

Animal Glossolalia

A Pneumatological Framework for Animal Theology

Daniela Rizzo | ORCID: 0009-0002-9005-5656
Alphacrucis University College, Parramatta, Australia
Daniela.rizzo@ac.edu.au

Received 2 September 2023 | Accepted 4 April 2024 |
Published online 19 April 2024

Abstract

This article extends the concept of glossolalia to encompass the idea of creaturely “sighs and groans,” emphasizing that animals, despite the apparent absence of reflective consciousness, harbor the capacity for expressions such as praise, lament, and prophecy. Within this research, a model of “animal glossolalia” is introduced, transcending the confines of human experience to delve into how animals engage in this unique form of spiritual expression through the Spirit. It posits that God hears the voices of all his non-human creatures through their sighs and groans. This exploration of animal spirituality and glossolalia challenges prevailing anthropocentric perspectives, advocating for a broader and more inclusive comprehension of glossolalia that embraces all of God’s creatures through the interceding Spirit.

Keywords

pneumatology – glossolalia – animal spirituality – animal voice – animal theology

1 Introduction

While animal theology is a growing field of inquiry, it’s notable that existing animal theologies often pay limited attention to the role of the Holy Spirit. In addition to examining the whole of creation from an eco-pneumatological perspective, this research ventures into exploring the presence and impact of the

Spirit in the lives of animals. Beginning with the acknowledgment of animal sentience and their capacity to experience emotions similar to humans, this article proceeds to unravel the theological implications of recognizing animals' sentience and their spiritual connection with their Creator.

Delving into the nuanced concept of animal spirituality, I introduce the idea of "animal glossolalia," proposing that animals might engage in spiritual communication through glossolalic expressions or "sighs and groans." I also delve into the concept of glossolalia as a form of cosmic worship, a language accessible to all creatures that transcends human verbal expression. In addressing the significance of animal voices and inspiration from the story of Balaam's donkey, a consideration is made wherein the donkey's verbal articulation of enduring suffering could be classified as a type of glossolalia.

By applying pneumatological imagination, this framework encourages the contemplation of animal voice without an anthropocentric bias. The overarching implication is that animals actively participate in the divine narrative, offering their praises, laments, and even prophecies to their Creator alongside their human co-creatures.

2 Animal Sentience

Attending carefully to the exploration of animal spirituality and its connections to pneumatology, a key component that warrants attention is animal sentience. Sentience refers to an animal's capacity to experience both positive and negative emotions, including pain, joy, and contentment. Although human moral behavior is complex, animals can exhibit behaviors similar to human behavior such as caring, comforting, playing, and disciplining. Animals are not mere objects or mechanisms but are subjects with an inner life similar to ours. Thus, recognizing the differences between humans and animals does not undermine the significant similarities between the species regarding their capacity for shared experience. In addition to this rationale, sentience may also include the presence of the Spirit within animals, as they are recipients of the life-giving breath of God.¹

For Pannenberg, the Spirit is the integral creative presence of God within creation, as the Spirit animates life and unites all creatures in fellowship with

1 The idea of animal sentience builds upon the notion that all creatures are created with autonomy and integrity, and are inseparable companions to humanity in creation, reconciliation and redemption. Clair Linzey, *Developing Animal Theology: An Engagement with Leonardo Boff*. (London: Routledge, 2022), 1–2.

their Creator.² The beauty of Pannenberg's pneumatology is that he does not divorce the Spirit from the creaturely realm; rather, his account of the "continuous creation" attests to the giving and sustaining presence of the Spirit in all of created life.³ Pannenberg makes key reference to the Spirit's animating presence within nonhuman creatures. While his consideration may have humans primarily in view, Pannenberg offers a generous pneumatological view that affirms nonhuman creatures, maintaining that the "life, movement and activity" of nonhuman creatures can be attributed to the Spirit of God.⁴

Animal sentience emphasizes that all creatures are created with autonomy and integrity and are inseparable companions to humanity in creation, reconciliation, and redemption. Building upon the foundation of animal sentience and its theological implications, we can further appreciate the depth of the spiritual bond that exists between all creatures, human and nonhuman alike, and their Creator, including the capacity for animals to engage in creaturely praise and lament.

The biblical text offers a multifaceted view of praise that extends beyond human worshippers, including a call for all of creation, animals included, to offer worship and reverence to God (Ps 148, 145:21; Is 66:23; Rev 5:13). While some interpretations limit the scope of these references to humans, the language used in the Psalms and prophetic writings suggests that all living creatures, both human and nonhuman, are called to worship. Psalm 148 depicts a wide variety of creatures as conveying the universal praise of all creation, including sea creatures, wild beasts, livestock, crawling insects, and birds of the air. While animals may not express their praise to God as humans do, they do possess a spontaneity and consistency that humans lack. Animals can glorify God in their own distinctive ways without using human language. Psalm 148's depiction of praise by all creation, including animals, is not a rhetorical device but a revelation that animals are companions in the divine, cosmic worship

2 Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 32.

3 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2: 76. Pannenberg's account of continuous creation refers to the preservation of creation, where creation is not a one-time historical act but a continual work of God in the Spirit.

4 Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2: 76. Pannenberg's robust theology welcomes the integration of pneumatology and eschatology, where the Spirit's action in the present provides hope for the eschatological fulfilment for all creation. He explains that while an eschatological consummation remains unfulfilled, life in the here and now is a proleptic expression that provides all creatures hope for the future new creation. Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 3, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 553.

of God. They are fellow creatures with their own relationship to God who respond to the Creator's care in their lives.⁵

The Old Testament portrays animals as capable of mourning and lamenting. In Isaiah 43:20, wild animals are linked to sorrowful sounds in the wilderness, but their cries of lament are transformed into a melody of praise as God provides water. The animals' response is likened to that of God's people, suggesting that "man and beast could rejoice and praise God together." Hosea 4:3 describes a devastating ecological crisis in which the land and all who live in it, including the animals and fish, are perishing due to the lack of faithfulness, kindness, and knowledge of God. These biblical passages reveal that animals are not only affected by environmental issues but are also capable of experiencing emotions and responding to God.

For Rachel Muers, the "cry of the earth" that is heard in the context of our environmental crisis can be seen as the Holy Spirit re-performing the gift of prophetic voice. Muers explains that nonhuman nature speaks with the power of the Spirit, sounding "prophetic laments and calls for repentance."⁶ Creation speaks in various ways, including pronouncing judgment on dishonest living and warning us of the repercussions of destructive actions. With a prophetic voice of lament, it could be imagined that the whales would sing a mournful song. They would tell us that the oceans are polluted and that our seas are darkened by greed. They may invite us to repent, for the harmony of the deep is disrupted, and their kin suffer. We should turn our hearts to stewardship, lest the gentle giants of the sea become silent forever. A koala who once roamed the eucalyptus forests as a symbol of tranquillity and grace now laments about her home that has been ravaged by flames. She may tell us that the trees that sustain her kind are falling, that the earth is scorched, and that she and her

5 For more on animal praise, see Richard Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures* (Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2012), 147–184.

6 Rachel Muers, "The Holy Spirit, the Voices of Nature and Environmental Prophecy," *Scottish Journal of Theology* 67, no. 3 (August 2014): 333. Griffiths provides a biblical framework that supports this idea. According to Griffiths, Luke's redaction of Acts 2:19–20 suggests that the cosmic imagery in Joel 2:28–32 portrays a prophesying creation. Luke links these ecological wonders and signs to the ministry of Jesus and the apostles by modifying Acts 2:19, adding the term "signs" to Joel's language of wonders, creating the couplet of "signs and wonders" that parallels the "signs and wonders" associated with Jesus and the apostles. God is portrayed as the one who will reveal these signs, just as God worked signs and wonders through Jesus and the apostles during their earthly ministry. For Griffiths, Luke indicates that creation, similar to Jesus and the apostles, also performs signs and wonders through the Spirit of God as part of its prophetic calling and empowerment. John Daniel Griffiths, "Spirit-Baptised Creation: Locating Pentecost in the Meta-Narrative of Creation and Its Implications for a Pentecostal Ecology," *Australasian Pentecostal Studies* 22, no. 1 (2021): 56.

brethren are close to extinction. She implores us to turn our hearts to healing, lest the fires of destruction consume all.⁷

Describing animals as capable of praise, lament, and prophecy suggests that they live in relation to God and respond to divine love in accordance with their nature. The implication is that God hears the voices of his nonhuman creation and, while they do not have reflective consciousness like humans, they still bear witness to the power of the Creator.

To consider that spiritual experiences may not be exclusive to the *imago Dei* challenges the idea that divine relationship is a trait solely attributed to human beings. Animal spirituality may not include humanlike characteristics such as self-transcendence and the search for meaning. Instead, animals possess a unique relationship with God just by living the specific lives they are called to by their Creator.

3 Animal Spirituality

Spirituality has long been associated with human consciousness and reasoning. However, recent studies suggest that animals, too, may possess spiritual experiences that are different from those of humans.⁸ Defining animal spirituality solely through humanlike characteristics such as self-transcendence, identity quest, and a search for meaning may be limiting; it presumes that reflective consciousness and human reasoning are primary in spiritual experiences.⁹ It is important to understand that animal spirituality could involve subcortical, affective, extralinguistic, relational, organismic, and phenomenal experiences that do not require interpretive cognitive functions.¹⁰ Human spirituality, which encompasses subjective experiences of value fulfillment, varies considerably across individuals and cultures. Therefore, it is reasonable to

7 Inspired by Joel 1:18–20.

8 In 2005, Jane Goodall, a renowned English primatologist and conservationist, documented her observations on what she deemed as sacred rituals or expressions of spirituality in chimpanzees. Based on years of research, Goodall identified foot thumping, rock throwing, vigorous jumping, hooting vocalizations, and subsequent quiet sitting and staring behaviour in the presence of natural wonders such as waterfalls and rain as a “dance” accompanied by nonordinary emotions similar to wonder and awe. Goodall, “Do Chimpanzees Have Souls?: Possible Precursors of Religious Behavior in Animals,” 276.

9 I also take into consideration that the argument for animal spirituality is predominantly based on analogies drawn from humans to animals, rather than the other way around.

10 Bjorn Merker, “Consciousness without a Cerebral Cortex, A Challenge for Neuroscience and Medicine,” *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* 30, no. 1 (February 2007): 63–81, 74. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0140525X07000891>.

anticipate similar diversity in the expressions and manifestations of animal spirituality. For Clough, spiritual experience refers to any experience that promotes an organism's flourishing, increases the meaning or purpose of its life, and enhances the quality of its existence.¹¹

Animal spirituality may primarily involve subcortical, affective, extralinguistic, relational, organismic, and phenomenal experiences that do not require conversion to meaning through interpretive cognitive functions. Brooks Pribac defines spirituality as a phenomenon that originates in the body and the ancient brain regions that are shared by humans and other animals. This phenomenon is characterized by a natural inclination of a nonreflective, experiential consciousness that is intrinsically relational and can be best understood in terms of affective vitality.¹² Unlike humans, animals may not reflect on their identity or question the meaning of their existence, as their identity and the meaning of their lives may be self-evident and intuitively comprehended.¹³ If spirituality is defined and scaffolded in this manner, then animals do indeed possess the potential for spiritual experiences.

4 Animals as All Flesh Partners

A.J. Swoboda's concept of Eco-Glossolalia, representing a Spirit-baptized creation and the unity of "all flesh," serves as a foundation for exploring the spiritual dimensions of animals within this framework.¹⁴ Within the context of his Spirit-baptized creation metaphor, Swoboda renders pentecostal pneumatology and its definition of Spirit baptism simply as "immersion."¹⁵ This immersion includes powerful experiences of encounter with the living God.

11 David L. Clough, *On Animals, Theological Ethics*, vol. 2 (London: T&T Clark, 2019), 23.

12 Teja Brooks Pribac, "Spiritual Animal: A Journey into the Unspeakable," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture* 11, no. 3 (2017): 340–360, 340. <https://doi.org/10.1558/jsmc.31519>.

13 Paul Cunningham, "The Case for Animal Spirituality. Part 1: Conceptual Challenges, Methodological Considerations, and the Question of Animal Consciousness," *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature & Culture* 16, no. 2 (April 2022): 186–224, 194.

14 A.J. Swoboda, "Eco-Glossolalia: Emerging Twenty-First Century Pentecostal and Charismatic Ecotheology," *Rural Theology* 9, no. 2 (2011): 103; Swoboda's metaphor is constructed on the communal understanding of Pentecost (as described in Acts 2:17), wherein the Spirit baptizes "all flesh." Swoboda clarifies that his thesis of a Spirit-baptized creation is developed from the creational narratives of Genesis 1–3, a portrait "of God's Spirit giving life and taking life in every element of the created realm." A.J. Swoboda, *Tongues and Trees: Towards a Pentecostal Ecological Theology* (Dorset: Deo Publishing, 2013), 241.

15 Swoboda. *Tongues*, 241.

It includes healing, empowerment for witness, and eschatological preparation, all of which implicate the community of faith. He argues that the holistic Spirit helps us to “conceptualize both the role of the individual in the church and the role of every partner in creation” and to see “the church and creation as holistic bodies that are interdependent and interdynamic.”¹⁶

Swoboda acknowledges that his concept of a Spirit-baptized creation may face challenges when considering the New Testament narrative. According to this narrative, Spirit baptism is linked to ecclesial purposes rather than creational purposes.¹⁷ However, in his development of a “creation pneumatology,” Frank Macchia explains that while the whole earth longs to live for God and reach for God “to the point of groaning in travail for the liberty of the Spirit,” creation requires complete transformation and restoration by the Spirit so that it may come into union with its Creator.¹⁸ Macchia affirms that the ultimate fulfillment of creation is its transformation into “the dwelling place of the Spirit in the image of the risen Christ.”¹⁹

Amos Yong advances the idea of the “Spirit poured out on all flesh” in a far more expansive way. He uses the example of the pneumatological vision of the prophet Isaiah and “links the charismatically anointed Messiah with the healing and reconciliation of creation’s destroying forces.”²⁰ This includes the Spirit poured out on all creaturely flesh, including the wolf and the lamb, the leopard and the kid, “all of whom are included in the blessings of God promised under the covenant of Noah.”²¹

God’s establishment of an eternal covenant with Noah and every living creature of all flesh ensures that “humans are not the only creatures that are addressed by God and called to live lives in response to God.”²² In groaning solidarity with all creatures, the same Spirit that dwells in the risen Christ intercedes on behalf of creation and serves as a guarantee that the future of creation, which is vulnerable to decay, will not be destroyed.²³

16 Swoboda, *Tongues*, 221.

17 Swoboda, *Tongues*, 241. While Swoboda explains that Spirit baptism is unique to Christian experience, he does not entirely disqualify a shared experience by nonhuman agents.

18 Macchia, “The Spirit of Life and the Spirit of Immortality: An Appreciative Review of Levison’s Filled with the Spirit.” *Pneuma* 33, no. 1 (2011): 69–78, 129. <https://doi.org/10.1163/157007411X554721>.

19 Macchia, “The Spirit of Life,” 129.

20 Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 300.

21 Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 300.

22 David L. Clough, *On Animals, Systematic Theology*, 1st ed., 2 vols., vol. 1 (London: T&T Clark, 2014), 41.

23 Matthias Wenk, “An Incarnational Pneumatology Based on Romans 8:18–30: The Spirit as

Building on the covenant established with Noah, Moltmann's profound exposition of "all flesh" extends beyond the confines of human boundaries, encompassing all living beings without discrimination.²⁴ This notion finds resonance in his portrayal of the ultimate manifestation of God's Spirit, whereby humanity undergoes a transformative metamorphosis, collectively becoming a prophetic community. The dynamic effect of the outpouring of God's Spirit reverberates throughout the entire fabric of existence, catalyzing not only the renewal of diverse life forms but also the revitalization of the communal tapestry of living creatures that grace the Earth.

Moltmann's perspective posits that the encounter with God, mobilized by the advent of the Spirit, transcends the limitations of particular individuals, groups, or even species. It extends its embrace to encompass the boundless breadth of creation, embracing "all flesh" in its expansive, creaturely entirety. This expansive vision resonates with his understanding of the Spirit's work that extends beyond the human realm, resonating with every form of life. The integral connection between his concepts and their deep roots in theological discourse can be further illuminated through his interpretations of key passages in Genesis, where the divine covenant with Noah symbolizes a universal bond, extending salvation to all living creatures. Additionally, Moltmann's insights align with the broader biblical context of a God whose care extends to all corners of creation, resonating with the Psalms' vivid descriptions of God's providence over all creatures.

5 Glossolalia as Creaturely Sighs and Groans

Animal glossolalia is a pneumatological idea that furthers AJ Swoboda's metaphorical concept of *Eco-Glossolalia*, which applies to the terrestrial economy of all creation. The term "animal glossolalia" is coined for the purpose of this research, which contends that animals are both witnesses to and active par-

God's Solidarity with a Suffering Creation," *Religions* 13, no. 3 (2022): 21. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel13030191>. Wenk explains that Romans 8:18–30 is centered on the Spirit's solidarity and intercession for a suffering creation that longs for liberation. Paul here is not only concerned with personal character transformation but also with the eschatological liberation of creation, leading to newness of life in fellowship with God's children (Romans 8:21). Although the text does not provide explicit ethical instructions, the broader Pauline context suggests that believers are encouraged to participate in the Spirit's mission in the world, as "the church is to be where the Spirit is, in solidarity with the suffering world." "An Incarnational Pneumatology," 22.

24 Jürgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation* (London: SCM Press, 1999), 57.

ticipants in the shared eschaton through the life-giving Spirit who intercedes their “sighs and groans” as a prayer to the Creator.²⁵ The aim is to construct a framework for animal pneumatology, and by doing so, broaden Swoboda’s idea to consequently position sentient creatures as *actual* Spirit-baptized participants. An implication is that an animal’s sighs and groans, whether intelligible to humans or not, constitute prayer and praise that is interceded by the life-giving Spirit. This is not to say that when a cat meows the mammal is necessarily engaging in prayer, as they may simply be vocalizing a desire to be fed, or to be let outside.²⁶ What I am proposing is that the Spirit can evoke glossolalic prayer within the inner life of animals from which animals can profess deep-rooted expressions of pain or joy.²⁷

Although this premise has not yet been researched through observational methods, animal participation in praise and prayer under the umbrella term of glossolalia can be pneumatologically woven into existing glossolalic definitions notably constructed by pentecostal theologian Frank Macchia and A.J. Swoboda to assist in the construction of a species-inclusive glossolalia.²⁸ As glossolalia is broadened to include animals, it is essential to re-evaluate one’s anthropocentric perspective to expand beyond human experience.

Earlier in this article, it was proposed that the act of worship finds expression across all forms of creation, serving as a means to usher in the kingdom of

25 Swoboda, *Tongues and Trees*, 113.

26 For the psalmist in Psalm 104:21, however, the lions’ incessant roar during the night is interpreted as a plea to God for sustenance. As Eaton explains, the psalmist envisioned a world in which all creatures, including the mighty lion, relied on God for their survival. John Eaton, *The Circle of Creation: Animals in the Light of the Bible* (London: SCM Press, 1995), 52.

27 As Paul writes in Romans 8:22, all creation, including humans, groan *inwardly*, and it is the Spirit that intercedes on all of creation’s behalf.

28 Kenneth Archer simply describes glossolalic prayer as “Spirit-inspired praise and lament.” Kenneth J. Archer, “God—Creation’s Hope, Creation—God’s Home: Pentecostal Theological Response to Terence E. Fretheim’s *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation*,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 19, no. 2 (2010): 198–212, 209. <https://doi.org/10.1163/174552510X526214>. Frank Macchia describes it as a form of “unclassifiable, free speech in response to an unclassifiable, free God.” See Frank D. Macchia, “Sighs Too Deep for Words: Toward a Theology of Glossolalia,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 1, no. 1 (1992): 47–73. Macchia adds that glossolalia must be understood in relation to eschatology, as the unintelligible cries of glossolalia are “yearnings for the redemption and liberation to come,” which includes all of creation. Macchia, “Sighs,” 61–62. While Macchia advocates that glossolalia is the explicit language of the *imago Dei*, I suggest that animals can also communicate prayer and praise through the Spirit, who intercedes on behalf of all creatures. That is, while humans can discern and interpret the transforming power of glossolalic symbols, the Spirit provides a “voice” by interceding with the instinctive “sighs and groans” of animal praise, lament, and desire for liberation to their Creator.

God.²⁹ In light of this, the concept of cosmic worship, embodied as a form of glossolalia, becomes a manifestation of the Spirit's role in bringing forth the kingdom of heaven on Earth. This celestial language, accessible to all creatures, becomes a unifying element in this divine process. What is proposed here, is that while the bearers of the *imago Dei* possess the autonomy to choose whether to engage with their Creator and seek the gift of tongues through the Holy Spirit, nonhuman creatures are inherently linked to the broader cosmic community of the Spirit.³⁰ To scaffold this argument, we begin by positioning glossolalia as a cosmic Spirit language and re-envision it as a pneumatological experience to extend beyond the human experience.

6 Tongues of Angels and the Cosmic Chorus

A correlating perspective comes to light as we take into account passages that refer to glossolalia as a language, or “tongues of angels” (Acts 2:1–4; 1 Cor 12:10, 13:1). To lay the groundwork for this discourse, glossolalia is conceived as a cosmic language of the Spirit wherein the “tongues of angels” is a unique creaturely tongue that harmoniously contributes to the symphony of cosmic worship within creation.

In the ensuing section, we delve into the scholarship of Richard Bauckham concerning the four hybrid angels. John's visionary encounters in Revelation 4:6–9 and Revelation 5:6–14 offer glimpses of these celestial beings encircling the divine throne in heaven. These creatures, described with distinct features—a lion, an ox, a human face, and an eagle—according to Bauckham's interpretation, may symbolize various categories of animate creation, mirroring the four earthly creatures. I propose that these angelic beings partake in what can be termed as “tongues of angels,” a form of cosmic glossolalia that resonates with expressions from both human and nonhuman entities. This notion posits a collective language that transcends conventional verbal communication, prompting a broader perspective on this phenomenon.

Bauckham's perspective underscores that nonhuman creatures, despite their divergence from human consciousness, should be regarded as active par-

29 Isaiah's vision of the peaceable kingdom reinforces the idea that triumph is a collective endeavor, involving every creature. Isaiah 11:6–9.

30 For Bauckham, every creature glorifies God by merely existing and carrying out their divinely assigned duties in God's creation. Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures*, 149–150.

ticipants in the act of worship.³¹ His insights emphasize that many elements of creation, lacking the linguistic capacity for verbal expression or conscious intentionality toward their Creator, inherently contribute to magnifying God simply by fulfilling their intended roles. This intrinsic contribution, stemming from their alignment with their Creator's design, inherently brings glory to God. They are, in essence, fellow members of the community of creation, sharing a common desire to worship their Creator.

Although the theme of creation's worship is not exclusively confined to a single scriptural passage, Bauckham posits that Psalm 148 encapsulates this concept comprehensively. Through a harmonious interplay of celestial beings and diverse categories of earthly creatures, the psalmist beckons the entirety of creation to unite in an anthem of praise directed toward the Lord. It is essential to note that the psalm paints a vivid tableau of creation itself transforming into an orchestra, where every element contributes its unique note to the symphony of God's praises. This symphony, in turn, extends an open invitation to human participants.

A significant portion of worship depicted in the book of Revelation doesn't originate solely from Christians or even humans. Within the celestial realm, God receives adoration from various entities. The four living beings (Rev 4:8; 5:8–9, 14; 19:4), angels (Rev 7:11), and the entirety of heaven (Rev 5:11; 7:11) partake in this worship. A pervasive theme emerges as all of creation joins in worship (Rev 5:13). This imagery serves to highlight the cosmic act of worship of the Creator.

According to Bauckham's interpretation of the book of Revelation, the depiction of each living creature resembles each one of the four earthly creatures and may symbolize distinct categories of animate creation.³² For instance, the creature resembling a lion could represent wild land animals, the one resembling an ox could represent domestic land animals, the one resembling an eagle could represent birds, and the one with a humanlike face could represent humans.³³ Interestingly, while one of the living creatures in Revelation has a human face, the other three are affiliated with other major categories of animal creation. For Bauckham, this portrayal suggests that humans

31 Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures*, 221–222.

32 John's vision in Revelation 4:6–9 and Revelation 5:6–14 includes the depiction of four living creatures surrounding the throne of God in heaven. These creatures are described with distinct appearances resembling a lion, an ox, a human face, and an eagle.

33 Bauckham, "Creation's Praise of God in the Book of Revelation," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 38, no. 2 (May 1, 2008): 55–63, 60. <https://doi.org/10.1177/01461079080380020201>.

do not hold a privileged or superior position among creatures.³⁴ The humanlike creature is simply one among the four, not listed first or given precedence. As creatures participating in the worship of God, humans are not set above other creatures but, rather, stand alongside them, sharing in the common worship of their mutual Creator.³⁵ This correlation suggests that each entity, regardless of its position or nature, plays a role in the broader cosmic worship of God. The idea that humans stand alongside other creatures in worship rather than being elevated above them reinforces the sense of unity and shared devotion in the cosmic worship paradigm.

To situate glossolalia in the context of cosmic language, it is suggested that glossolalia functions as a means of communication that surpasses the limits of conventional linguistic confines. This concept underscores the idea that worship transcends the boundaries of human verbal expression. Much like glossolalia bridges the divide between the verbal and nonverbal realms, cosmic worship can be envisioned as a harmonious symphony of expressions emanating from every facet of creation. This harmony finds resonance in the angelic beings partaking in the “tongues of angels,” implying that even nonhuman entities play a role in the grand chorus of worship.

John Poirier’s research makes a fascinating connection between the liturgical jubilus and the belief in esoteric angelic languages, suggesting that glossolalia may be akin to a form of clandestine angelic communication.³⁶ This idea gains further credence from the historical association of “alleluia,” a liturgical

34 Bauckham, “Creation’s Praise of God in the Book of Revelation,” 62.

35 Yong compliments this idea of a shared spiritual and material realm. He writes, “The spiritual realms are intertwined both ontologically and epistemologically. Regarding the former, the Spirit both hovers over the waters of creation and gives the breath of life; the human is intimately and intricately connected with the orders of creation.” Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 300.

36 Poirier’s term “liturgical jubilus” refers to a joyful and exultant expression of praise and worship within the context of religious liturgy, particularly in Christian traditions. In the ancient world, there was a widespread belief that gods, angels, demons, and other divine beings spoke languages that were not used by humans, except in magical practices or ecstatic states. John C. Poirier, *The Tongues of Angels: The Concept of Angelic Languages in Classical Jewish and Christian Texts*, Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 2 (Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck GmbH & Co. KG, 2010), 1. In his book, Poirier highlights two key points. First, Jewish and Christian sources exhibit varying views on the language spoken by angels, debating whether angels used Hebrew or had their own distinct language. Additionally, Paul’s words in 1 Corinthians 13 and 2 Corinthians 12 cannot be attributed to any known Jewish or Christian sources, suggesting unique perspectives on angelic languages. Furthermore, Paul’s writings generally have limited content on angels or demons.

expression of praise in Christian worship, with angelic adoration.³⁷ This novel concept, termed “angeloglossy,” expands the existing frameworks of human glossolalic language and angelic esoteric languages.

Poirier’s findings also indicate how esoteric angelic languages could enrich our understanding of glossolalia, proposing that this Spirit-infused voice extends beyond human experience to encompass both celestial and terrestrial sentient beings.

Furthermore, the parallels between human and angelic languages, along with the introduction of the “angeloglossy” concept, invite us to adopt a more inclusive perspective on communication between diverse orders of creation and the divine. This suggests that the language of worship transcends human boundaries, encompassing the full spectrum of sentient beings. Just as angels engage in worship through their distinct language reflective of their nature, so do animals, plants, and other forms of life express their devotion through their inherent characteristics.

Transitioning from Bauckham’s and Poirier’s perspectives on angelic praise, we encounter a striking parallel in Paul’s thought, where the focus shifts to the collective engagement of all creatures as depicted in Romans 8:20–22. For Paul, there exists an interdependence between nature and humanity rooted in their shared identity as creatures of God, rather than a position of humans dominating nature. In a feminist reading of Romans, McGinn notes Paul’s emphasis on eschatological vision and the obstacle preventing its realization. For Paul, the obstacle is not inherent to creation itself, but rather lies within the deficiencies of humanity. Human salvation remains incomplete, “and creation waits for its sibling.”³⁸ Upon humans being embraced as God’s children and inheriting God’s freedom and glory, creation will similarly find fulfillment through the liberty and magnificence of God. Paul’s insight into the ultimate purpose of creation is crucial; without it, his claims regarding creation’s active role in human salvation would lack coherence.

37 Poirier, *The Tongues of Angels*, 140.

38 McGinn, “All Creation Groans in Labour: Paul’s Theology of Creation in Romans 8:18–23,” in *Earth, Wind and Fire: Biblical and Theological Perspectives on Creation*, ed. Carol J. Dempsey and Mary Margaret Pazdan (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2004), 114–123, 122.

7 Sighs Too Deep for Words

The task of reenvisioning the scope of glossolalia must begin with Frank Macchia's definition of glossolalia as vocal expressions akin to sighs and groans for the nonverbal dimension of glossolalic speech. In his article "Sighs Too Deep for Words: Toward a Theology of Glossolalia," Macchia refers to the biblical concept of "sighs and groans" to describe the experience of glossolalia, which he defines as a form of prayer that goes beyond the borders of human language. Macchia argues that glossolalia is a manifestation of the Holy Spirit, who intercedes for us with "sighs too deep for words" (Romans 8:26). He suggests that glossolalia allows believers to participate in the Spirit's intercession, as they offer prayers in a language that surpass their own understanding, a language that can be expressed as sighs and groans.³⁹ Macchia highlights the significance of recognizing glossolalia as a spiritual and transcendent occurrence rather than limiting it to a solely linguistic or psychological encounter.⁴⁰

Macchia underscores the idea that our glossolalic prayers should harmoniously blend with the collective voice of the groaning creation. For him, glossolalia isn't detached from the world's suffering but rather serves as a heart-

39 Macchia, "Sighs," 59. One intriguing aspect of how early Pentecostals interpreted Romans 8:26 is the phenomenological descriptions provided by those who claimed to have personally experienced what Paul described. For instance, some interpreted Paul's use of the language of groaning in Romans 8:23, 24, and 26 as a literal expression of groaning that they themselves experienced. They believed that this groaning was most evident during times of deep prayer and intercession.

McGraw found that glossolalia was associated with decreased blood flow (perfusion) in the brain's frontal lobes. This decrease in blood flow aligned with the subjects' reported lack of intentional control over their glossolalia, suggesting that it was not a consciously controlled activity. The implications of this finding extend to theories about the frontal lobes' role in consciousness and volition, indicating that the reduced frontal lobe activity during glossolalia may support the notion that it is not consciously controlled. This finding may shed light on the neural mechanisms underlying altered states of consciousness and spontaneous vocalizations in religious or spiritual contexts. John J. McGraw, "Tongues of Men and Angels: Assessing the Neural Correlates of Glossolalia," in *Religion and the Body*, ed. David Cave and Rebecca Sachs Norris, Modern Science and the Construction of Religious Meaning (Leiden: Brill, 2011), 57–80, 61. Therefore, it could be argued that animals may experience transcendence through glossolalia, expressing their creaturely nature without the need for consciousness as a prerequisite for their participation.

40 Within this context, Macchia describes Cyril Williams's view of tongues (or glossolalia) as a form of "mysticism of sound" that can represent a connection with the divine. Macchia, "Sighs," 52.

felt expression of yearning for the deliverance of a suffering creation.⁴¹ When human freedom is experienced through the Spirit, it should be a freedom dedicated to the emancipation of all of creation.⁴²

In situating eschatology as the context for Spirit-baptism, one could argue that unity with our co-creatures becomes a central aspect of God's divine renewal in the eschaton.⁴³ If glossolalic sighs and groans don't convey intellectual messages but instead stir the Spirit's transformative work within, then why should this profound experience be confined to only one species? Since God's covenant extends to every living creature, not exclusively to humans, it's plausible that all creatures engage in prayer and praise with the Creator Spirit through their unique vocalizations, including their sighs and groans.⁴⁴

Animals, much like humans, possess distinct modes of communication that may elude human understanding. In a manner akin to how humans communicate with God through glossolalia, one can envision the communication of animals taking on a similar participatory role, akin to what can be described as an "animal glossolalia."

Considering animals, the concept of "primal spirituality," as defined by Harvey Cox, offers insight into the inherent spiritual or instinctual aspects of animals that transcend religious doctrines and ceremonies, connecting them to a fundamental sense of spirituality. Cox articulates primal spirituality as a means of describing glossolalia as an innate spiritual expression that transcends religious dogma and rituals. The notion of glossolalia as primal speech explores a form of preverbal communication akin to that observed in infants. By emphasizing the foundational spirituality within Pentecostalism, Cox suggests that glossolalia liberates Christianity from the constraints influenced by Greco-Roman cultural formalities. When applied to nonhuman creatures, this concept implies that animals possess a direct and unfiltered connection to the Spirit, unencumbered by human-made structures. For animals, this connection could foster an intimate relationship with God distinct to their nonhuman nature, as they engage in a free and instinctual form of connection with the Spirit.⁴⁵

41 Macchia, "Sighs," 69.

42 Macchia, "Sighs," 69.

43 For Macchia, the phenomenon of glossolalia is evidence that such transformation has already begun, both among us and in creation. Macchia, "Sighs," 70. He states, "Here we have an eschatology that incorporates transcendent experience with the realities of our creaturely and historical existence, transforming this existence with the promise of redemption, a promise that includes all of creation." Macchia, "Sighs," 60.

44 Clough, *On Animals, Systematic Theology*, 41.

45 Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the 21st Century* (Boston, MA: Da Capo Press, 2001), 81.

By categorizing glossolalia as creaturely sighs and groans, the approach seeks to identify commonalities within the glossolalic experience that can be extended to a broader cross-creaturely context. The objective is to emphasize that, while humans can discern and interpret the transformative potential of glossolalic symbols, the Spirit may convey a spiritual voice by intervening in the innate “sighs and groans” of animal expressions encompassing praise, lament, and the longing for freedom directed toward the Creator. Through a pneumatological perspective, the focus extends beyond the human realm of glossolalia, delving into how the Spirit communicates with and serves as a mediator for nonhuman creatures.

8 Glossolalia and the Liberation of Creation

For Macchia, Pentecost and glossolalia signal a profound connection between the language of liberation and unity with the new creation. He asserts that Spirit-baptism establishes the framework for the “church’s identification with Christ’s redemptive order.”⁴⁶

Macchia adds that the Spirit disrupts deeply ingrained prejudices such as classism, sexism, and racism.⁴⁷ Additionally, we can include speciesism as another dimension of this disruption for the liberation of a suffering creation. If we consider eschatology as the context for Spirit-baptism in preparation for a renewed creation, it becomes reasonable to argue that unity with our fellow creatures should be prioritized in God’s divine act in the eschaton.⁴⁸

Viewing creation as a community carries profound implications for how humans perceive their identity. Humans are intended to engage in reciprocal relationships of giving and receiving, with God as the central focus, recognizing that all beings in the evolving world share the intrinsic quality of being creatures. In essence, humans and other animals, despite their distinctions, fundamentally share the same identity as creations belonging to the same generous

46 Macchia, “Sighs,” 54. See also Cartledge, *Charismatic Glossolalia: An Empirical-Theology Study* (Farnham, UK: Ashgate, 2002) 188. Cartledge describes glossolalia as giving “expression to a longing for God’s Kingdom to be consummated here on earth.”

47 Macchia, “Sighs,” 66.

48 For Macchia, the phenomenon of glossolalia is evidence that such transformation has already begun, both among us and in creation. Macchia, “Sighs,” 70. He states, “Here we have an eschatology that incorporates transcendent experience with the realities of our creaturely and historical existence, transforming this existence with the promise of redemption, a promise that includes all of creation.” Macchia, “Sighs,” 60.

God and participating in a unified community. This perspective encourages us to perceive animals as kin within the Spirit.⁴⁹

Traditionally, Spirit-baptism (often expressed through tongues) is centered on the divine healing of human relationships within the community. However, human prejudices and divisions extend beyond discrimination among one creaturely species. The concept of glossolalia as a transformative experience that influences social relationships could extend to animals and the suffering endured by nonhuman creatures due to human actions.⁵⁰ It is suggested that if believers receive spiritual gifts to intercede for creation, then the Spirit, as the animating force in animal life, may also intercede on behalf of all creatures through glossolalia, fostering a synergistic relationship that contributes to the liberation of creation in a shared eschaton.

If animals were to express praise and worship to their Creator through the indwelling presence of the Spirit, one of their creaturely functions could involve a desire for *koinonia*, expressed through their glossolalic manifestations of sighs and groans.⁵¹ In this shared solidarity with all creatures, the same Spirit dwelling in the risen Christ intercedes on behalf of creation, serving as a guarantee that the vulnerable future of creation, susceptible to decay, will be preserved and not destroyed.⁵²

49 Johnson, "Animals' Praise of God," *Interpretation* 73, no. 3 (July 2019): 259–271, 267. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020964319838804>.

50 This would include the effects of global warming in the environment which is attributed to human activities.

51 As Archer states, "creation's participation in God's coming brings about its own liberation." Archer, *God—Creation's Hope*, 211. Although some of the charisms (1Cor 12:4–11) are poured out to empower believers in their evangelization or personal edification, all of the gifts are intended to provide service in order to help build *koinonia*. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, "Spirit, Reconciliation and Healing in the Community: Missiological Insights from Pentecostals," *International Review of Mission* 94, no. 372 (January 2005): 43–50, 48. The charismata reveal how human existence is never fulfilled in isolation and that God's "creation facilitates humanity's relationship with God." Andrew Ray Williams, "Greening the Apocalypse: A Pentecostal Eco-Eschatological Exploration," *PentecoStudies* 17, no. 2 (2018): 205–229, 227. Althouse suggests that the charismatic presence of the Spirit presupposes a kenosis of Spirit, as "a sacrifice for the other; and likewise, the Spirit empowers us to be servants for the kingdom, participating with God in his mission to reconcile the whole world." Peter Althouse, "Implications of the Kenosis of the Spirit for a Creational Eschatology," in *The Spirit Renews the Face of the Earth: Pentecostal Forays in Science and Theology of Creation*, ed. Amos Yong (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2009), 171. In terms of animals' participation through prayer and praise, it could be argued that Old Testament animal sacrifice under the Mosaic Law points to one example of the contributions made by animals as participants in God's mission to reconcile the world.

52 Wenk, "An Incarnational Pneumatology," 21. Wenk explains that Romans 8:18–30 is cen-

9 Balaam's Donkey and Glossolalic Speech

What is the significance of animal voice? In Numbers 21:32, a donkey is granted the temporary ability to speak. Perhaps this demonstrates that God deems the voice of animals important. The story of Balaam's donkey offers a unique expression of intelligible lament from a nonhuman creature within the biblical text. In this story, God not only utilizes a donkey's natural behavior but also bestows upon her miraculous abilities to serve his purposes.⁵³

In this account, the angel of the Lord is explicitly hostile toward Balaam, warning the prophet that he should only speak the words of Yahweh. In contrast, such animosity is not extended toward the creature, as the donkey also rebukes Balaam. It is evident that the donkey possesses a unique status akin to that of the angel of Yahweh, as both angel and donkey function as agents of God, communicating to Balaam in a mutually complementary manner.⁵⁴

The mechanism of the donkey's temporary faculty of speech directly relates to the admonished human. It is plausible that the miraculous verbal exchange between species points us to an Old Testament glossolalic occurrence wherein a possible manifestation of either *xenolalia* or *akolalia* could have occurred during this event.⁵⁵

This could mean that either glossolalia or *xenolalia* is evidenced by the speaker, where the donkey verbalizes a language foreign to her intrinsic consti-

tered on the Spirit's solidarity and intercession for a suffering creation that longs for liberation. Paul here is not only concerned with personal character transformation but also with the eschatological liberation of creation, leading to newness of life in fellowship with God's children (Romans 8:21). Although the text does not provide explicit ethical instructions, the broader Pauline context suggests that believers are encouraged to participate in the Spirit's mission in the world, as "the church is to be where the Spirit is, in solidarity with the suffering world." Wenk, "An Incarnational Pneumatology," 22.

53 The significance of the biblical narrative where a donkey acquires the momentary faculty of speech in relation to the prophet Balaam suggests that God "not only employs [the donkey's] natural behaviour for his purposes [but] he also endows her with his supernatural ability for his purposes." Kenneth C. Way, "Animals in the Prophetic World: Literary Reflections on Numbers 22 and 1Kings 13," *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 34, no. 1 (September 2009): 53.

54 Way, "Animals in the Prophetic World," 54.

55 According to Yong, *akolalia* refers to a miraculous act of hearing, in which a prophetic message is conveyed to the listener through the vehicle of human language spoken in glossolalic utterance. This message is specific to the listener and is comprehended by them. In contrast, *xenolalia* involves a glossolalic speaker being enabled to speak in a language that is unfamiliar to them. Amos Yong, "The Truth of Tongues Speech: A Rejoinder to Frank Macchia," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 6, no. 13 (October 1998): 106–115, 108–109. <https://doi.org/10.1177/096673699800601306>.

tution. Or *akolalia* is experienced by the hearer, where the prophet Balaam can understand the donkey's vocalization as a comprehensible spoken language.

While this passage can be unpacked further, one important point is made clear. That is, in her own emotional protest of ill-treatment, Balaam's donkey embodies the suffering and distress that torments all nonhuman creatures, whose grievances generally are restricted to sighs and groans.⁵⁶

In contrast to this human imposed suffering, we look to Jesus's triumphant entry into Jerusalem. Dignity is bestowed on the donkey ridden by the Messiah.⁵⁷ Animals, too, find hope in their creaturely Messiah, the lamb of God.

10 Implications of Animal Glossolalia

Implications of animal glossolalia carry profound theological significance, building upon the foundation of a prophesying creation. As illuminated by Muers and Griffiths, the theological underpinnings of nonverbal prophetic expressions expand our understanding of prophecy beyond a strictly anthropocentric perspective, acknowledging that the prophetic voice is not limited to humans but extends to sentient nonhuman creatures.

This concept gains even greater depth through the lens of animal glossolalia. This conceptual framework substantiates the notion that animals can engage in prophetic expression within the paradigm of animal glossolalia.⁵⁸ Glossolalia, functioning as a cosmic mode of communication or an ecumenical

⁵⁶ In relation to this subject, Klaus Koch performs a brief but interesting study of Hosea 2:21–22. He suggests that the Hebrew verb *anah*, which means “answer,” may also have a sense of “to respond in a discussion” and can refer to nonverbal reactions, providing new impulses from one subject to another within a given relationship. Hosea's description of a coherent chain in which God acts in interdependence with earth, creature, human, and nation reflects a “sociology of nature.” This indicates that the natural world is a network of interconnected creatures held together by divine interaction with them. Fretheim, “Nature's Praise of God in the Psalms,” *Ex Auditu* 3 (1987): 16–30, 26.

⁵⁷ Mark 11:4–7 explains that the Messiah's colt is untied, which adds an additional layer to the animal's liberation.

⁵⁸ For Macchia, the tongues spoken at Pentecost stand as the initial ecumenical language of the church. This first ecumenical language did not derive from Greek or Latin origins. Rather, the tongues manifested at Pentecost underscore the notion that no singular language can assert absolute supremacy when it comes to comprehending truth. These tongues, symbolizing unity, encompass the entirety of languages found under the heavens (Acts 2:5). See Macchia, “Babel and the Tongues of Pentecost: Reversal or Fulfilment? A Theological Perspective,” in *Speaking in Tongues: Multi-Disciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Mark J. Cartledge (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 47.

language of the Spirit, provides a compelling rationale for animals to partake in prophetic discourse.⁵⁹ This perspective unfolds the idea that the tongues of Pentecost symbolize the inaugural ecumenical language of the church, transcending linguistic boundaries and emphasizing the inclusive embrace of all languages under heaven.

Moreover, this concept invites us to consider that the scope of this ecumenical language is not limited to the human voice alone but extends to the nonhuman voice as well. Just as Spirit baptism is manifested through a diverse array of tongues, each yearning for redemption, the multifaceted expression of animal glossolalia underscores the limitations of human language in fully encapsulating the mysteries of the Spirit. This hints at a cosmic language of the spirit that transcends the confines of human communication, offering a profound glimpse into the intricate relationship between the divine, the natural world, and the mysteries that lie beyond our comprehension.

11 Conclusion

Animal glossolalia, rooted in pneumatological imagination, reveals a profound dimension of spirituality in the nonhuman realm. This perspective invites us to consider animals not merely as passive beings within creation but as active participants in the divine narrative, offering their own unique forms of praise, lament, and even prophecy. The indwelling Spirit, as the conduit of this spiritual communication, intercedes on behalf of all creatures, underscoring the universality of their connection to the Creator. This inclusive view challenges traditional anthropocentric boundaries and beckons us to recognize the cosmic chorus of worship and spiritual expression that encompasses all animals in the grand symphony of creation.

59 Macchia states, "Spirit baptism implied that the Spirit's redemptive and empowering work is to be experienced and expressed in a vast diversity of tongues that groan for the redemption to come (Rom 8:26), revealing the ultimate inadequacy of human thought and speech to express the divine mystery." Macchia, "Baptized in the Spirit: Towards a Global Theology of Spirit Baptism," in *The Spirit in the World: Emerging Pentecostal Theologies in Global Contexts*, ed. Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2009), 10.