Christ and the Spirit have the same *function*.⁶² He argues, this function is largely *vocational* and is in contrast to the *soteriological* emphasis highlighted by Paul.⁶³ Interestingly, Hvidt's work focusses on the reverse – he emphasises the soteriological functions of revelatory experience rather than the vocational aspect of empowerment for mission.⁶⁴ In the testimonies of the study, *both* emphases are clearly evident (Ch. 5.1.3.4, 5.1.3.6) and occurred in the context of the divine-human relationship. Davidson has emphasised the need for this integration of "being" and "doing" in the Spirit's work. It is out of personal relationship with God that Christians are motivated to deeper levels of sanctification and greater acts of service (Ch. 6.1.2.1).⁶⁵

The Christocentric framework of the Catholic tradition provides an appropriate way for understanding the function of revelatory experience and may act to redress the Pentecostal focus on personal needs and desires. The Pauline themes of "encouragement, exhortation and comfort" are better served when

⁵⁹ Land, 23; Lee, 150; Clark, 56.

⁶⁰ Eg. Paul K. King's discussion of God's purpose in speaking in dreams is typical in making no mention of the Spirit's work as an extension of Jesus's ministry, "Discerning Dreams." *The Pneuma Review: Journal of Ministry Resources and Theology for Pentecostal and Charismatic Ministries & Leaders* (blog), August 27, 2020, <http://pneumareview.com/discerning-dreams/>, [accessed Sept 7, 2020].

⁶¹ E.g. Lum, 223, Fourie, 31; Cartledge, "Charismatic Prophecy and New Testament Prophecy", 77; Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, Location 1373-1540.

⁶² Stronstad, *Spirit, Scripture and Theology*, 174-177.

⁶³ Stronstad, *Prophethood*, 123. Also, Menzies, "A Response to Max Turner," 53; Robert P. Menzies, *Empowered for Witness: The Spirit in Luke-Acts*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement 56 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994) compared with Max Turner, "Spiritual Gifts and Spiritual Formation in 1 Corinthians and Ephesians," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 22 (2013): 187–205.

⁶⁴ Although the role of experience in pioneering new religious orders is noted, *Christian Prophecy*, 13; Volken, 228-230.

⁶⁵ Davidson, 73. Evangelical practical theologian Andrew Root's work finds resonance here as he presents "divine action" in a Christocentric manner, *Christopraxis*.

connected to the wider purpose of Christ's ministry. Here, the Spirit speaks to sanctify individuals through the actualisation of doctrine and invite them into Christ's missional purpose.

8.3.2.2 The Role of Revelatory Experience in the Development of Doctrine

The place of revelatory experience in relation to existing doctrine is an area of concern for P-C (and Cessationist) scholars. As noted, P-C authors insist that contemporary experiences must be void of doctrinal content and that contemporary experience is distinguished by its *local* rather than universal application (Ch. 3.2.2.3).

Yet, this approach does not line up with church history that reveals the role revelatory experience has frequently played in doctrinal development, beginning with the early church. Scripture records multiple examples of revelations that were "private," yet found their place in the formation of doctrine (eg. Acts 10, Paul's experiences in 1 Cor 15, 1 Cor 13:2, the Apocalypse).⁶⁶ This is in keeping with the early church's understanding of the Spirit's work in leading the church into truth in matters "to come" (John 16:12-15).⁶⁷ This pattern continued in the post-biblical church. Tertullian used inspired experiences as supplementary evidence to form theology on a variety of subjects including Hades and the abode of the righteous dead, the existence of the Trinity and the veiling of women in the church.⁶⁸ Medieval figures Bonaventure and Thomas of Aquinas used prophetic revelations in their explanations of Scripture when a passage could be understood in different ways.⁶⁹ Similarly, early American/Australian Pentecostals evidence doctrinal content in their revelatory experiences.⁷⁰ Indeed, Robeck shows that the writing down and circulation of visions and prophetic oracles (implying wider application) has occurred throughout the Christian community for centuries.⁷¹

In this study, while the vast majority of experiences referred to personal matters, these were not void of theological substance (Ch. 8.2.2.1). Further in some cases, Spirit encounters challenged existing interpretations of doctrinal matters including divorce and remarriage (A19), women in leadership (AP22) and healing (A2). Again, this diverges from P-C claims that experience does not (and should not) have bearing on doctrinal matters. The pattern of Scripture and of history points to a role for

⁶⁶ Turner shows that prophetic experience did not play a major part in theology, however he does not consider the D/Vs of Acts, *Holy Spirit and Spiritual Gifts*, 201, 214.

⁶⁷ G. M. Burge, *The Anointed Community: The Holy Spirit in the Johannine Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987).

⁶⁸ Robeck, "Canon, Regulae Fidei," 70.

⁶⁹ Hvidt, "Prophecy and Revelation," 105.

⁷⁰ Robeck, "Written Prophecies," 30; Hymes, "Old Testament Theology."

⁷¹ Robeck, "Written Prophecies," 29.

revelatory experience in doctrinal formation, but the question of what constitutes “new doctrine” and its range of application must be clarified.

The Catholic tradition provides an appropriate pathway by which to address the interaction of doctrine and experience. Having established the limits of revelation, Hvidt points to the role revelatory experience can have in providing an “inspired hypothesis” for the development of dogma and renewed perspectives on Scripture. New revelations can cause an element of Christian teaching to be understood that “has been forgotten or only vaguely known.”⁷² Hence private revelations may have bearing on public understandings. Hvidt argues that the Protestant tradition has always neglected the wider implications of individual experience due to a lack of understanding about the connectedness of the Body of Christ (Col 1:18).⁷³ Indeed, he shows that prophetic revelations have historically been among the “main catalysts for the continuous unfolding of revelation and growth into the full truth.”⁷⁴ While Protestants would voice their concerns over conclusions regarding Marian apparitions made possible by this approach,⁷⁵ Hvidt’s perspective is pertinent to at least two testimonies in the study.

The first testimony concerns the issue of marriage and divorce. A19 reported that God spoke to “release” her from marriage after eight years of domestic abuse. At first, she struggled with the message since “the marriage vows are permanent” and “God hates divorce” (Mal 2:16). At the same time, she discerned her experience to be from God, therefore requiring acquiescence. Upon broaching the issue with her pastor, he denied the legitimacy of her experience, quoting Malachi and advising her to return to her marriage. Desperate, she turned to another tradition which enabled her to re-theologise her experience:

I rang the Salvation Army line in tears and they went through the passages with me. They were the first to shine a light on it. But because I didn't know a lot about the Salvation Army, I didn't know what he was saying was true, so then I went on a journey of learning what was true.

I would say now that the passages they were interpreting and quoting at me about my situation – a lot of them fit it into particular situations and it needed to be looked at in those contexts. I would say now that whilst God does hate divorce, he has made way to

⁷² Volken, 100.

⁷³ Ibid., 273.

⁷⁴ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 241-242.

⁷⁵ Ibid., 244-245.

divorce even with Moses with the law. God doesn't allow abuse to continue. He doesn't sanction that – that is against the vows of marriage (A19).

A19's testimony reveals the role revelatory experience has in developing an "inspired hypothesis" for the development of doctrine. Although this process was not part of her espoused theology, it was unwittingly followed (as "operant" theology) when she allowed her experience to challenge existing church teaching. Hvidt has argued that revelatory experience may be "private" and "particular," yet have *public* significance. For if A19's experience was discerned to be of God, it would have bearing on others in similar situations and therefore the wider church's teaching on divorce. This perspective challenges the division made by P-C authors that contemporary experience is limited to local situations with no wider ramifications. Indeed, this approach takes seriously the notion of the democratisation of the Spirit where *every* believer has access to the wisdom of the Spirit regardless of their status in the church (Acts 2:16-17).

At the same time, this approach also requires broader connections across different ecclesial communities. As Keener shows, appeals within a single community risk the danger of circularity and wider interaction is needed in order to properly test the messages of contemporary revelation.⁷⁶ A19's experience could have been used as an "inspired hypothesis" by which to reflect on divorce teachings in light of different scriptural interpretations outside the tradition. This allows for teaching to adapt to new contexts and areas not be covered by the biblical text.

The second testimony is similar and relates to the issue of gender roles. AP22 recounts a revelatory message that challenged her to submit to God above her husband AP21. This message was later confirmed by her husband and led to a shift towards an egalitarian model in their marriage. In time, more of the wife's giftings began to surface and she became the visionary leader of the church while her husband stepped back into a support role. AP21 tells how these experiences led to a break from their church's denomination which supported patriarchy in marriage and ministry. AP22 and AP21 have now established a church that reflects egalitarian teaching. Here again, private revelations have implications on public understandings. If AP21 and AP22's private experiences were discerned to be from God, they may represent God's intention for gender roles universally.

Even though the Catholic perspective on the role of revelatory experience in the revision of doctrine generally contradicts the Pentecostal perspective at a theoretical level, there are indications of potential agreement. Pentecostal scholar John Christopher Thomas for example, highlights the role of

⁷⁶ Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics*, 279.

revelatory experience in his study of the Gentile inclusion in the early church (Acts 10; 15)⁷⁷ and relates it to the contemporary issue of women in ministry. Further, evangelical scholar I. Howard Marshall allows for “Spirit-insights” to develop theological understandings “beyond the Bible” based on the principles of development within the Bible.⁷⁸ A similar approach may be applied to other doctrinal issues outside the “conditions of salvation” such as IVF treatment, the nature of spiritual warfare and issues of human sexuality.⁷⁹

It should be recognised that this perspective on the revision of doctrine in new contexts is only possible through a careful distinction between the material aspect of revelation in the Christ event which is *complete* and the formal expression in apostolic teaching which *continues*.⁸⁰ In the Catholic perspective, both these aspects reside in Scripture, but the aspect of “formal revelation” also incorporates “Tradition” or church teachings. Thus, formal revelation continues its growth in the knowledge and implementation of revelation’s truth through the ongoing activity of the Spirit in the church.⁸¹ This requires *consistency* and *unicity* in the foundation of the Deposit of Faith in Christ and in its actualisation by the Spirit in history.⁸²

Such understandings about the role of church “Tradition” in relation to the Spirit’s work are in strong tension with Protestant understandings of *sola scriptura*. However, the testimonies of those in the study point to the necessity of an enhanced role for the church community, as the Spirit continues to apply the revelation of Christ to new contexts. Indeed, some indicators of this perspective may already be evident among P-C scholars. In N.T. Wright’s conception of Scripture as “theodrama” for example, he makes a distinction between the “acts of Jesus” which are complete and the “acts of the early church” which continue into the present time.⁸³ Similarly, after considering the model of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), James Shelton acknowledges the limitations of a *sola scriptura model* and insists on the incorporation of Scripture *and* Tradition into Pentecostal understandings. For

⁷⁷ Thomas, “Women,” 41-56.

⁷⁸ Marshall, *Beyond the Bible*, 56-62.

⁷⁹ Eg. Andrew Goddard highlights the increasing use of Acts 15 as a model for homosexuality debates, *God, Gentiles and Gay Christians: Acts 15 and Change in the Church* (Cambridge: Grove Books, 2001).

⁸⁰ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 216.

⁸¹ *Ibid.*, 218,

⁸² *Ibid.*, 219-212.

⁸³ Norman T. Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God* (London: SPCK, 1992), 155.

Shelton; “to put it (Pentecostal experience) into a Protestant system is to force Pentecostalism into a too tightly fitting evangelical dress; its ancient catholic nature shows through.”⁸⁴

8.3.3 Summary

The testimonial data highlights the role revelatory experience can play in actualising doctrine in the lives of individuals. This is in keeping with the Catholic tradition. Here, the Spirit speaks to continue the ministry and mission of Christ, a process that includes sanctification and vocational empowerment in the context of the divine-human relationship. Contemporary revelatory experience can also play a role in contributing to the development of teaching in the wider church, due to the connectedness of the Body of Christ by the Spirit. While authentic revelatory experiences can never add to the conditions of salvation, they shed light on how the Christ event is actualised in new settings. Such a position affirms their importance in bringing Christ’s truth to new contexts and issues, a need highlighted by the Friday Apostolics (Ch. 3.2.3).

This position also challenges P-C understandings about the sufficiency of Scripture. The Catholic tradition recognises the *need* for contemporary revelation in order to help with what “theology cannot work out.”⁸⁵ Thus, Scripture remains sufficient in communicating the conditions for salvation and the Deposit of Faith, but itself points to the need for ongoing revelatory experience in order to apply Christ’s salvific work to new contexts.

8.4 HEARING GOD’S VOICE

This section analyses the modes in which revelatory messages were “heard” in the study. In the previous chapter, analysis centred on the efficacy of different communicational forms (7.1.2.1). This section centres on theological understandings surrounding different revelatory modes.

8.4.1 Historic Concepts of Revelation

Hvidt places understandings about revelation in the context of history.⁸⁶ He shows that revelation has been understood in two ways – firstly as “inspired experience” that involves a concrete and supernatural occurrence such as a vision or audition that results in a revealed message – and secondly, as a “concept to be reflected upon” that involves the transmission of propositional content (defined as

⁸⁴ James B. Shelton, “Epistemology and Authority in the Acts of the Apostles: An Analysis and Test Case Study of Acts 15:1-29,” *The Spirit & Church* 2, no. 2 (2000): 247.

⁸⁵ Rahner, *Visions and Prophecies*, 25.

⁸⁶ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 123.

the “Deposit of Faith” constituted by the Scriptures and tradition).⁸⁷ Hvidt shows that the charismatic idea of revelation as “inspired experience” was predominant throughout history until the middle of the 19th Century when it shifted to a “concept to be reflected on.”⁸⁸ This shift occurred during the Enlightenment when theologians battled to defend orthodoxy against the claims of humanism and deism.⁸⁹ “Revelation” then, is a *modern* theological category that came to prominence when it was set over reason and there was a need to defend confessional positions. Hvidt shows that during the 20th Century, the fundamentalist movements within Protestantism began insisting that the Bible alone was the source of revelation, while the Roman Catholics re-emphasised the supernaturality of revelation and its place within the teachings of the Church.

Hvidt shows that revelation as “experience” and revelation as “cognitive reflection” both serve to actualise the fundamentals of faith. The difference between the two is the *internal activity* of the soul in receiving revelation. In experiential understandings, revelation arises from an immediate supernatural encounter with the divine that is not normally accessible to the human person.⁹⁰ In the reflective understanding, a historic tradition is transmitted and cognitive processes are involved.

Hvidt draws on the language of mystical theology to categorise the modes of inspired experience as visions, dreams, apparitions and auditions.⁹¹ He shows that the senses of sight and hearing feature prominently in mystical phenomena. Visions are defined as “revelations that occur in the imagery of the human cognitive faculty” and arise while awake (often in an ecstatic state). Dreams are experienced as visions in the sleep state. Apparitions are more objective, tangible and sensorial – scenes appear as “3-dimensional material objects” more akin to physical objects and visible only to the visionary.⁹² Auditions (also termed “locutions”) consist of “inner words” that are not normally discernible to the senses.⁹³

While Hvidt shows a general acceptance of inspired experience as a mode of revelation in Catholic theology, he also notes periods in history that were negative towards them. For example, leading 16th Century mystic (and contemporary of Teresa of Avila), St John of the Cross followed the Augustinian

⁸⁷ Ibid., 125-127.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 153.

⁸⁹ Avery Dulles, *Models of Revelation* (Dublin: Gill and Macmillan, 1983), 4, 19-20; also Goldingay, *Models*, 288.

⁹⁰ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 125-127.

⁹¹ Ibid., 10.

⁹² Teresa of Avila explores the different types of visions in scholastic theology tracing back to Augustine, *Interior Castle*, Sixth Mansions, Ch. VII-IX, III; Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 134.

⁹³ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 134.

tradition in favouring “word-less contemplative mysticism” and rejecting the phenomenon of inspired experience. Instead, St John urged followers to focus on the revelation of Scripture and tradition. Hvidt notes that John’s strong denunciation of apparitions in his writings could even be described as heretical and led to a significant neglect of the older tradition up until the late 1960s.⁹⁴ He attributes this rejection to the influence of Greek/mainly Platonic ontology.⁹⁵ Volken links St. John’s antipathy to the unhealthy desire for visions throughout Spain at the time and the “ravage wrecked on souls” as a result.⁹⁶ Revelatory experiences were pursued for their sensationalistic nature and became dangerous when people sought the “gift rather than the giver.”⁹⁷

8.4.2 Rescripting Ordinary Theology

The ordinary theology of Pentecostals in the sample relating to hearing God’s voice are rescripted here via two foci: the nature of revelatory modes and comparisons between them.

8.4.2.1 The Nature of Revelatory Modes

The data revealed a range of modes for hearing God’s voice (Ch. 5.1.4.1). Respondents reported plentiful experiences of dreams, visions and voices and other senses. Scripture also featured prominently. To a significantly lesser degree, the modes of books, people (preachers, prophetic messengers or counsellors), circumstances and nature were present. These revelatory forms can be categorised as unmediated (or mystical)⁹⁸ and mediated (non-mystical), whereby “mediated” refers to experiences that required the agency of a material object or person.⁹⁹

The unmediated experiences in the data generally correlated with Catholic understandings of the revelatory modes. D/Vs were a common experience, containing both literal and symbolic scenes. Far less common were “open visions” (AP22, A4) which can be correlated to the Catholic term “apparitions.” The experience of “voices” corresponds with the Catholic term “auditions.” These were either “inaudible”/“internal” and “audible”/external, although the use of the term “audible” is disputable since most respondents claimed a third party would not have heard it. Indeed, “voices” may be a limiting descriptor as the message was not always verbal. As in Scripture, participants often

⁹⁴ Ibid., 141-148.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 141.

⁹⁶ Volken, 95.

⁹⁷ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 145-6.

⁹⁸ In modern discourse, mysticism is often interpreted as a term denoting immediate and extraordinary “experience”, *Medjugorje and the Supernatural: Science, Mysticism, and Extraordinary Religious Experience* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 73. T

⁹⁹ Neumann uses the term “mystical” to designate the absence of human mediators, “Experience,” 88.

referred to God “speaking” even when the message came in visual form.¹⁰⁰ However, respondents also made plentiful reference to “sensory impressions,” a category that is absent in Hvidt’s writings and in the biblical narratives (although emotions often accompany revelatory messages (e.g. Dan 8:27; Rev 5:4)).

These findings were consistent with the findings of other Pentecostal studies, with some exceptions regarding D/Vs. Cartledge found imagery to be less trustworthy than word-based experiences in his study, perhaps due to the ambiguity of symbolism.¹⁰¹ In a similar vein, Lum noted the most common hearing modes to be firstly a “word or sentence coming to mind”, followed by sensory impressions, a Scripture verse or passage coming to mind and “mental pictures.”¹⁰² Muindi noted the prevalence of mental words and pictures in his research.¹⁰³

As noted, mediated modes of revelation (sermons, books, human counsel, circumstances and nature) were also present in the data. These experiences appear to reflect Hvidt’s description of revelation as a “concept to be reflected upon.” Rather than the irruptive or invasive nature of unmediated modes, the revelatory experience began with active cognition by the recipient as they took time to read a book, engage with a sermon, enlist counsel or observe an aspect of nature. Typically, the experience was described as a thought that resonated in the mind of the recipient in some way and was subsequently discerned to be of God. For example, when A16 was reading a particular passage in a book, her “heart leapt out of her chest.” Those who “heard God speak in nature” described their revelatory insights after pondering on different aspects of the world around them – the garden fertiliser was like life’s trials that “stunk” but made plants grow (A10) and the vast expanse of the ocean “spoke” of God’s enormity (B15). These experiences acted to confirm and reinforce established truths, rather than provide “new” or previously unknown information.

This type of experience was also present in the use of Scripture as a revelatory mode. Insights came as participants reflected on their Scripture reading. The Spirit’s work was seen in highlighting the “right verse” at the “right time.” This experience may align with “Scripture verses brought to mind” in other studies.¹⁰⁴ Again, experiences referred to the application of established or known information such as matters of salvation and morality rather than new information. The element of cognition however was less prominent in experiential and “creative” readings, where revelatory experience departed

¹⁰⁰ Ch.1.3.3.

¹⁰¹ Cartledge, “Charismatic Prophecy and New Testament Prophecy,” 84.

¹⁰² Lum, 181-2.

¹⁰³ Muindi, *Pentecostal-Charismatic Prophecy*, 225.

¹⁰⁴ Cartledge, “Definition and Description,” 83-4; Lum, 222.

markedly from the historical-critical meaning of the text. Here, Scripture became a vehicle for somewhat creative experiences and could be seen to be as subjective as unmediated experiences.

8.4.2.2 Revelatory Modes Compared

Respondents in the study revealed that there was no preferred form in hearing God's voice (Ch. 5.1.4.2). However, mediated modes were not commonly cited in the testimonies as examples of hearing God and a specific "voice" was not identifiable. Unmediated experiences tended to be valued for their revelation of previously unknown information as well as their affective impact, a feature that was not as strongly present where reflective cognition was involved. Pentecostal scholars have recognised contemporary prophecy to be revelatory in a way that is clearly distinguished from cognitive reflection.¹⁰⁵ In addition, the multi-sensory nature of unmediated experience (Ch. 7.1.2.1) as well as its invasive and irruptive quality amplified its impact. One respondent entrenched in a domestic abuse situation recalled her name being called so loudly in the night that it woke her up "physically and spiritually." Her ears hurt for hours afterwards and provided the impetus to flee her partner that had not been possible before (C6). In the Catholic tradition, Volken highlights the "shock" value of revelatory experience – it is due to the "marvellous nature" of revelatory forms that provoke response in a way that "familiar sacramental signs do not always produce."¹⁰⁶

Hvidt describes the "theological uneasiness" associated with revelation as *inspired experience* in the Catholic tradition. This "uneasiness" is also present in the P-C tradition which presents the mediated modes of revelation as more reliable than unmediated modes. Grudem for example, is clear that Scripture is the preferred mode for hearing God's voice due to its "objectivity."¹⁰⁷ Evangelical missionaries Doyle and Webster wrestle with the validity of D/Vs in the conversion of Middle Eastern Muslims *apart* from Scripture¹⁰⁸ and popular P-C authors claim that mystical modes are "unstable" and fall into the domain of the spiritually immature.¹⁰⁹ D/Vs are particularly viewed with scepticism, with Grudem arguing that the most common means of divine communication in the Old Testament

¹⁰⁵ Muindi, *Pentecostal-Charismatic Prophecy*, 2; Lee, 160; Cartledge, "Definition and Description," 87-88.

¹⁰⁶ Volken, 233.

¹⁰⁷ Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, Location 962. Similarly, John Goldingay, "Old Testament Prophecy Today," *The Spirit and Church* 3.1 (2001), 46; Carson, *Showing the Spirit*, 176-82.

¹⁰⁸ Tom Doyle and Greg Webster, *Dreams and Visions – Is Jesus Awakening the Muslim World?* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2012), Kindle Electronic Edition, Location 132.

¹⁰⁹ Meyer, 45, 48; Huggett, 115; Williamson, *Hearing God*, Location 571, 716, 2885; Batterson, *Whisper*, 119.

was a *verbal* message – even while admitting Scripture’s own description (Num 12:6).¹¹⁰ Similarly, Dallas Willard largely rejects contemporary D/Vs, labelling them “strange” and unreliable.¹¹¹ This suspicion towards unmediated experience was relatively uncommon in the study (CP16), with only a few participants insisting that hearing God “outside Scripture” reflected the behaviour of a “baby Christian” (eg. BF8). Such tentativeness tended to be expressed by those who had *not* experienced unmediated forms of revelation (B11, BF9).

As Hvidt notes, the preference for mediated modes is likely due to the uncertainties around the level of human influence in unmediated experience.¹¹² The element of previously unknown information distinctive of such experiences invites the risk of abuse. Hymes identifies this fear in the trend away from D/Vs towards Scripture among early Pentecostals.¹¹³ As in St John’s situation (8.4.1), the use of mediated modes of revelation represents the safer option.

Historic shifts in the concept of revelation offers an explanation for the disconnect between the endorsement of unmediated modes as a source of revelation *in* Scripture and rejection of them *outside* Scripture by P-C authors. Hvidt shows that since the Enlightenment, the Protestant tradition has tended to emphasise the *reflective* concept of revelation, while the emphasis on the *experiential* concept re-emerged in the Catholic tradition around Vatican II. While the former may be the “safer” option, the analysis reveals the value of unmediated experience. Rather than diminishing its role for fear of error, the tenuousness of unmediated modes points to a greater need for discernment, as it did in biblical times (1 Thess 5:20-21).

8.4.3 Summary

The phenomenologically equivalent position of the Pentecostals in the sample was evidenced in their acceptance of unmediated revelatory modes, including auditions, dreams and visions and sensory impressions. This approach concurred with the Catholic tradition and the concept of revelation as “inspired experience.” Both mediated modes (which reflect revelation as “a concept to be reflected on”) and unmediated modes have their value in the transmission and actualisation of theological knowledge.

¹¹⁰ Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, Location 3204.

¹¹¹ Willard, *Hearing God*, Loc. 45-46.

¹¹² Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 127.

¹¹³ Miller, *Convinced*, 53; David Hymes, “Old Testament Theology.”

8.5 RECOGNISING GOD’S VOICE

The critical nature of discernment has been noted by scholars, since it is the *source* of revelatory experience that sets the limits of authority.¹¹⁴ The process of recognising God’s voice is also crucial in minimising the problems of pastoral fallout associated with the revelatory experience. In this section, Hvidt’s work regarding discernment in the Catholic tradition is brought into dialogue with the ordinary theology of study participants.

8.5.1 Discernment in the Catholic Tradition

This section provides an overview of Hvidt’s work in discernment and highlights three aspects of the process: the epistemological reliability of revelatory experience, criteria for discernment and responsibility for discernment.

The Epistemological Reliability of Revelatory Experience

Hvidt recognises the complex and mixed nature of revelatory experience. Experience reveals a range of human-divine influences, with many irrational and subjective elements that cannot be empirically verified.¹¹⁵ He cites specific examples in Catholic history, whereby divine inspiration was said to come with “different force, sometimes stronger, sometimes weaker.” At times messages were received “word for word”¹¹⁶ as in St Teresa’s experience:

I am like a parrot which has learnt to talk; only knowing what has been taught or heard... They will understand that it does not originate from me and there is no reason to attribute it to me, as with my scant understanding and skill, I could write nothing of the sort unless God in His mercy, enabled me to do so.¹¹⁷

Hvidt emphasises the complexity of discernment – experiences can be judged, but they cannot be definitively proven. At the same time, essential clarity *is* possible, even while there is no way to determine the levels of divine/human input. Instead he points to the outcomes of experience and like Kraft, their *incarnational* nature.¹¹⁸

¹¹⁴ Robeck, “The Gift of Prophecy,” 1010; Jon K. Newton, “Holding Prophets Accountable,” *The Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 30, no. 1 (2010): 63-79.

¹¹⁵ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 286.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 132.

¹¹⁷ Teresa of Avila, *The Interior Castle*, Preface.

¹¹⁸ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 132.

Additionally, Hvidt emphasises the human propensity for self-deception and advocates for a position of scepticism towards spiritual experiences – especially among those who are “weak of soul.”¹¹⁹ He quotes Rahner in saying that supernatural agency should *never* be presupposed due to the challenges of faith and the “misery of life” that tends to drive people to “excessive credulity.”¹²⁰ Similarly, Teresa of Avila exercised extreme vigilance and conscientiousness in scrutinising her own experiences “from every point of view” in order to avoid delusion.¹²¹

Criteria for Discernment

Hvidt shows that the process of discernment works to identify the origin of the revelatory experience from three possible sources: the self, the divine or evil origins.¹²² This has been achieved through a clear and systematic process that has been established since the 16th Century. Three criteria are applied. The first criterion is “intrinsic” to the experience and relates to the *content* of the revelation.¹²³ As stated, this message must be in keeping with the “Deposit of Faith” as revealed in Christ and established by the church.

The second criterion is also intrinsic and applies to the *recipients* themselves.¹²⁴ Since divine inspiration is received through human filters, the physiology, psychology and spiritual life of the recipient must be taken into account. Although not prerequisites to revelation, the dynamics of humility, obedience and strength arising from the experience or of the person are often an indicator of its divine nature. Hypersensitivity and excessive impressionability may have a negative impact. Rahner specifically mentions how piety, personal honesty and integrity of the person adds to the legitimacy of a message, while at the same time acknowledging that this is not always a protection against error.¹²⁵

The third criterion is “extrinsic” since it is observable (to some degree) by others. It relates to the *effects* of revelation. These include “edifying fruits” in the community (Matt 7:15-16) and the presence of miraculous signs. Signs are important since they are considered to be the only absolute

¹¹⁹ Ibid., 289.

¹²⁰ Rahner, *Visions and Prophecies*, 7.

¹²¹ Benedict Zimmerman, “Introduction to The Interior Castle or The Mansions,” 1905, <http://www.ccel.org/ccel/teresa/castle2.iii.html> [accessed Dec 21, 2019].

¹²² Gee, *Concerning Spiritual Gifts*, 47.

¹²³ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 287-288.

¹²⁴ Ibid., 289-293.

¹²⁵ Rahner, *Visions and Prophecies*, 76.

and tangible way of establishing objectivity.¹²⁶ Rahner states, “so long as a particular apparition can be explained in natural terms according to a reasonably probable, though hypothetical, general theory of visions, its supernatural character cannot be considered to have been established.”¹²⁷ Additionally, Teresa of Avila suggests authenticity to be measured by the distinctive and memorable nature of the experience. The message is frequently different from what an individual knows or expects to hear and there is a sense that it comes from outside the imagination rather than within it.¹²⁸

Ultimately, the Catholic perspective points to the fruits or impact of an experience. Rahner acknowledges that even where prophetic experiences appear to be miraculous in some way, they must have a “religious impact” for them to be recognised as divine.¹²⁹ Likewise, Teresa of Avila suggests that an authentic revelatory experience always leads to greater self-abasement and less self-interest. This is in contrast to diabolically inspired experiences: “In a manner I cannot explain, these communications, without any further explanations, frequently give us to understand far more than is implied by the words themselves. But Satan could never counterfeit the effects I spoke of; he leaves neither peace nor light in the soul, only anxiety and confusion.”¹³⁰

Responsibility for Discernment

Hvidt emphasises the role of *all* members in the church in the process of discernment. Individuals carry responsibility to judge their own experiences, while ultimate responsibility lays with the church hierarchy.¹³¹ Church leadership becomes directly involved *only* when a private revelation is applied to a wider range of people or when “sufficient numbers of believers show interest in it.”¹³² This is due to the potential for greater hazards. Initially, responsibility lies with the local bishop in the geographic area where the prophetic message is being conveyed.

Regarding the revelatory experiences of individuals, Rahner advocates that the “burden of proof” always lies with the one who affirms the thesis (i.e. the recipient), since outsiders cannot observe the workings of an inner mystical experience. However, the community is still involved in the application of external criteria.¹³³ For St. Teresa, all experiences must be shared with a confessor and one should

¹²⁶ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 293; Rahner, *Visions and Prophecies*, 12.

¹²⁷ Rahner, *Visions and Prophecies*, 82.

¹²⁸ Teresa, *Interior Castle*, Sixth Mansions, Ch.III.

¹²⁹ Rahner, *Visions and Prophecies*, 91.

¹³⁰ Teresa, *Interior Castle*, Sixth Mansions, Ch. III, 24. 25.

¹³¹ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 299.

¹³² Rahner, *Visions and Prophecies*, 17.

¹³³ *Ibid.*, 12, 80.

never go against the confessor's judgement. The confessor should be "highly spiritual" and theologically astute. Ultimately all revelations must be subject to Scripture and church authorities.¹³⁴

8.5.2 Rescripting Ordinary Theology

Having outlined the Catholic approach to discernment through the work of Hvidt, the testimonial data will be rescripted according to three aspects: epistemological reliability, discernment criteria and responsibility for discernment.

8.5.2.1 The Epistemological Reliability of Experience

In line with Hvidt's observations, respondents in the study reported a wide variation in clarity of their experiences, while at the same time revealing a general confidence about their epistemological reliability (Ch. 5.1.5.1). This confidence was evidenced in the easy use of language "God said." Although it is impossible to define the percentage of human/divine mix as Hvidt notes, it is also too simplistic to suggest that contemporary experiences are *always* more human than divine. Hence the ordinary theology of Pentecostals falls into line with Hvidt's perspective and contrasts markedly with the viewpoint of Grudem where prophetic experience as a "report in human words" never has the potential to be accurate or conclusive.

While there are no Pentecostal studies that specifically address perceptions of accuracy in the broader revelatory experience, there is consensus that contemporary *prophecy* consists of a mix of divine inspiration and human participation, even while the degree of each cannot be clearly marked. Muindi describes prophecy as *neither* "purely divine nor purely anthropological," but rather, "an immediacy of divine will and speech transpositionally expressed through human liberty and language."¹³⁵ Lum's position aligns more closely with Grudem in that prophecy is "almost always" expressed in words selected by the messenger rather than by God.¹³⁶

In the study, a large number of respondents reported that experiences came in clear and precise wording that was distinguishable by the "otherness" of the voice. Like St. Teresa, respondents reported that at times the experience was recognisably divine because "it was not my words" (A10, A8), "I don't speak like that" (B9, C6), and "at first I didn't know what it meant." (B1). Certainly, messages were deemed clear enough to be acted upon. Respondents rationalised the epistemological

¹³⁴ Teresa, *Interior Castle*, Sixth Mansion, Ch. VIII, 10.

¹³⁵ Muindi, *Pentecostal-Charismatic Prophecy*, 225.

¹³⁶ Lum, 185.

reliability of their encounters by correlating them with biblical characters Ezekiel, Paul and Peter (AP22, A4).

At the same time, respondents reported experiences that revealed lower levels of clarity and required a longer time to discern. Not all experiences were accepted as legitimate and there were times when the fullness of meaning was still not apparent to participants at the time of interview. As noted by scholars, Pentecostals readily acknowledge the room for error caused by human influence and the subsequent need for testing.¹³⁷ At the same time, accuracy could improve with maturity and practice. Cartledge has noted the growing popularity of “levels” of prophecy and its corresponding idea of development.¹³⁸ For recipients, the dissemination of the Spirit to all meant some were specialists (often designated as “prophets”) and some were beginners.

This concept of levels in clarity reflects the biblical experience. The common call for testing indicates the mixed nature of revelatory experience under both the Old Covenant and the New.¹³⁹ It is clear that biblical characters were capable of both accurate *and* flawed inspiration (e.g. Acts 14:11; 13-15; Mt 16:23). Miller has noted the distinctly human elements in the interpretation of revelatory messages in his Luke-Acts study. Sometimes the message was straightforward and clear, while in others, recipients struggled to interpret the meaning.¹⁴⁰ Newton argues for a “gradation of prophecy in terms of quality in the New Testament as may be observed in the Old Testament, with apostolic prophecy and Revelation at the pinnacle, false prophecy at the other end and some fairly ordinary material in between.”¹⁴¹ Similarly, Keener concludes that prophetic wording was not always precise, but was “close enough” to give the “basic thrust” of the message.¹⁴²

¹³⁷ Albrecht, 230; Poloma, *Main Street Mystics*, 146-7, 165; Luhrmann, 86.

¹³⁸ Cartledge, “Definition and Description,” 90. Luhrmann notes the value of prayer training and cultivation of the “inner senses”, 189. Also, Phil Wilthew *Developing a Prophetic Culture: Building Healthy Churches that Hear Jesus Clearly* (Milton Keynes: Malcolm Down Publishing, 2016), 100; Huggett, 133; Bickle, 101,118; Graham Cooke, *Developing Your Prophetic Gifting* (Tonbridge: Sovereign World, 2003), 17.

¹³⁹ Dt 18:19-22; Jer 28:1-17; 1 Kings 22:22; 2 Chron 18:21. Compare with 2 Pet 2:1; 1 Jn 4:1; 1 Thess 5:20-21; 1 Cor 13:9, 14:29; Rev 2:20. Forbes shows that discernment was an issue in several biblical and early church communities, 240.

¹⁴⁰ Miller, *Convinced*, 91-103. Eg. Lk 2:8-20; Acts 8:26-40; 5:19-21a; 18:9-11; 23:8-11; 27:23-24. Compare with Lk 1:11-22, 26-38, 46-55, 67-69.

¹⁴¹ Jon K. Newton, “The Scope of Christian Prophecy,” *Australasian Pentecostal Studies* 13 (2010): 65.

¹⁴² Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: 3:1-14:28*, Vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Press, 2013), 3081-3107.

Even though revelatory experience was understood to include varying levels of human influence, the majority of study respondents still believed it was possible to “get it right.” Newton explains that this reflects a Christian view that “displays a confidence that there is an objective physical and spiritual reality and that real knowledge of this reality is possible through (or on the basis of) revelation, partially and selectively now, but more fully and completely in the eschaton.”¹⁴³ In line with Hvidt’s conclusion that it is impossible to accurately discern the divine-human mix, AP21 described the interaction between human imagination and divine thoughts as a “very fine line.” However, it “didn’t matter” where that line fell since “God transforms us to think the thoughts of the Spirit and have the ‘mind of Christ.’”

At the same time, this approach towards epistemological reliability in the study may verge on overconfidence, and participants may have been too eager to attribute their experiences to God without reference to a process of testing. Clearly, there is a tension between the concept of open access to Spirit experience and the need for epistemic humility. Parker warns that because revelation does not always discount ambiguity, Pentecostal attempts at avoiding mystery are misguided.¹⁴⁴ It is theologically and pastorally astute to acknowledge the possibility of accuracy *and* error.

8.5.2.2 Discernment Criteria

The data revealed several criteria for discernment in the study (Ch. 5.1.5.2), including Scripture, God’s character, emotional impact, “otherness” of the voice, secondary revelatory experiences and the agreement of friends, family and leaders. Although different in emphases and categorisation, these criteria correspond well with the Catholic tradition. Here, rescription is undertaken according to three themes: Scripture and God’s character and personhood, the role of the community and the substantiation of previously unknown information.

Scripture and God’s Character and Personhood

The most common response regarding the discernment criteria for God’s voice in the study was “Scripture,” with occasional references to the Pauline measures of “encouragement, edification and comfort” (1 Cor 14:3). This is consistent with wider P-C understandings that emphasise the criterion of biblical fidelity above all others¹⁴⁵ as well as the Pauline criteria.¹⁴⁶ Messages are deemed to be

¹⁴³ Jon. K. Newton, *Revelation Worldview* (Eugene: Wipf and Stock, 2015), 195.

¹⁴⁴ Ibid., 174.

¹⁴⁵ Lum, 212.

¹⁴⁶ Fourie, 37-39; Cartledge, “Definition and Description,” 88; Lum, Location 3679; Muindi, *Pentecostal-Charismatic Prophecy*, 257; Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, Location 1381-1406, 2572.

divine when they edify the church and/or the individual in some way. To a degree, these measures align to the first criterion of the Catholic tradition – that of revelatory *content* – which must be consistent with Christ and apostolic teaching (Ch. 8.2.1).

However, as P-C scholars have recognised, the Scriptures as a whole and the Pauline criteria in particular, are limited in their ability to judge extra-biblical experiences.¹⁴⁷ This was the case in the study, where Scripture was unable to directly address many of the scenarios, particularly those that involved predictive and directive elements (eg. where to plant a church (AP21), who to marry (A9) or where to go on mission (C5)). In these cases, “Scripture” was understood to be the reference point for knowledge of “God’s character.” Hence, when used as a criterion for discernment, Scripture was not used indiscriminately – God’s character was explained by references to qualities that were consistent with *Christocentric* understandings rather than Old Testament depictions of God as in Luhrmann’s American study.¹⁴⁸ For example, respondents rejected the idea that God would tell them to sacrifice their child (Gen 22:1-2) or commit genocide (Dt 7:1-2). As AF6 describes it, the “hallmarks of hearing are not just the words of God – but the heart of God the father, like feeling the love of God first.” Thus, messages should be discerned “not out of the paradigm of the Old Testament, but through grace and the cross.”

This dynamic highlights the need to *qualify* Scripture as the standard for discernment. Here, Hvidt’s criterion of consistency with the material revelation of God in Christ is helpful, whereby “God’s character” becomes equated to the person and teachings of Jesus (Col 1:15). A number of Pentecostal scholars support a narrower criterion for discernment, including Fourie¹⁴⁹ and Keener.¹⁵⁰ Robeck highlights the standard of Jesus’ teaching and the *regula fidei* or “Rule of Faith.”¹⁵¹ In the church’s discernment of the Apocalypse, David Johnson emphasises “Truth” as personified in the character and story of Jesus (Jn 14:6).¹⁵²

This Christocentric criterion forces a distinction with *pre-Christ* experiences in Scripture. When Old Testament narratives were used in the study for discernment (e.g. Ezekiel and Daniel), participants

¹⁴⁷ Fourie, 41-42; Thomas, “Women,” 46.

¹⁴⁸ Luhrmann, 64.

¹⁴⁹ Fourie, 36-37.

¹⁵⁰ Keener, *Gift Giver*, 41.

¹⁵¹ Robeck, “Canon, Regulae Fidei,” 70, 74, 80.

¹⁵² David R. Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment in the Apocalypse* (Cleveland: CPT, 2018), 353-354; also, Clark H. Pinnock, *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: Intervarsity, 1996), 209-10.

instinctively applied a Christocentric hermeneutic. Although Hvidt is clear that pre-Christ experiences are “less perfect than the Incarnation,” he does not elaborate on the implications of this for revelatory experience.¹⁵³ Though the Old Testament narratives “originate from the same mystery” and form an essential part of the Christ-story, New Testament teaching also reveals them to be a “shadow” of God’s perfection in Christ (Col 2:17; Heb 8:5).¹⁵⁴ The practice of discernment highlights the issue: if Pentecostals were to use Old Testament experiences to discern their own, the text could be used to justify scenarios such as genocide (Deuteronomy 7), marriage to a prostitute (Hosea 1) or divorce on the basis of race (Ezra 10). This use of Christocentric framework for discernment further calls into question the Old Testament mindset of African Pentecostals observed by Gunda and Masenya (Ch. 4.1.2). The revelation of Christ in his incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection has been identified as an important reason for the improved status of New Covenant revelatory experience (Jn 16:7; 2 Cor 3:7-18).¹⁵⁵ Andrew Root describes the ministry of the Spirit as “Christopraxis” and not “Trinitarian-praxis or something else” because “Jesus is the hermeneutic of God’s ministry, and as the hermeneutic of God’s ministry Jesus is the hermeneutic of God’s very being.”¹⁵⁶ Without a Christocentric hermeneutic, the application of Old Covenant experience to the discernment of contemporary experience is problematic.

Furthermore, the criterion of “God’s character” as personified in Christ may extend beyond the *content* of revelatory messages. In the study, discernment was facilitated by a connection with the *person* in the context of a relationship that carried its own unique history and pattern. Discernment therefore became *relational*, whereby recognition of the divine voice arose not so much from the knowledge of the biblical text as from the knowledge of a living person. Experiences were discerned not just in *what* “God said” but in *how* it was said including its familiar tone and vocabulary (A8). As A4 describes it:

It's more about knowing him as a person. The more I hear him talk to me about who I am and what I've done. But aside from that, he's giving me a revelatory vocabulary. It's like I've now got my own little dictionary of various visions and words and things that I can go from and use with people. The vocabulary comes from experience and from my own intimate times with Jesus.

¹⁵³ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 217.

¹⁵⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵⁵ Keener, *Gift Giver*, 41.

¹⁵⁶ Root, 101.

Thus, the discernment process could be better described as personal and experiential rather than intellectual and theoretical. Lee recognises this dynamic in his study of Aimee Semple McPherson's Foursquare teaching. He emphasises the "Word of God" as the ultimate and principal criterion for discernment, but then asks the question of *what* the Word of God is. He shows that McPherson uses two meanings – the person of Jesus Christ *and* the Scriptures – sometimes separating them in a Barthian way and sometimes conflating them.¹⁵⁷ Lee shows that the implication of their distinction is significant. It requires that the Bible *alone* cannot be the ultimate assessing criterion of prophecy since "strictly speaking, the Bible is *not* the Word of God, Jesus Christ, but rather a witness to him,"¹⁵⁸ an approach that is consistent with the insights of Smith.¹⁵⁹

The relational and embodied approach to discernment contrasts with Lum's conclusions that enhanced discernment requires a greater knowledge of the Bible.¹⁶⁰ While the Scriptures remain the ultimate testament to the Gospel and a basic knowledge of the Gospel is clearly required, the emphasis on relationship with a person over expertise with the biblical text makes the discernment process accessible to all, irrespective of hermeneutical skills. As noted by Schniedewind and Walton and Sandy, access to written texts has and continues to be the privilege of the literate elite.¹⁶¹ The tendency towards relational discernment may therefore preserve the democratic nature of the revelatory experience and allow access to those who have only a base knowledge of the Gospel.

The nature of discernment as embodied and personal also points to the *incarnational* and *wholistic* nature of revelatory experience highlighted by Kraft. As the embodiment of God's Word, the life and teachings of Jesus act as a model or template for the discernment of ongoing revelation. This template is wholistic and three-dimensional, providing a vivid and demonstrable guide for discernment, based not just on what Jesus *said* and what he *did*, but how he made people *feel*. Several respondents noted the affective dynamic in the discernment process, discerning the divine voice by its emotional impact (eg. A8, C5, C12). Affections such as joy, hope and empowerment in the experience were associated with the character of God over diabolic sources. A personalised, experiential approach incorporates the multi-faceted nature of revelatory experience, reflects the incarnation and validates affections as a legitimate part of the process.

¹⁵⁷ Lee, 164-166; also, Land, 74.

¹⁵⁸ Lee, 166.

¹⁵⁹ Ch. 6.2.3

¹⁶⁰ Lum, 214.

¹⁶¹ Schniedewind, *How the Bible*, 14; Walton and Sandy, 83, 119.

The Role of the Community

Two criteria in the study involved the community in discernment: the counsel of friends, family and leaders and “secondary revelatory experiences” delivered as prophecy (Ch. 5.1.5.2). The value of this community involvement was seen in providing a “second opinion.” This can be correlated with Hvidt’s second intrinsic criterion for discernment, which includes the physiology, psychology and spiritual life of the recipient since the involvement of the community enabled a filtering out of the human factors embedded in the experience.

In the study, respondents were aware that internal factors such as personal desires and mindsets obstructed the flow or revelation (A7, A19, A6, C3, C5, A17, B6). The training course in Church A included teaching on neuroplasticity so members could learn “how to recognise their soul stuff” for the purpose of improving discernment. AP21 explains: “The soul is like a filter system and God is the hot water in the tea. The strainer is the soul and it filters right through – sometimes you’ve got to look at what’s left behind.” The significance of these influences became even more apparent in cases where individuals were mentally or physically unwell. Like Hvidt, Parker has noted the psychological dimension of discernment and highlights the importance of spiritual maturity in the evaluation process.¹⁶² In his study, respondents assessed their experiences via a “feeling of rightness” and a sense of things feeling “harmonious and coherent.”¹⁶³ However “feelings of rightness” are vulnerable to spiritual and psychological immaturity. Parker points to the failure to attend to reason in the discernment process with the result that Spirit experience has led to the sanctioning of much abuse including “selfish desires, power struggles, spiritual elitism and emotional escapism.”¹⁶⁴ Like other Pentecostal scholars, he points to the importance of the community to address these issues.¹⁶⁵

The testimonies in the study revealed *how* the community operates to filter out the intrinsic factors embedded in Hvidt’s second criterion. This role was not demonstrated in a type of consultation process whereby revelation was tested against popular opinion (such an approach was seen to be unhelpful and even antagonistic to discernment (B13).) Instead, the “community” was effective when it allowed for the input of those who were in proximal relationship with the person and were able to provide a more objective perspective against the backdrop of the person’s weaknesses, personality traits and history. It was when this community was not consulted that discernment most often “failed,” as individuals were unable to separate experiences from their own desires and feelings

¹⁶² Parker, 198.

¹⁶³ Ibid., 109.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 199.

¹⁶⁵ Fourie, 36; Thomas, “Women,” 55; Wenk, “Creative Power,” 126-128; Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 156-190; Clark, 235.

(AP21, B12, C5). This dynamic required an openness to discussion and degree of personal vulnerability on behalf of the recipient (eg. C3) as noted in the sociological analysis (6.2.2.2). Similarly, Parker notes the need to *talk about* their experiences so that both the positive and negative elements of experience may be elevated to a more conscious level.¹⁶⁶

Secondly, the community functioned to provide a vehicle for secondary revelatory experiences generally expressed as prophecy (A4, C7, AF5, AF6, B5, A7). Keener calls this phenomenon “paired visions” whereby two parties receive complementary messages independently of each other.¹⁶⁷ This phenomenon which is absent in Hvidt’s work, required verification of revelatory messages through another party. In the study, participants reported confidence in their experience after “hearing” the same message from two independent sources.

The Substantiation of Previously Unknown Information

A discernment criterion that was evident in the Pentecostal testimonies was the verification of previously unknown information (Ch. 5.1.5.2). Individuals became assured of the authenticity of their experience when predictive messages came to pass or an element of their experience was later confirmed in real life such as a previously unseen building, location or person (eg. A16, AP21, C4, A6, A14, C8). This correlates well with Hvidt’s third extrinsic criterion, involving the *fruit* of the experience including miraculous signs. The substantiation of new information provided a tangible and external way of confirming the supernatural element embedded in the experience.

At the same time, the criterion of “signs” was not a strong one in the ordinary theology of participations. This is consistent with Muindi’s study, where confirmation came from physical sensations that accompanied the delivery of prophecy rather than “miracles.”¹⁶⁸ This may also be due in part to a general negativity towards signs or “fleeces” as evidence of doubt (referencing Gideon’s doubt in Judges 6,7). In contrast, signs appear frequently in the New Testament material as an important criterion for discernment. Keener and Johnson show that “signs and wonders” act as a compelling criterion for confirming divine activity in Luke-Acts (eg. Acts 10:44-46; 15:12).¹⁶⁹ Similarly, Newton notes their wide appeal in the epistles (eg. 1 Cor 14:22-25; 2 Cor 12:12; Heb

¹⁶⁶ Parker, 193.

¹⁶⁷ e.g. Lk 1:39-56; Acts 9:17-18; 10:17-44, Craig S. Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary: 24:1-28:31*, Vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic Press, 2015), 1639.

¹⁶⁸ Muindi, “Nature and Significance,” 139.

¹⁶⁹ Acts 2:19, 22, 43; 5:12; 6:8; 7:36; 14:3, Keener, *Acts* Vol. 1, 542; Luke Timothy Johnson, *Decision Making in the Church: A Biblical Model* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 82.

2:4).¹⁷⁰ He defines signs as an “element of the extraordinary” or at least, “an extraordinary depth of insight” about the revelation.¹⁷¹ At the same time, signs can be falsified and the use of signs is moderated by clear warnings regarding their potential for deception.¹⁷²

It may be that the Catholics require a higher bar than Pentecostals, who are more likely to associate supernatural “signs” with minor physical sensations. It may also be the case that respondents were reporting “lower levels” of experience, requiring less signs to confirm them than in the Catholic understanding. One pastor explained that greater supernatural signs were necessary where greater acts of faith were called for (AP21).

At the same time, it has been noted that Pentecostals may be too eager to claim divine origins for their experiences (8.5.2.1). In the study, coincidences and fortuitous happenings were easily assigned divine origins without any reference to the presence of signs as demonstrated in the biblical narratives. The Catholic emphasis on the more verifiable criterion of signs may help to curb this overconfidence.

8.5.2.3 Responsibility for Discernment

The data revealed that individuals saw themselves as responsible for the discernment of their own experiences (Ch.5.1.5.3). In the vast majority of cases, church leadership was not consulted, nor was this seen to be necessary. The few exceptions were in situations where the revelatory message was unusual or when individuals were in direct personal relationship with senior leaders (A5, C5, A12).

This attribution of individual responsibility for discernment is consistent with the Catholic tradition. Rahner maintains that the onus is on the recipient of the revelation to discern their own experience. However, this conflicts with the normative and formal theology of Pentecostals, who tend to place leadership at the centre of the process. Although the issue of discernment for private revelations is rarely addressed in the Pentecostal academy, personal prophecy is often discouraged *because* leadership cannot be present.¹⁷³ The literature typically centres on public prophecy and the Corinthian instructions that “Two or three prophets should speak, and the others should weigh carefully what is said” (1 Cor 14:29). Debates exist over who constitutes the “others” in this case – designated prophets, those with gifts of discernment, the senior leader or the assembly as a whole – however,

¹⁷⁰ Newton, *Revelation Worldview*, 179.

¹⁷¹ Ibid., 194.

¹⁷² Dt 13:1-3; Exod 7:8-12; Mt 7:22, 23; 24:24; 2 Thess 2:9-11; Rev 13:13-15; Johnson, *Pneumatic Discernment*, 359-60.

¹⁷³ Lum, 225; Gentile, 336-38. Also, popular authors; Cooke, 90; Jacobs, 160-161.

consensus seems to indicate that responsibility rests with all believers (even though the process for this is unclear).¹⁷⁴

While the epistles remain somewhat ambiguous regarding the process of discernment for public prophecy, the Acts narratives provide clear demonstrations for the broader revelatory experience. Where experience pertains only to the individual, responsibility for discernment appears to lie with the recipient, as in the case of Paul's decision to go to Jerusalem even when the experiences of others were involved (Acts 20:22-24; cf Acts 21:4 and Acts 21:10-14). However, when private experiences concerned a wider audience, as in the case of Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10), discernment was mediated by a higher level of church leadership via the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15).

The Catholic tradition provides a framework that reflects the pattern of the biblical narratives and in particular the Gentile story. Although this narrative is becoming more common as a framework for discernment by Pentecostals (particularly in the area of hermeneutics),¹⁷⁵ the model was absent in the ordinary theology of those in the sample who were more familiar with the principles of 1 Cor 14:3. It is interesting that the narratives have acted as a model for respondents in the hearing and response phases of experience (See Ch. 7.1.3), but not in the discernment process. In the Catholic tradition, responsibility for discernment depends on the *scope* of revelation. Hvidt describes the process which dates back to the Middle Ages and involves ecclesial investigations by a special commission and a "pastoral letter" from the Pope.¹⁷⁶ The whole procedure is termed a "canonical process" and is seen to reflect the workings of the Jerusalem Council. In such cases, church pronouncements are neither infallible or binding on the church: they act as either "permission to believe that God has spoken" or strong "advice" that can be rejected. As Hvidt notes, these processes take time and a "cautious openness." They are also relatively uncommon.¹⁷⁷

The process of discernment of contemporary experience may be aligned with the canonisation of Scripture itself. Both Fourie and Goldingay have made this connection, with the only difference being the amount of time involved.¹⁷⁸ Canonisation was essentially a discernment process by the community

¹⁷⁴ Forbes, 265-269; Newton highlights the additional input of experienced prophets and those recognised as operating in the discernment of spirits, "Holding Prophets Accountable," 69.

¹⁷⁵ Thomas, "Women," Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 156-190; Arrington, "Use of the Bible," 101-7; Wenk, "Creative Power," 126; Clark, 235. Also, William W. Klein, Craig L. Blomberg, Robert L. Hubbard Jr., *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2004), 202-206.

¹⁷⁶ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 294, 299.

¹⁷⁷ Rahner, *Visions and Prophecies*, 89.

¹⁷⁸ Fourie, 47; Goldingay, *Models*, 339.

of faith according to a number of criteria, including consistency with the Gospel and apostolic teaching.¹⁷⁹ As is the case in contemporary experience, this was not a clear “cut and dried” process without controversy.¹⁸⁰ Today, the Scriptures are deemed to be true and reliable testament to divine revelation *because* they were subjected to Christocentric discernment at several church councils. In Keener’s words, they have “passed the test.”¹⁸¹ This process emulates discernment in the early church and is equally applicable in contemporary settings.

8.5.3 Summary

The phenomenological equivalent approach of the Pentecostals in the sample mean that contemporary experiences carry the possibility of epistemological reliability. However careful discernment is still required to filter out diabolical voices and the voice of self. This process may take time and is seen to improve with experience. The primary criterion for discernment is the person of Christ – contemporary revelation is consistent not only with his teachings, but with his personhood. Where contemporary revelatory experiences contain extra-biblical, future-oriented and previously unknown content, “Scripture” is a limited measure for discernment. Although Scripture provides the general basis for revelatory content as testament to Christ and the Gospel, greater input from the community is required to filter out psychological and physiological obstacles and to assess the meaning of signs. This pattern for discernment is modelled on the New Testament church experience, whereby responsibility for discernment lies with the intended audience of the revelation. Specifically, the Gentile narrative in Acts provides the pattern, revealing an interplay between Christocentric content, the input of the community and supernatural signs (Acts 15:28).

8.6 RESPONDING TO GOD’S VOICE

In this section, I examine the final response phase of revelatory experience, beginning with Hvidt’s work in the Catholic tradition. This is followed by a rescription of the ordinary theology in the sample.

¹⁷⁹ Guy P. Duffield and Nathaniel M. Van Cleave describe five criteria: apostolicity, spiritual content, doctrinal soundness, usage in the churches and divine inspiration, *Foundations of Pentecostal Theology* (Los Angeles: L.I.F.E. Bible College, 1987), 15.

¹⁸⁰ Allert, 50-51.

¹⁸¹ Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics*, 107.

8.6.1 Experience as Divine Imperative

Hvidt shows that the Catholic tradition views true revelatory experiences as “divine imperatives” for the faithful.¹⁸² Revelatory messages are authoritative for the intended audience and show how Christianity should act in a concrete historical situation. Once judged to be from God, the anticipated response is faithful obedience. Refusal to obey indicates a lack of submission to God and is considered a grave sin.¹⁸³ Volken shows how this approach reflects the pattern of the narratives, which point to the consequences of refusing to respond appropriately to revelations (e.g. Mk 16:14; Lk 1:20).

At the same time, the authoritative nature of revelatory experiences does not limit human freedom or remove individual responsibility in decision making.¹⁸⁴ As Rahner states, experiences should not be used as “a device for cleverly avoiding the difficult passages of history” and securing “a safe and comfortable life.”¹⁸⁵ He explicitly warns against the “craving of prophecies” in order to escape the burden of decision-making.

Further, revelatory experience is understood to be ontologically imbued with power, bringing expectations for manifestation and fulfilment of divine intentions in the individual’s life. St Teresa taught that, once tested and discerned, it is *right* to trust revelatory messages. They are “operative” and carry authority over the circumstances to which they refer.¹⁸⁶ Hvidt cites Volken in arguing against the separation of private revelations in Scripture as *infallible* from non-biblical revelations – the truth of particular revelations is “established through their object, aim and recipient, not by the fact that they are not in the Bible.”¹⁸⁷ At the same time, Hvidt shows that most future-oriented experiences are conditional upon human response for their fulfilment.¹⁸⁸

8.6.2 Rescripting Ordinary Theology

Responses to revelatory experience reveal understandings of the authority of revelatory experience. This dynamic has already been explored with respect to the location of authority (Ch. 7.2.2.1) and its impact on the epistemological process (Ch. 7.3.2.3). In this section, the data is rescripted in dialogue

¹⁸² Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 178-9; also Rahner, *Visions and Prophecies*, 23,26.

¹⁸³ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 144.

¹⁸⁴ Volken, 264.

¹⁸⁵ Rahner, *Visions and Prophecies*, 105.

¹⁸⁶ Teresa, *Interior Castle*, Sixth Mansions, Ch. III, 7,15.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 25.

¹⁸⁸ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 182.

with Hvidt's theological perspectives. Two themes from the testimonial data are pertinent: the response of obedience and the interaction between divine fulfilment and human free will.

8.6.2.1 The Response of Obedience

As noted, respondents viewed their experiences as authoritative requiring the response of obedience (Ch. 5.1.6.1). The authority of the experience was pragmatic and often called for changes in behaviour. Further, the divine voice was seen to override the authority of any other human voice – including that of church leaders (BP16) and marriage partners (AP22). Again, the narratives acted as models for appropriate behaviour. Respondents' based their responses on the biblical characters who actively submitted to the voice of the Spirit (B3). The corollary was also true – direct correlations were made with characters like Jonah and Sarah who disobeyed the revealed word of God (A4, A15).

The ordinary theology of respondents in the study regarding the response to revelatory experience is in close alignment with the Catholic perspective that sees genuine experience as divine imperatives. It is also in keeping with the pattern of the biblical material, particularly Acts (eg. Acts 5:20; 10:13-20, 20:22-23; 21:4-14).¹⁸⁹ It does however contrast with the phenomenologically inferior approach of P-C voices (both formal and normative). For Grudem, contemporary revelatory experiences are *never* held to be divinely authoritative and carry minimal authority on a par with pastoral activities like counselling.¹⁹⁰ He explains;

In practical terms, this means that even if a prophecy contains words of ethical instruction (for example, "You should leave your job..."), these instructions should not be considered divine obligations (i.e. to disobey them would not be thought the same as disobeying God), but they should be viewed as the prophet's own fairly accurate (but not infallible) report of something he thinks (though not with absolute certainty) has been revealed to him by God.¹⁹¹

The perspective of minimal authority for contemporary experience has been observed in some Pentecostal studies, including Lum's in Singapore where it carried an even lower authority than

¹⁸⁹ John Miller, "Dreams/Visions and the Experience of God in Luke-Acts," Eds. Frances Flannery, Colleen Shantz, and Rodney Alan Werline. Vol. 1. *Experientia, Inquiry into Religious Experience in Early Judaism and Early Christianity* (Atlanta: SBL, 2008), 180; Forbes, 221; Keener, *Acts* Vol. 1, 1546; Newton, *Revelation Worldview*, 181.

¹⁹⁰ Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, Location 2448. See also Bridge, 202-204.

¹⁹¹ Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, Location 1576.

pastoral leadership.¹⁹² Similarly, Cartledge observes that prophetic experience among Anglicans was not viewed on the same level of authority as in Scripture as for Catholics in the USA.”¹⁹³ However, these studies do not explore practical outworking of this position in respondents’ lives. The question of how the principles of the biblical narratives are to be applied (if not to follow the same pattern) must be asked.

8.6.2.2 The Interaction between Divine Fulfilment and Human Free Will

In the study, the perspective of divine authority in revelatory experience related not only to respondents’ behaviour, but to the circumstances addressed by the message – God was expected to fulfil his promises in a tangible way (Ch. 5.1.6.2). This approach reflects the perspective of the biblical characters who saw divine messages as trustworthy because they reflected the integrity of God’s character and power.¹⁹⁴

At the same time, respondents were aware that revelatory messages did not always equate to divine fulfilment. Active co-operation was required to see the vision come to pass. This also reflects the pattern of Scripture where the majority of prophetic statements were *conditional* upon the response of faith and obedience of their audience (eg. Jer 18:1-10), whether the conditions were explicitly stated or not.¹⁹⁵ Baulkham shows that “the predictive element in biblical prophecy is not fatalistic. It leaves room for human freedom, for human response to God’s will and human participation in his purpose for the world.”¹⁹⁶

The ordinary theology of those in the study is thus in alignment with the Catholic approach which sees revelatory experience as ontologically imbued with power, but is in contrast with the P-C position whereby contemporary prophetic experience does not carry the same authority to impact circumstances as it does in the Scriptures. For Grudem and others, the revelatory messages in

¹⁹² Lum, 222.

¹⁹³ Cartledge, “Charismatic Prophecy and New Testament Prophecy,” 86.

¹⁹⁴ Num 23:19, Is 46:10, Is 55:11; Jer 1:12; Am 1:2, Hab 2:3; Ac 27:22-25; Rev 22:6,7. Goldingay, *Models*, 209, 211-213.

¹⁹⁵ Robert Chisholm, “When Prophecy Appears to Fail, Check Your Hermeneutic,” *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 53, no. 3 (September 2010): 561-563; Keener, *Acts* Vol. 1, 1546, 3081; Newton, *Scope*, 70; Newton, “Holding Prophets Accountable,” 70-71.

¹⁹⁶ Richard Bauckham, *The Theology of the Book of Revelation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 149; Also, Newton, “Holding Prophets Accountable,” 71-2.

Scripture are considered “infallible,” while those outside it are not.¹⁹⁷ However, this position of “infallibility” for biblical revelatory experience belies the interaction between divine intentions and human free will that is clearly evidenced *in* the text. Indeed, this has always been the problem when as the “test of fulfilment,” the manifestation of predicted outcomes is the main criterion for divine origins.¹⁹⁸

The Catholic approach provides a framework that reflects the interaction between divine authority and human free will in the biblical narratives. Hvidt highlights the difference between a Hellenistic worldview which was predominantly fatalistic and meant that prophetic experience was fixated on discovering the gods’ predetermined future through divination and the like¹⁹⁹ and the Eastern-Semitic prophetic tradition that was more centred on the development of a relationship, where divine revelation was spontaneous and unsolicited.²⁰⁰ It is this latter perspective that was evidenced in the data, with respondents generally viewing future-oriented scenes as possibilities rather than the concrete prediction of future realities. God was faithful and could be trusted to perform his word authoritatively in the circumstances of respondents, however, human frailty *could* thwart and shape divine intentions. Thus, foretelling experiences became an invitation for respondents to redirect present activity and play their role in bringing the forecast reality to pass. This understanding is seen in A17’s explanation of the consequences of obedience:

God said, “I want you to move back in with your mum.” “No, no, no! Not listening!” It’s the only time that he really got on my case. Every day for a month!

Eventually, as soon as I said, “Okay I’ll move in with her”, I saw him in a vision. I saw him walk up to a white board – I’m getting teary now – and the sense I got was, these are all the current plans for my future. He wiped them out. Then he said, “You’ve just made the best decision of your life. You’ve got a big future now. It’s going to be very hard and very refining” (and it’s an amen to both of those) – but I moved in with my Mum. And it

¹⁹⁷ Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, Location 4165; Clark, 211; Bridge 1985, 202-204. In popular literature; Damazio, 54-55; Meyer, 39.

¹⁹⁸ Robert P. Carroll examines the failure of Old Covenant prophecy in his study, *When Prophecy Failed: Reactions and Responses to Failure in the Old Testament Traditions* (London: SCM Press, 1979).

¹⁹⁹ This perspective is affirmed by Aune, 23-24 and Newton, *Revelation Worldview*. See also Ben Witherington III who maintains that the problem at Corinth was the tendency to adopt a Greco-Roman rather than Hebrew approach to prophecy, *Jesus the Seer: The Progress of Prophecy* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1999), 316.

²⁰⁰ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 70.

was, because while I was living with her, she received Jesus as Lord and saviour and then I found her in the bathroom when she had a stroke. Otherwise she would have died alone in the bathroom (A17).

However, the interaction between fulfilment and free will was also a source of confusion for some recipients in the study. This was particularly the case when a third party was involved. One interviewee attributed the failure of a prophetic message to a lack of co-operation by another person. A detailed vision of meeting her future husband came to pass as foretold. However, after a time of dating, they broke up. With no hope of reconciliation, A16 reflected on the influence of human will on divine intentions:

A16: At that time, I was really confused. I said, "God you said this, but this is the outcome and it doesn't match."

TH: How did you come to understand what happened?

A16: We have choices. Because God entered into a covenant with humanity – even though God is God, he has limited himself to work with us, even with all our flaws and sins. And God actually needs us. God could have chosen to do everything in his own strength, but he chose not to. He chose to partner with us so that we can show his glory. But when God calls us, it is up to us to respond.

While the understanding of revelatory experience as conditional was present in the study, theological understandings were still being worked out when prophetic promises remained unfulfilled. This may be due in part to a mixture of theological approaches, whereby the P-C understandings of the general “infallibility” of Scripture were applied to the particular “fallibility” of conditional experience. Inconsistency in beliefs about the “authority” and “infallibility” of experiences inside and outside of Scripture became problematic when the “test of fulfilment” was applied. As a number of scholars show, Scripture itself demonstrates that legitimate revelatory experience *may* fail when thwarted by a lack of human co-operation, even while God’s words and character remain infallible.²⁰¹ Goldingay argues that one of the features of Old Testament prophecy is that it was *likely* to fail.²⁰² Indeed a prophetic word may be delivered to change behaviour so that the predicted outcome was *not* fulfilled, such as in the case of Jonah and the destruction of Nineveh (Joel 2:13; Jon 3:4, 9; 4:2). Lum has

²⁰¹ Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed*; Keener, “When Prophecies Don’t Happen”; Chisholm, “When Prophecy Appears.”

²⁰² Goldingay, “Old Testament Prophecy,” 44.

acknowledged the limitations of using fulfilment as the only measure where prophecies relate to future situations.²⁰³

The Catholic position which advocates for consistency for the authority of experience both inside and outside the Scriptures provides a basis for understanding the lack of fulfilment when humans choose not to respond. In such cases, it makes more sense to speak of the *infallibility of God's nature* as expressed in *God's words* rather than the “infallibility” of the *text*. God's faithfulness in speech and action remain even when prophetic fulfilment does not occur (2 Tim 2:13). Such an approach acknowledges the unchangeable nature of God as well as the continuing reality of fallen humanity.

8.6.3 Summary

The ordinary theology of participants at the response phase revealed significant alignment with the Catholic tradition. Pentecostals in the sample drew parallels with the pattern of the biblical characters, who viewed revelatory experience as authoritative and responded in anticipation of divine fulfilment. As in Scripture, the “infallibility” of divine experience was only seen with human co-operation. The use of the biblical narratives as a model would further serve Pentecostals in processing their theological understandings when fulfilment does not occur.

8.7 SUMMARY: THE THEOLOGY AND PRACTICE OF PENTECOSTAL REVELATORY EXPERIENCE

The theology and practice of revelatory experience among Pentecostals in the study largely reflected an approach that assumed phenomenologically equivalency with the biblical experience in direct and literal ways. The correlation between biblical and contemporary settings was evidenced at every facet of the experience. The content of contemporary revelatory experience was seen to be consistent with Scripture which acted as the measure for all experiences. The experience functioned to produce both soteriological and vocational outcomes in keeping with Christ's transforming and prophetic mission, even when this link was not evident in participants' theology.

Regarding the hearing phase of experience, modes of experience were largely unmediated and consisted of voices (auditions both “internal” and “external”), D/Vs and sensory impressions. Unmediated modes were also present and referred to established information as opposed to previously unknown or future-oriented information. In terms of epistemological reliability, respondents assumed no differentiation to canonical experiences. This included the capacity for both accuracy and error and the associated need for learning and development. Discernment was seen to be largely the

²⁰³ Lum, 136.

responsibility of the individual, but required interaction with the community. Pastoral fallout largely occurred when there was a lack of consultation. When adequate discernment processes were employed, contemporary experience did not add or contradict the incarnational message of Christ and apostolic teaching. The central role for Scripture was maintained through the application of a Christocentric hermeneutic for discernment and the use of biblical narratives as models for contemporary practice. Revelatory experience was held to be authoritative over intended recipients and their circumstances, but this did not diminish interaction with human free will in divine fulfilment.

The analysis further revealed that the operant theology of revelatory experiences among Pentecostals in the sample aligns closely with the phenomenologically equivalent perspective of the Catholic tradition rather than with formal or normative theology of their own tradition. This is somewhat surprising given that in practise, the two traditions do not interact with each other. Alignment occurred in several areas, particularly with regard to the hearing and response phase of the experience.

At the same time, the Catholic tradition revealed several theological understandings and processes that were relevant to Pentecostal practice. This was particularly apparent in the discernment process, where a more comprehensive basis for discernment based on the Gentile narrative (Acts 10,15) could prove helpful for Pentecostals who typically relied on the more limited Pauline rubric for prophecy. This model allowed for the filtering out physiological and psychological factors and the use of signs for discernment. The Christocentric hermeneutic may further aid in curbing a tendency towards the meeting of personal needs rather than fulfilling Christ's mission. The Catholic tradition also revealed an epistemic humility that may be advisable for Pentecostals. Finally, the Catholic tradition provided a mechanism for how revelatory experience could be incorporated into the development of doctrine through consultation with extended networks.

9. CONCLUSION

This project has investigated the ordinary theology of revelatory experiences among Australian Pentecostals by means of qualitative methods. It draws on the data to describe the themes and patterns of Pentecostal revelatory experiences in terms of a “script.” This script has been reflected upon and “rescripted” in dialogue with the voices of Scripture, theology and social science. This allows for modification of the script and for ordinary theology to be taken into account in the theological discussion.

In this chapter, the insights gained in the research are integrated into a proposal for theological construction. From there, a bibliology that is consistent with this approach is proposed. This enables the theological and ministry problems of contemporary revelatory experience to be addressed and recommendations to be made for ministry praxis. The chapter concludes with an evaluation and suggestions for further research.

9.1 TOWARDS A THEOLOGY OF PENTECOSTAL REVELATORY EXPERIENCE

This theological framework reflects a phenomenologically equivalent perspective of contemporary revelatory experience that is informed by the ordinary theology of Pentecostals in the sample and the Catholic tradition. It is described here in relation to its basis in Scripture and its content, function and process.

9.1.1 The Basis for Phenomenological Equivalency

The study indicates that the primitivist worldview of the Pentecostals that anticipates biblical experience to be repeatable in contemporary contexts extends to all aspects of the revelatory experience. This perspective emphasises continuity between New Testament and contemporary experience.

The theme of continuity in contemporary experience is framed in understandings about the revelatory experience in the Old and New Covenants. Under the Old Covenant, God communicated his will and intentions to the prophets largely as D/Vs who then “prophesied” them to God’s people (Num 12:6). However, this schema had limitations and a *new* covenant was promised that provided universal access to revelation without the mediation of prophets (Num 11:29; Is 59:19-21; Jer 31:33-34; Joel 2:28). This covenantal shift began at the Incarnation when as the “living Word,” Jesus embodied and perfected divine revelation (Jn 1:1, 14; Heb 1:1-3; Col 1:15). Jesus defined revelatory experience under the New Covenant by its Christocentric purpose, with the Spirit acting as his “continuing voice” in new contexts after his ascension (Jn 16:7).

The New Covenant was fully inaugurated on the Day of Pentecost with the Spirit's outpouring. The ability to receive divine communication in the same phenomenological manner as the Old Covenant prophets was conferred on the assembled believers (Acts 2:16-17) and was extended to subsequent generations (Acts 2:39).¹ Thus the same ability that was once limited to the Old Covenant prophets is now disseminated to *all*. In this way, there is continuity between the revelatory experience of the Old Testament prophets, the living Word demonstrated in Jesus and the voice of the Holy Spirit.

9.1.2 The Content and Function of Revelatory Experience

In this framework, the teachings and actions of Jesus as the embodied Word of God and as expressed by apostolic teaching sets the limits for the content and function of contemporary revelatory experience. Spirit experiences under the New Covenant are best understood in terms of their Christocentric nature. Contemporary revelatory content is envisaged as both "reminders" of the Gospel teachings established by Jesus through his Incarnation (Jn 14:26) (and as reliably recorded in Scripture) and as new and future-oriented revelation whereby gospel realities are applied to new contexts (Jn 16:13-14).

The Christocentric nature of New Covenant revelatory experience locates its function. Ongoing revelation is best understood as being continuous with the ministry and mission of Jesus. The Spirit speaks to impart a knowledge of God that is experiential and relational. As believers respond, the truths of the Gospel are actualised in the personal and particular setting of their life. The Spirit directs the pedagogical process, adopting a learner-centred approach that requires a response of faith and obedience for transformation to occur. In addition, revelatory experiences act to mobilise recipients into Christ's ministry and mission. Hence, the experience fulfils both soteriological and vocational functions in the context of the divine-human relationship.

Private revelatory experiences may have public implications due to the nature of the Body of Christ and its connectedness by the one Spirit. Revelatory experiences may provide an inspired hypothesis for the revision of doctrine and its application to new contexts. Such revelations do not add to or contradict the incarnational message of Christ and apostolic teaching. This process requires corporate

¹ Jon Mark Ruthven, "'This Is My Covenant with Them': Isaiah 59.19-21 as the Programmatic Prophecy of the New Covenant in the Acts of the Apostles (Part I)," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 17 (2008): 32–47; Jon Mark Ruthven, "'This Is My Covenant with Them': Isaiah 59.19-21 as the Programmatic Prophecy of the New Covenant in the Acts of the Apostles (Part 2)," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 17 (2008): 219–37.

reflection across local communities and ecclesial traditions. It also allows revelatory insights to extend beyond the domain of literates, clergy and theologians, since all have the same access to the Spirit's wisdom.

9.1.3 The Process of Revelatory Experience

A phenomenologically equivalent perspective means that the process of revelatory experience correlates with the canonical experience at every phase. While the Incarnation sets the limits for the *content* and *function* of contemporary revelatory experience, the New Testament narratives demonstrate its outworking – ie. how it is heard, recognised and responded to. The inclusion of phenomenological detail in the text means that Pentecostals are able to draw on the practices of the early church to guide their own reflections. The narratives become points of reference because they provide concrete demonstrations of the forms and processes of inspired experiences post-Christ. They also provide plentiful examples of the potential challenges, pitfalls and mistakes. As Clark states, “Luke maintains that Acts records the continuation of the creative activity of the Son of God. If the twentieth century Pentecostal movement considers itself a product of that ongoing activity, then it can learn from the procedures adopted by the original model in the first century.”²

The New Covenant narratives are preferred over Old Testament narratives as models for contemporary experience. This is because New Covenant revelatory experience is an *improvement* on the Old and occurs *in light of* the full revelation of the living Word in Jesus (Jn 16:7; 2 Cor 3:7-18). As “types” and “shadows,” Old Covenant narratives are useful as models for contemporary experience only *when* a Christocentric hermeneutic is applied (Col 2:17; 1 Cor 10:6; Heb 8:5).

Hearing God's Voice

In the “hearing” phase, revelatory messages are received in the same modes as the biblical experience. God communicates in human categories and forms that are familiar with the recipient. Inspired experiences are wholistic and may involve all the senses, and include the unmediated forms of D/Vs, voices and sensory impressions. However, this does not preclude mediated revelatory modes such as Scripture, sermons, teaching materials and nature which tend to involve reflection on known and established Gospel truths (Jn 14:26).

Recognising God's Voice

The discernment phase finds its basis in the Christocentric nature of revelatory messages and the process modelled by New Testament narratives. Discernment begins with the presupposition that

² Clark, 149.

divine messages bear the potential to be epistemologically reliable upon testing. As in the biblical experience, *levels* of quality are possible due to varying degrees of human influence. This position allows for New Covenant experience to *improve* Old Covenant experience, since the advent of Jesus provides a clear standard for discernment, superceding and fulfilling previous revelation (Jn 1, 14; Heb 1:3).³ This position is affirmed by the prophets who looked forward to the revelatory experience under the New Covenant (Num 11:29; Is 59:19-21; Jer 31:33-34), by Jesus who accomplished it (Jn 16:7) and by Paul who experienced it (2 Cor 3:7-18).

All contemporary revelatory experiences are subject to testing (1 Jn 4:1) and this is particularly the case for those containing new and previously unknown revelation. In keeping with the democratic intent of the experience, discernment remains the responsibility of the recipient who is also accountable for its response. However, this process is outworked in community. Here, the intended audience or *scope* of the revelation determines the level of involvement by church leadership in discernment.

Criteria for discernment is first and foremost grounded in the limits set by the Gospel as recorded in Scripture. Contemporary revelatory experiences must not contravene God's complete and perfect revelation demonstrated in the life and teachings of Jesus and expressed in apostolic teaching. Thus, knowledge of the nature and character of God as revealed in Jesus facilitates effective discernment. This criterion not only relates to the content of the experience, but to its impact. The ability to discern effectively develops with an increasing experiential knowledge of God.

The communal aspect of discernment is modelled on the Gentile narrative (Acts 10-15). Private revelatory experience requires discernment in community. The New Covenant reality of universal Spirit-access provides opportunity for confirmation of private experiences via another party. This occurs when two people receive complementary Spirit messages as in the case of Peter and Cornelius (Acts 10:1-8; 9-23) and/or when corporate reflection acts to filter out psychological and physiological influences (Acts 15:28). This process also locates the role of New Covenant prophecy since when all individuals are hearing God for themselves, it becomes easier to discern the experience of a third party (Acts 20:22-24; 21:4, 10-14).

The presence of signs acts as a third criterion for discernment. Signs constitute a tangible affirmation of the revelatory message in miraculous ways. This includes the verification of previously unknown information as well as associated miraculous phenomena (Acts 10:44-48).

³ Keener, *Gift Giver*, 41.

Responding to God's Voice

Once discerned, the contemporary revelatory experience is divinely authoritative. This authority is sourced in God and applies to the intended audience of the experience as well as the circumstances to which the message refers. The authority of the experience is pragmatic and calls for faith and action. Revelatory experience also has performative authority to fulfil divine intentions, however this is conditional upon the response of the recipient.

9.2 THE RELATIONSHIP OF REVELATORY EXPERIENCE TO SCRIPTURE

One of the aims of this thesis is to address the theological problem of contemporary revelatory experience in relationship to Scripture (Ch. 1.4.1). Insights from the study shed light on the practical dynamics of revelatory experience *within* the Scriptures and have implications for the doctrine of Scripture. The study reveals that existing P-C bibliologies are incompatible with Pentecostal practice. This requires an alternate bibliology that reflects phenomenologically equivalent understandings of contemporary experience and includes an expanded role for the community.⁴

9.2.1 Contemporary Revelatory Experience and Existing P-C Bibliologies

The theological analysis of revelatory experience in relation to Scripture as a whole (Ch.7) indicates that phenomenologically equivalent revelatory experiences are incompatible with a bibliology that views canonical experience as uniquely inspired and phenomenologically superior. The adoption of this bibliology by Pentecostals has led to a disconnect between theory and practice. Cessationist Richard Gaffin is correct in saying that it is not possible to hold certain understandings about Scripture while promoting ongoing authoritative revelatory experience.⁵

The position of phenomenological inferiority (encompassing lower levels of authority, fallibility and reliability) in contemporary experience largely finds its basis in beliefs about the inspiration of Scripture. However, the analysis reveals that authentic experiences in Scripture are accurate and reliable, *not* because the manner of their inspiration was “verbally inerrant,” but because they had been tested and discerned by the Spirit-filled community (e.g. Acts 15:28). While, not all P-C scholars hold to this bibliology, no other rationale for an inferior type of contemporary experience has been offered. The problem has arisen because categories such as “verbal inerrancy,” “authority” and “infallibility” have been superimposed *on* the text as a whole rather than being based on the way Scripture describes them

⁴ John McKay has also identified the need for revised doctrines of Scripture to accommodate Pentecostal experience, “When the Veil Is Taken Away: The Impact of Prophetic Experience on Biblical Interpretation,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 5 (1994): 22.

⁵ Gaffin, “Cessationist View,” 46-47.

within the text. Goldingay shows that these categories are a product of Western theology and were triggered by events *outside* of Scripture in church history and secular thought.⁶ Contemporary experience reveals the inappropriateness of these categories.⁷

A better way to uphold the place of Scripture in light of ongoing revelatory experience is to employ the categories demonstrated *in* the Scriptures rather than categories outside of them. The practice of phenomenologically equivalent revelation *requires* that contemporaries use the same theological language and assumptions of the biblical characters. As such, categories such as “authority,” “inerrancy” and “infallibility” must be seen to apply to *God*, with the Scriptures acting as true and reliable *witness* to these realities.

9.2.2 A Bibliology for the Phenomenologically Equivalent Position

It is only with a revised bibliology that the theological problem of relationship to revelatory experience can be addressed. This perspective views the doctrine of Scripture through a pragmatic lens. Here, Scripture retains its formative place as the final and permanent testament to the Christian faith, however, its *uniqueness* is defined by its *content* rather than the manner of its inspiration.⁸ Scripture testifies to the ultimate revelation in Christ’s incarnation and the ongoing Christ reality. It is the foundation of Christ “once for all entrusted to God’s holy people” (Jude 3) on which all contemporary experience builds (1 Cor 3:10-13). This witness is true and reliable because it has itself been tested by the church community as depicted in the Scriptures (Eg. Acts 15) and in the canonisation process.

This position affirms the *sufficiency* of Scripture in providing the conditions of salvation, while also affirming the *importance* of ongoing revelatory experience in applying those truths to new contexts. Such understandings mean that Christ’s pedagogical intent for the Spirit is fulfilled (Jn 16:13) and the narrative patterns of Scripture under the New Covenant can be applied. This ongoing revelatory activity of the Spirit does not weaken the place of Scripture *when* the voice of the Spirit is consistent with the testimony seen and heard in Jesus. Claims to fresh revelation do not mean the canon is being

⁶ Goldingay, *Models*, 5-6.

⁷ This disconnect has been observed by several Pentecostal and Catholic scholars; Grey, *Three’s a Crowd*, 50; Bruce Vawter, *Biblical Inspiration* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1972), 155; Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatological Theology*, 6-9; Goldingay, *Models*, 5; Kraft, 205.

⁸ This is also consistent with the perspective of the church in the early centuries, where numerous documents were described as Spirit *inspired* (“*theopneustos*,” 2 Tim 3:16), yet were not deemed canonical, Allert, 58-65.

added to since the Scriptures are *adequate* for God's purposes in providing the final and permanent basis for faith.

In this schema, the fundamental reason for acknowledging the authority of the Scriptures as the expression of divine revelation is the witness they bear.⁹ This authority resides in the person who inspired the text rather than in the text itself (1 Jn 1:3). This perspective allows for authentic contemporary experiences to be as authoritative for their audience as the biblical experience. It also recognises the infallibility of God's words as a reflection of divine character (Is 45:23), while still allowing for human fallibility when they are not appropriately responded to (2 Tim 2:13). In this position, the meaning of the phrase "Word of God" is also modelled after the First Century use and refers to the embodied life and teachings of Jesus and the ongoing voice of the Spirit. This means that the continuing word of the Spirit is always consistent with the living Word Jesus since both are part of the same Trinitarian reality.

9.2.3 The Expanded Role of the Community

The "phenomenologically equivalent" bibliology has ramifications for the role of the church community. Scripture is limited in its ability to provide discernment for experiences that refer to extra-biblical and future-oriented contexts. While Scripture maintains its formative place in setting the limits revelation's content and function, discernment of these cases requires greater involvement by the Spirit-filled community. This movement towards the community in discernment reflects the pattern of the New Testament church (Acts 15:28). It also affirms the location of authority in the living Godhead. In the same way that Scripture provides credible witness to the reality of revelatory experience in biblical contexts, the community acts to provide credible witness to the reality of revelatory experience in contemporary contexts.

It is significant that traditions and movements who practise high-level revelatory experiences have arrived at similar conclusions regarding the expanded role of the community. Kraus notes this perspective among the Anabaptists.¹⁰ Similarly, in Catholic practice, the community has always maintained a central role in discernment as "Tradition."¹¹ Historically this emphasis on the community has conflicted with Protestant understandings of Scripture.¹² However, this ecumenical tension is shifting with recent Catholic discussions having replaced the view of two separate (and

⁹ Goldingay, *Models*, 28.

¹⁰ Norman C. Kraus, *Evangelicalism and Anabaptism* (Scottsdale: Herald Press, 1979), 173, 179.

¹¹ Hvidt, *Christian Prophecy*, 238.

¹² Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatological Theology*, 33-37. Land asserts that Pentecostals have adopted a "Protestant approach to the Scriptures," while practising a "Catholic approach in their sanctification," 30;

competing) sources of revelation with the notion of a living tradition, whereby the “living gospel” is seen to be the overarching and authoritative source of revelation above both Scripture *and* tradition.¹³ As Macchia describes it, this represents a change from the old formula of “two sources of revelation” to the newer and more promising “one source of revelation with two streams that flow from it.”¹⁴ In these understandings, both Scripture *and* tradition act to recognise the living authority of the Godhead, and the *living Gospel* is the standard for judging the witness to ongoing revelation. This renewed position has been affirmed in recent discussions with the Anglican and Orthodox traditions.¹⁵

9.3 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR RENEWED PRAXIS

A further aim of this thesis is to address the ministry problems associated with the revelatory experience (Ch. 1.4.2). The field of practical theology is always committed to answering the “so what?” question in relation to the topic of study.¹⁶ The study confirms that revelatory experience (particularly high-level experiences) presents a significant risk to pastoral goals and institutional stability and that these due to both theological and sociological factors. For example, pastoral fallout may occur when there is theological confusion about the limits of contemporary revelation, or in sociological terms, when the community does not have the training to support adequate discernment. Institutional stability may arise when there are misplaced theological understandings about the Christocentric nature of revelatory experience or sociologically, when there are threats to leadership power.

By drawing on the sociological and theological analyses in the study, it is possible to address the broader praxis of the Pentecostal church. The following recommendations are made for renewed praxis of individual revelatory experiences within the Pentecostal community. It is recommended that churches should:

1. Establish and communicate a clear shared theology for contemporary revelatory experience. This should locate the experience within a Christocentric framework, which sets the boundaries for its content and function. Regular teaching that draws on the biblical narratives (particularly those of the New Testament) provides guidelines for the reinforcement of the theological framework and

¹³ Louis Mahoney, “Revelation: Scripture or Tradition,” *Dominicana* 52, no. 1 (1967): 44.

¹⁴ Frank D. Macchia, “A Reply to Rickie Moore,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 17 (2000): 15-19.

¹⁵ “Moscow Statement 1976 #9,” in “Growth in Agreement: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level,” eds. Harding Meyer and Lukas Vischer (New York: Paulist Press, World Council of Churches, 1984), 42.

¹⁶ Cartledge, *Testimony*, 180.

guidelines for its operation. This framework should be regularly articulated and rehearsed in public gatherings. Appropriate responses to authentic experiences should be encouraged to ensure favourable ministry outcomes.

2. Provide rites and rituals that demonstrate and model revelatory experience in public gatherings. In particular, the use of public prophecy and testimonies that communicate that God *is* speaking as much as God *has* spoken should be featured regularly.

3. Model appropriate language for revelatory experiences. This includes language that reflects its uncertain nature. The phrase “The Lord said” should be used only after sufficient discernment processes have been applied. In the early stages of development, it may be more appropriate to say, “I think God is saying.” Further, the language of contemporary revelatory experience should be modelled after biblical use. Hence the “Word of God” should be used primarily to refer to the *living* word of God manifested in Jesus and continued through the Spirit.

4. Intentionally provide opportunities for training and practice based on adequate theology. It is pastorally unsafe to promote high-level revelatory experiences without providing training for its proper use. Churches should consider offering training in both formal and informal contexts with the goal of equipping all members to access the experience. This requires a solid basis in Gospel teachings so that beginners may adequately discern their experiences. Formal training may include courses, teaching in sermons and small group materials. At an informal level, the experience should be incorporated into the discipleship process. This allows for members to take responsibility for their own spiritual formation and reflects the democratic intention of the experience. It also orients the role of leadership from director to facilitator in a process that recognises the pedagogical role of the Spirit and promotes dependency on and submission to Christ in the disciple’s life.

5. Develop a culture for accountability and communal discernment. Discernment processes require the use of consultative language within the context of genuine relationships to be effective. Conversations about revelatory experiences should be encouraged and promoted. Specifically, questions such as “What is the Holy Spirit speaking to you about?”, “How do you know it’s God?” and “How can I help you do what the Spirit is saying?” are central to the navigating the revelatory experience successfully.

6. Establish and implement protocols for revelatory experience. Although training tends to be more effective than external controls, it is still important to address pastoral issues through a common set of protocols. For example, how to deal with cases of mental illness or how to respond when a public prophecy requires correction.

7. Anticipate a measure of individual and corporate instability. High-level revelatory experiences are sociologically disruptive by nature. The potential for fallout and instability is inevitable due to both the fallen nature of humanity and the stimuli for change inherent in revelatory experience.

Implementation of discernment processes will act as a preventative measure for pastoral fallout, but only to a degree. The phenomenologically equivalent perspective views authentic revelatory experience as a source of life, growth and change. Genuine experiences stimulate growth, change and the extension of Kingdom of God. A measure of instability should be anticipated and welcomed as a source of Spirit-life in the community.

8. Establish networks for the incorporation of revelatory experience into theological discussions. The idea of using revelatory experiences as “inspired hypotheses” for reflection on contemporary issues requires consultative connections across different communities and traditions so that revelatory messages can be properly discerned and applied. This is only facilitated by a relational ethic that allows for robust and honest discussion.

These recommendations provide for the creation of communities where revelatory activity can be sustained. They enable the experience to be harnessed for the attainment of ministry goals including spiritual formation and church growth while still maintaining the formative place of Scripture.

9.4 EVALUATION OF THE STUDY

Evaluation represents an important stage of the research process. It seeks to reflect on the study’s methodology and the validity of its results. Overall, the study was effective in achieving its aims, both in contributing to a theological framework that reflected the practice of Pentecostals and providing the means to address some of the problems arising from this potent but volatile experience.

As a methodological process, Cartledge’s dialectic approach to the testimonies of participants fit the thesis aims well. The challenge lay in bringing the voices of the theorists, Scripture and ordinary theology together and giving adequate weight to each. Cameron et al’s “four voices” was helpful in providing a more complex understanding of the sources of theology. This was particularly evident in the data relating to more generalised questions (App. 5, Q. 4-13) and those given for a “specific” experience (App. 5, Q. 14-21). In some cases, there was a mismatch between the two as respondents gave the answers of normative theology in the former while espousing a different approach in the latter. Cartledge’s concept of a dialectic implying “two voices” may be overly simplistic for this study, where the voices of the Pentecostal “lifeworld” and “system” are more diverse and fragmented. The complexity pointed towards the conceptualisation of a “conversational” model of practical theology rather than the more simplified one of a “dialectic.”

By far the most challenging aspect of the study was in identifying appropriate dialogue partners for discussion. As noted, this area has rarely been investigated in the P-C academy and many of the theological voices within the tradition did not reflect the practice of Pentecostals in the sample. This created a need to look outside the tradition and highlighted the disparity between the voices of formal and ordinary theology within the tradition. At the same time, the findings of Pentecostal experience were surprisingly consistent with the Catholic approach. This is likely due to their common starting point regarding the experience itself. In many ways, this alignment between Pentecostals and Catholics reinforced the Pentecostal conviction that the Spirit leads believers “into all truth” (Jn 16:13).

9.5 OPPORTUNITIES FOR FURTHER STUDY

Suggestions for further study in the area of Pentecostal revelatory experience include:

1. An exploration of the revelatory experience in relation to Trinitarian theology. This project argues that a Christocentric approach to theological understandings of contemporary revelatory experience offers a pragmatic and effective way to guide the experience. However, this approach may also lead to Trinitarian confusion by appearing to subordinate the work of the Spirit to Christ. Lee has already connected this tendency to the subordination of the Spirit in his discussion on Spirit baptism.¹⁷ A Christocentric approach to revelatory experience may have similar effects. A recent study by Pentecostal scholar Studebaker has sought to correct this tendency and highlights the distinctive agency of the Spirit, however he fails to mention revelatory experience.¹⁸ Further research exploring the role of the Trinitarian spirit in revelatory experience would contribute to enhanced understandings of Pentecostal pneumatology.

2. The nature of divine fulfilment in relation to the conditional nature of revelatory experience. This study briefly addressed the dynamics of authoritative revelatory encounters with human interaction and co-operation. Practical theology studies focussing on the nature of prophetic fulfilment in the lives of individuals could be undertaken and reflected upon in light of biblical precedents, following on from the pattern of Carroll and Chisholm’s work.¹⁹ Insights could have implications for both Pentecostal practice as well as larger theological understandings in the area of open and reformed theism.

¹⁷ Lee, 147-71.

¹⁸ Studebaker, *From Pentecost*.

¹⁹ Carroll, *When Prophecy Failed*; Chisholm, “When Prophecy Appears.”

3. Leadership models that explore the role of senior leader as facilitator rather than director. This study highlights the power shift from pastoral leaders to individual believers as the latter become more adept in engaging revelatory experience. A study that explores this dynamic in Australian Pentecostal communities that have been known for their director-style leadership and its relationship to discipleship would provide constructive strategies for ecclesiology and ministry.

4. A Pentecostal theology of discipleship. The lack of a Pentecostal theology for discipleship has been noted.²⁰ Protestant Evangelical studies that have incorporated the Spirit's work in discipleship have focussed on the experience of hearing God through Scripture.²¹ Ruthven claims that the "Protestant" approach has "messed up" the discipleship process due to the neglect of revelatory experiences.²² A study that reflects on extra-biblical revelatory experiences would provide a uniquely Pentecostal contribution to understandings about discipleship and spiritual formation.

9.6 SUMMARY

This project has investigated the contemporary revelatory experience in relation to biblical experience through the framework of different theological traditions. The use of practical theological methodology has enabled the study to address the questions that have not been adequately covered in systematic theology, providing an essential contribution to the development of a theology for revelatory experiences.

The study reveals the potency of the Pentecostal revelatory experience when practised within the boundaries of the Gospel and apostolic teaching, and the patterns established by the early church as depicted in Scripture. The phenomenologically equivalent position of the Pentecostals affirms the living work of Christ who continues to act through the Spirit in contemporary times. This does not diminish the importance, value or inspiration of Scripture, but rather affirms Scripture's own emphasis by situating ultimate authority in its divine author. It also highlights the importance of revelatory experiences for individual sanctification and mission as well as in the application of Gospel truths to new contexts.

²⁰ Two main works have been identified: James P. Bowers, "A Wesleyan-Pentecostal Approach to Christian Formation," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 3, no. 6 (1995): 55-86; Jerome R. Boone, "Community and Worship: The Key Components of Pentecostal Christian Formation," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 4, no. 8 (1996): 129-42.

²¹ Michael J. Wilkins, *Following the Master*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2010.

²² Ruthven, *What's Wrong*, 243-287.

The phenomenologically equivalent position is in contrast with the formal voices of the P-C tradition, who generally claim contemporary revelatory experience to be inferior to the inspired experiences of Scripture. The practice of revelatory experience in the study highlights the inadequacy of a bibliology that is grounded in theological categories that rose out of modern debates rather than the dynamics of experience in Scripture itself. The claim of Grudem that alternate positions to the inferior approach de-emphasises the teachings of the Bible is not sustained by the findings of this study.²³ On the contrary, the practice of equivalent revelatory experiences acted to reinforce the formative role of Scripture as they provided a witness to and model for the ongoing reality of the Spirit.

The use of the phenomenologically inferior position by Pentecostals represents a threat to the ongoing practice of revelatory experience. Contemporary experience requires adjustment to current bibliologies such that Scripture is seen as a *witness* to the living authority of the Godhead who *has* spoken and who *continues* to speak. The safe practice of revelatory experience also requires that it is firmly grounded in a discernment process adjudicated by multiple witness in the Spirit-filled community and affirmed by supernatural signs. This enables contemporary experiences to be viewed as divinely authoritative and having the potential for transformation and prophetic fulfilment in the lives of individuals. When a theology for revelatory experience is patterned after the biblical experience and undergirded by accountability within the local church community, contemporary revelatory experiences can fully be harnessed for their kingdom purpose.

²³ Grudem, *Gift of Prophecy*, Location 3069.

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APPENDICES

1. Pastor's Permission Letter for Church A/B/C
2. Church Consent Form
3. Information Sheet
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5. Focus Group Schedule (Church Members)
6. Interview Schedule (Church Members)
7. Interview Schedule (Pastors/Leaders)
8. The Sample
9. Permissions

1. PASTOR'S PERMISSION LETTER FOR CHURCH A/B/C



I Keith Campbell Court
Scoresby VIC 3179

P.O. Box 9183
Scoresby VIC 3179

HEARING, RECOGNISING AND RESPONDING TO GOD'S VOICE IN THE PENTECOSTAL CHURCH: TOWARDS A PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

PERMISSION LETTER FOR CHURCH A/B/C

<insert date>

Dear Pastor ,

My name is Tania Harris and I am conducting a research project with Rev. Dr Jon K. Newton (Dean of Postgraduate Studies, Harvest Bible College) towards a Doctor of Ministry at Harvest Bible College. This means that I will be writing a 60,000-word thesis on my chosen topic – the equivalent of a 300-page book.

I would like to invite you to participate in this study. Please read the details about my project below before making a decision.

Aim of the Research

The aim of this study is to investigate the experiences of Pentecostal Christians in hearing, recognising and responding to God's voice. I am particularly interested in the theological reflections surrounding hearing God experiences and how we can learn from them. Ultimately, I hope to develop a practical theology for hearing God's voice, from which will come insights that will help people hear God's voice more clearly and regularly in their lives.

Reason for Your Selection

There are varying perspectives on the theology and practice of hearing God's voice today. Your church has been selected (along with two others), for its commitment to helping your congregation hear God's voice in their everyday lives, as well as being representative of a historical tradition associated with beliefs about the nature of contemporary God-conversations.

Possible Benefits to Your Church

My hope is that the findings of this study will contribute to the current theological discussions in this area from a distinctly Pentecostal perspective. Using the results, I also plan to publish a book; *The Church who Hears God's voice* for pastors and leaders who are seeking to effectively pastor their churches in this essential area of discipleship.

What does the Research Involve?

The study involves an interview with yourself, as well as with a sample group of fifteen people from the life of your church. Potential participants would be recruited voluntarily via your church communication channels to ensure that participation is voluntary and a diversity of age-groups (over 18), ethnicities and gender are represented. Interview topics will include the nature of experiences hearing God's voice and reflections on those experiences. We will look at how God speaks, how we recognise and test the voices we hear and how we respond to what we've heard.

Interviews would require approximately one hour and would be privately recorded at a location convenient to the interviewees. The interviews would be sensitively handled, and participants may remove themselves at any time if they are feeling uncomfortable. All interviews are voluntary and would only be done with the participants' genuinely informed consent.

The study would also include four to six weeks of observation of your public church services (and possibly one or two smaller gatherings) in order to ascertain how hearing God's voice is understood within the life of your church community. Notes will be taken during the services, but this will be discreet.

Withdrawal from the Research

Being in this study is voluntary and there is no obligation to participate. Furthermore, both you and your church members will be able to withdraw from participation in the study at any time prior to approval of interview transcripts. (However, once data has been submitted, it will not be possible to withdraw individual answers, as responses are anonymous).

Confidentiality, Storage and Use of Data for Other Purposes

The confidentiality of the interviewees and your church will be kept strictly anonymous. In the report writing and any subsequent publications, pseudonyms for both the names of individuals and churches will always be used.

Data collected will be stored in accordance with Harvest Bible College regulations in a password-protected computer for five years. Data may be accessed later for other purposes but again, no individual or church will be identifiable.

Results

If you would like to be informed of the aggregate research findings, please contact Tania Harris (ph: 0412 357 351 or email: tania@godconversations.com). The findings are accessible for six months following assessment.

Further Questions

If you would like to contact the researchers about any aspect of this study, please contact the Primary Supervisor:

Rev. Dr Jon K. Newton
Dean of Postgraduate Studies
Harvest Bible College
Email: jnewton@harvest.edu.au
Ph: (03) 8799 1111
P.O. Box 9183
Scoresby VIC 3179

In addition, complaints concerning the manner in which this research is being conducted can be made to:

Rev. Dr. Michelle Sanders
Harvest Bible College
Email: msanders@harvest.edu.au

(03) 8799 1111
P.O. Box 9183
Scoresby VIC 3179

Your involvement in this important research would be highly valued and appreciated. To participate, please sign and return the form attached.

Looking forward to hearing from you,

Blessings,
<insert signature>

Tania Harris
God Conversations
tania@godconversations.com

2. CHURCH CONSENT FORM



I Keith Campbell Court
Scoresby VIC 3179

P.O. Box 9183
Scoresby VIC 3179

HEARING, RECOGNISING AND RESPONDING TO GOD'S VOICE IN THE PENTECOSTAL CHURCH: TOWARDS A PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

CHURCH CONSENT FORM

<insert date>

Tania Harris
36/3 Victoria Park Parade
Zetland NSW 2010

Dear Tania,

Thank you for your request for myself and my church <Church A/B/C>'s to participate in the above-named research.

I have read and understood the Permission Letter regarding the research <insert project number> and hereby give permission for this research to be conducted.

Yours Sincerely,

<signature of Pastor>

<name of above signatory>
Senior Pastor/Lead Pastor
Church A/B/C
Contact Details

3. INFORMATION SHEET



I Keith Campbell Court
Scoresby VIC 3179

P.O. Box 9183
Scoresby VIC 3179

HEARING, RECOGNISING AND RESPONDING TO GOD'S VOICE IN THE PENTECOSTAL CHURCH: TOWARDS A PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

INFORMATION SHEET

Dear Church,

Our church has agreed to participate in a research project that examines the way in which we hear, recognise and respond to God's voice. The findings of this project will be used to provide guidelines for churches across the world to better understand our experiences and how we can facilitate them in our own lives and in the life of our church.

Ps. Tania Harris is the founder *God Conversations*, a ministry that equips people to recognise and respond to God's voice and a friend of our church. She will be undertaking the research as a student at Harvest Bible College in the degree of Doctor of Ministry under the supervision of Dr Rev. Jon K Newton.

As part of the project, in the next two months, she will be visiting our church, leading two focus groups and interviewing 15 people from our church who have volunteered to be involved. The interview will take approximately one hour and will be held at a place that is convenient to you. Tania will be looking at how God speaks in your life, how his voice is recognised and how you respond to what we've heard. Everything you say will be confidential. Your participation is entirely voluntary and there will not be any disadvantage to you in any way if you chose not to participate. You may also choose not to answer any particular question, and you may withdraw your contribution at any time prior to the start of her analysis of the information.

With your permission, she will record the conversation to help her with my analysis. She will be writing up the information in a formal report and it is possible that the material could be used in a future book. However, *she will not be identifying the contribution of any individuals or churches* in her thesis or in any publications, and will write it in such a way as to protect your confidentiality. I will make available the findings to our church once the project has been completed.

If you would like to be part of this research, please fill in the attached form and return it to me at the details below. She will then contact you to arrange a convenient time and place for the interview. If at any time you have questions about the project, please contact her via email:

tania@godconversations.com or phone: 0412 357 351.

This study has been approved by the Ethics Committee who serve Harvest Bible College. If you have any questions about the study, you can contact Tania's supervisor Dr Jon Newton (Email: jnewton@harvest.edu.au, ph: (03) 8799 1111). Also, if you have any complaint or concern about the way you have been treated during the study, you may contact Dr Michelle Saunders (Email: msanders@harvest.edu.au, ph: (03) 8799 1111). Any complaint or concern will be treated in confidence and fully investigated and you will be informed of the outcome.

Your involvement in this important research is highly valued and appreciated. To participate, please sign and return the form attached. Thank you for your help!

Yours Faithfully,

Senior Pastor
Church A
Contact Details

4. PARTICIPANTS' CONSENT FORM



I Keith Campbell Court
Scoresby VIC 3179

P.O. Box 9183
Scoresby VIC 3179

HEARING, RECOGNISING AND RESPONDING TO GOD'S VOICE IN THE PENTECOSTAL CHURCH: TOWARDS A PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

PARTICIPANTS' CONSENT FORM

Project: Hearing, Recognising and Responding to God's Voice in the Pentecostal/Charismatic Church: Towards a Practical Theology

Researcher: Tania Harris

I (*the participant*) understand what this research project is designed to explore. What I will be asked to do has been explained to me. I agree to take part in the project, realising that I can withdraw at any time without having to give a reason for my decision. I agree that the interview and/or focus group will be recorded for analysis purposes. Furthermore, I agree that research data collected in the study may be published in a thesis or publication or provided to other researchers in a form that does not identify me in any way.

I am happy for the researcher to contact me to arrange a suitable time and place for a conversation.

NAME OF PARTICIPANT:
(*block letters*)

SIGNATURE: DATE.....

CONTACT DETAILS:

Email:

Phone:

Please return this form to:

Tania Harris
PO Box 271
Surry Hills NSW 2010

5. INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (CHURCH MEMBERS)

HEARING, RECOGNISING AND RESPONDING TO GOD’S VOICE IN THE PENTECOSTAL CHURCH: TOWARDS A PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: CHURCH MEMBERS

Introduction

My research is all about people’s experiences hearing God’s voice. We are looking at your experiences so that we can learn from them and gain insights that will help others hear God’s voice more clearly and regularly.

Your comments and experiences are valuable and will be used to write reports, but everything you say will be anonymous. No person or church will be identifiable in the research.

If there is anything I ask that you don’t want to talk about, just say pass and we’ll move on. If you want to stop this interview at any time, you are free to do so. If you have any complaints about the process, then you can follow it up with Dr Michelle Sanders at Harvest Bible College (Email: msanders@harvest.edu.au, ph: (03) 8799 1111).

For our notes, I would like to record our interview. Is that ok?
Are you happy to proceed?

Questions

Questions about spiritual background:

1. Tell me a bit about your spiritual journey... (E.g. How long have you been a Christian?)
2. Tell me a little about your place in this church. (E.g. How long have you been here? Any particular leadership roles that you play? What drew you to this church)
3. Which of the following best describes your religious background (before the age of 18)?
 - a. Pentecostal-Charismatic
 - b. Evangelical Protestant
 - c. Baptist
 - d. Mainstream Protestant (e.g. Methodist, Lutheran, Anglican)
 - e. Catholic
 - f. None
 - g. Other _____ (Please specify)

General Questions about hearing God Experiences:

4. What do you understand about hearing God's voice?
5. What are the ways God normally speaks to you? Why do you think that is?
6. Have you ever heard God speaking to you via: Prophecy? Dream or vision? Audible voice? Inaudible voice? Hunch, impression, senses? Scripture? Christian books? Nature? Other?
7. Do you think there is a best or preferred way to hear God's voice? What do you think that is?
8. Is hearing God's voice a common occurrence for you? How often would you say you experience God speaking to you in a significant way?
9. How would you know if something wasn't from God? Has that ever happened to you? Tell me about it.
10. Has hearing God's voice affected your spiritual walk/understanding of God? How?
11. How important is it for you to hear God's voice?
12. Do you consider you have the gift of prophecy? Call of a prophet?
13. What has been helpful in showing you how to hear God's voice more clearly? Any particular parts of the Bible you have learned from?

Specific Questions about Hearing God Experiences:

14. Can you recall a specific time God spoke to you? Tell me about it.
15. How did you hear God's voice?
16. Was the content of the message? Something you already knew? Or 'new' information?
17. How did you know it was God's voice? Was there anything you did to check? (E.g. Speak to your pastor, speak to loved ones, check it against Scripture).
18. After God spoke, what happened? Did you change anything as a result?
19. If it was predictive, do you think it will come to pass? Why/why not?
20. Looking back, what difference did the experience make to you?
21. Is there anything else you would like to add to our conversation?

General Background Information:

22. Age?
23. Gender?
24. Race or ethnicity?
25. Which best describes the level of education you have completed:
 - a. Less than high school
 - b. High school graduate
 - c. Vocational training

- d. University graduate
- e. Postgraduate

26. What is your current marital status?

- a. Single
- b. Engaged
- c. Divorced/separated
- d. Married
- e. Widowed

6. FOCUS GROUP SCHEDULE (CHURCH MEMBERS)

HEARING, RECOGNISING AND RESPONDING TO GOD'S VOICE IN THE PENTECOSTAL CHURCH: TOWARDS A PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

FOCUS GROUP SCHEDULE

Introduction

My research is all about people's experiences hearing God's voice. We are looking at your experiences and the experiences of the people in your church so that we can learn from them and gain insights that will help others hear God's voice more clearly.

Your comments and experiences are valuable and will be used to write reports, but everything you say will be anonymous. No person or church will be identifiable in the research.

If there is anything I ask that you don't want to talk about, just say pass and we'll move on. If you want to stop your participation in this group at any time, you are free to do so. If you have any complaints about the process, then you can follow it up with Dr Michelle Sanders at Harvest Bible College (Email: msanders@harvest.edu.au, ph: (03) 8799 1111).

For our notes, I would like to record our time together. Is that ok?

Are you happy to proceed?

General Questions about hearing God Experiences:

1. What do you understand about hearing God's voice?
2. What are the ways God normally speaks to you? Why do you think that is?
3. Do you think there is a best or preferred way to hear God's voice? What do you think that is?
4. Is hearing God's voice a common occurrence for you? How often would you say you experience God speaking to you in a significant way?
5. How would you know if something wasn't from God? Has that ever happened? Tell us about it.
6. After God spoke, what happened? Did you change anything as a result?

7. Has hearing God's voice affected your spiritual walk/understanding of God? How?
8. How important is it for you to hear God's voice?
9. What has been helpful in showing you how to hear God's voice more clearly? Any particular parts of the Bible you have learned from?

Questions related to hearing God's voice in your church community:

12. How are hearing God's voice experiences facilitated in this church? Any specific training?
13. How are hearing God's voice experiences managed in this church?

Is there anything else you would like to add to our conversation?

7. INTERVIEW SCHEDULE (SENIOR/LEAD PASTOR)

HEARING, RECOGNISING AND RESPONDING TO GOD’S VOICE IN THE PENTECOSTAL CHURCH: TOWARDS A PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE: SENIOR/LEAD PASTOR

Introduction

My research is all about people’s experiences hearing God’s voice. We are looking at your experiences and the experiences of the people in your church so that we can learn from them and gain insights that will help others hear God’s voice more clearly.

Your comments and experiences are valuable and will be used to write reports, but everything you say will be anonymous. No person or church will be identifiable in the research.

If there is anything I ask that you don’t want to talk about, just say pass and we’ll move on. If you want to stop this interview at any time, you are free to do so. If you have any complaints about the process, then you can follow it up with Dr Michelle Sanders at Harvest Bible College (Email: msanders@harvest.edu.au, ph: (03) 8799 1111).

For our notes, I would like to record our interview. Is that ok?

Are you happy to proceed?

Questions about spiritual background:

1. Tell me a bit about your spiritual journey... (E.g. How long have you been a Christian?)
2. Tell me a little about your place in this church. (E.g. How long have you been here? What has been your experience like?)
3. Which of the following best describes your religious background (before the age of 18)?
 - a. Pentecostal-Charismatic
 - b. Evangelical Protestant
 - c. Baptist
 - d. Mainstream Protestant (e.g. Methodist, Lutheran, Anglican)

- e. Catholic
- f. None
- g. Other _____ (Please specify)

General Questions about hearing God Experiences:

4. What do you understand about hearing God's voice?
5. What are the ways God normally speaks to you? Why do you think that is?
6. Have you ever heard God speaking to you via: Prophecy? Dream or vision? Audible voice? Inaudible voice? Hunch, impression, senses? Scripture? Christian books? Nature? Other?
7. Do you think there is a best or preferred way to hear God's voice? If so, what do you think that is?
8. Is hearing God's voice a common occurrence for you? How often would you say you experience God speaking to you in a significant way?
10. How would you know if something wasn't from God? Has that ever happened to you? Tell me about it.
11. Has hearing God's voice affected your spiritual walk/understanding of God? How?
12. How important is it for you to hear God's voice?
13. Do you consider you have the gift of prophecy? Call of a prophet?
14. What has been helpful in showing you how to hear God's voice more clearly? Any particular parts of the Bible you have learned from?

Questions related to hearing God's voice in your church community:

14. How are hearing God's voice experiences facilitated in this church? Any specific training?
15. How are hearing God's voice experiences managed in the public service?
16. How are hearing God's voice experiences managed outside of the public service? (e.g. small groups, pastoral care etc.)
17. What would you say if someone came to you with the claim God told them to do something you considered to be unsafe?
18. Is there anything else you would like to add to our conversation?

General Background Information:

19. Age?
20. Gender?
21. Race or ethnicity?
22. What is your current marital status?
 - a. Single
 - b. Engaged

- c. Divorced/separated
- d. Married
- e. Widowed

23. Which best describes the level of education you have completed:

- a. Less than high school
- b. High school graduate
- c. Vocational training
- d. University graduate
- e. Postgraduate

8. THE SAMPLE

Table 1: Sample by Age and Gender

	No. of interviews (inc Snr/Lead Pastor)	Gender		Age				
		F	M	18-29	30-44	45-64	65+	Unknown
Church A	20 + 2 = 22	13	9	4	6	12	0	0
Church B	15 + 1 = 16	9	7	2	4	6	2	2
Church C	15 + 1 = 16	9	7	0	11	3	2	0
Total	54	31	23	6	21	21	4	2

Table 2: Sample by Educational Background

	No. of interviews (inc Snr/Lead Pastor)	Educational Level					
		Less than High School	High School	Vocational	University degree	Postgraduate degree	Unknown
Church A	20 + 2 = 22	0	1	7	11	3	0
Church B	15 + 1 = 16	1	1	6	5	1	2
Church C	15 + 1 = 16	0	0	4	4	8	0
Total	54	1	2	17	20	12	2

9. EXTENDED TESTIMONIES

This section includes selected extended testimonies from the data (Ch. 5):

9.1 The Content of Revelatory Experience

Father X was inviting us over to his house and my father was saying, "Trust him." But this one day, I (11 yrs) was with my brother (9 yrs). We were going to Father X's house and I distinctly heard God say, "Don't go." I said to my brother that we shouldn't go. We didn't go. 15 years later, we found out Father X was a paedophile who abused a lot of kids.

It was like God was saying, "Stop!" Father X had been to my Dad's church. He's been around. He was a lovely man, very kind and gentle. He ran a parish. We trusted him. My dad trusted him implicitly. When my Dad found out, it was like "What?" (AF9).

I had a shunt in my brain (which drains the fluid) and the doctors had told me that the shunt had snapped and I would need surgery that night. I'm standing outside the emergency department and God told me that my X-rays had been read wrong and I needed to go in and speak to the doctor. It wasn't an audible voice like "boom, boom, boom," but it was clear enough. I heard the words in my head: "Your X-rays have been read wrong. This is gonna be okay."

So, I walked back in and said, "Excuse me, I would like to see my X-rays please. I have a feeling that something is not quite right. I know I'm a chartered accountant not a doctor, but if you're sending me to surgery – my family is on the other side of the world. I think I'd like to see them (the x-rays)." So, they took me through and said that it wasn't normal protocol, but since I was persistent, they would let me see. They showed me the gap on the X-ray and I said, "Okay that's interesting, okay, whatever – I don't know – I obviously have to go with what you say." Then, about a half an hour later, the key doctor came through and said, "We are very sorry, your X-rays were read wrong. The doctor who read your X-ray was not a brain specialist – I am, and I can tell you, your shunt hasn't snapped." So, it was exactly what God had said. I never ended up having the severe level of surgery (C14).

9.2 The Function of Revelatory Experience

9.2.1 Personal Transformation and Sanctification

I was at home, lying in my bed listening to music. This was a very detailed vision and it was with the Father. He came in real regular clothes and he took my hands in his hands and said, "Why don't you believe that I will provide for you?" "Well you haven't provided in the past" I said. And he said, "Do you think that's true? Think about your past." So I thought about it and there's actually no point where I have gone without – I've always been provided for – and I'm like, "Ok that's not true." And he's like, "That's exactly right, it's not true. I've always provided for you and I always will."

Then he put his hand out and said "Watch." Out of the centre of his hand grew this most exquisite pink rose and he said to me, "as long as this rose is alive, I will provide for you." It was just beautiful. Roses are very significant in my relationship with him – since I was a child it was prophesied over me about the "Rose of Sharon" and being the fragrance of the Lord, so he's always spoken to me with the imagery of roses because it speaks of our relationship.

So that was my assurance that he would always provide. Every time I feel I haven't got enough and I start getting panicky, that image of the rose comes back and it's still alive. Within two months after that vision, I got this job at the Swim School and within a year of being there, I got a big promotion. I am so well provided for. I have spare money at the end of the month. I can save. I can give to other people. I'm like, "This is incredible; I haven't been able to do this in years!" (A5).

9.2.2 Revelation of God's Plan

I was walking along and God said, "You're going to get promoted and go to Town X and run the business." And that's what happened that day. My boss called me in and said we want to expand our business – to go from this town to a larger town and we want you to be the service manager and run the whole department. Because God spoke to me and it happened, I believed it was right to me to go. So, I answered yes straightaway (B16).

I was driving my car and superimposed in front of me, I had a vision of a church in Suburb X. I saw the building. I saw the block of land. I saw the style of building. I went

back and told my wife: "I think God has called me to help start a church in X." And we drove out there (I hadn't been out there for years – I hadn't seen Tom or his wife Sarah for 16 months at least) and showed my wife, "This is the land where I saw the building. And while we're out here, let's go see Tom and Sarah."

So, we went to Tom's house – Tom was out, Sarah was in. Sarah goes, "Oh you wouldn't believe it, guess what? We are going to build a new church." And I said, "Is it in X Street?" and she said, "Oh my God, how do you know that?!" Long and short of it, I saw that God was leading me to go out there and help pioneer that church and I became director of the Building fund. It was really funny because Tom is a bit sceptical about those things. He said to me, "What colour did you see?" And I told him the colour and he goes, "Wrong! We ordered a different colour." I said, "That's fine." Anyway, when it was delivered, they'd gone a bit wrong in the colour and it ended up being the colour I had told him! That was significant for me because I had no way of knowing that (A9).

10. PERMISSIONS

Harris, Tania M. “The Wacky, the Frightening and the Spectacular: Hearing God’s Voice in Australian Pentecostal Churches.” In *Australian Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements: Arguments from the Margins*, edited by Cristina Rocha, Mark P. Hutchinson, and Kathleen Openshaw. Leiden: Brill, 2020.

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