

MOVING BETWEEN WORLDS: EMBODIED LITURGY IN
PENTECOSTAL CHURCHES

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Introduction

Imagine visiting your friend's church for the first time. Immediately you notice something different about the worship: At first, everyone is clapping with shoulders bouncing up and down and feet shuffling side to side. The music is louder than what you are used to, and the worship leader is actively encouraging people to raise their voices unto the Lord. During the second song, you begin hearing multiple people mutter unintelligible utterances—some under their breath, others real loud with their eyes closed. Meanwhile, everyone's hands are raised above their heads, with some swaying side to side, and others even stomping in place with faces oriented to the floor. The intensity of the various bodily movements and sounds you see and hear fluctuates slightly throughout the remainder of songs, but during the last one, you see some people on their knees, and others pacing back and forth in a dance-like rhythm in the aisle next to you. You do not know for sure, but you think that maybe the lights in the sanctuary got dimmer, and you know that the music definitely got quieter.

As the music fades and the worship team lays down their instruments, you see people who had journeyed beyond their rows migrate back to their seats. You see some people hugging each other as they sit back down, and some still sniffing as they wipe their faces with tissues. If you have never been in this sort of environment before, this experience may feel unusual to you. Perhaps it even makes you feel uncomfortable. Yet this environment is completely normal for your friend and for those who worship

in that church. This is only a glimpse of what the Pentecostal worship experience is like.

Embodiment and bodily experiences play important roles in Pentecostal liturgy, as worship in this context is a full-body experience that engages with God through active participation and movement. This is something I can attest to, given my own lived experience as someone raised in different Pentecostal churches. Though I no longer attend one, those experiences have shaped me as a worshipper. Additionally, as a professionally trained dancer, I believe in the important role the body has in worship and in encountering God, since movement and bodily experiences can be powerful for both the person engaged with them and for those who observe. As such, this paper seeks to demonstrate that the body is the point that connects the inner worlds of believers to the external world of God, which is in some way contingent on being in community with others. A phenomenological framework will be used to examine the various forms of the Pentecostal body as it relates to encounter, music, movement, surrender, and interaction.

Before proceeding, I must make an important distinction. Throughout this paper, I will be referring to the “Pentecostal body.” This term is not meant to exclude bodies from other Christian traditions; rather, it is meant to be an exemplar of the typical Pentecostal experience that may or may not be transferable across other church liturgies. This is fitting, since the scope of this paper is restricted to Pentecostal worship. However, I do acknowledge that some of what will be attributed as “Pentecostal” may also be experienced by other Christian bodies—to which Pentecostalism is not necessarily a requirement for the experiences that will be examined. Therefore, I encourage readers to reflect on these experiences and discern how their own bodies might be used—or may have been used already—in their own liturgical contexts.

The Phenomenological Body: Theoretical Considerations

Before exploring the various aspects of Pentecostal embodiment, it is foundational to review the theoretical considerations of how

the body experiences and perceives itself and the world. According to Jean-Luc Marion, the body is constantly doing *something*; whether it is allowing a person to feel, perceive, or simply experience the world.¹ This is consistent with Maurice Merleau-Ponty's view that experiences contain intimate inner communication with the world, body, and others.² To expand on this, James K. A. Smith describes the body as always *constituting* the world, which likewise affirms Merleau-Ponty's other notion that bodily movement is what allows the world to exist, and for us to be conscious of it. Ultimately, the body is not merely my *object* as much as it is my *background*—the viewpoint from which I can view the world and encounter its many objects.³

This idea that inner worlds can meet outer ones through the body is solidified in Georg Hegel's explanation that the body is a "nexus" of a person's reality and being—that the outer whole belongs to a person's innate being.⁴ Philip Kain expands on this to mean that the material and spiritual worlds align with our individual consciousnesses.⁵ This, I argue, is the reason why we can become familiar with God's world—especially if we take God to be our object of consciousness in worship. For instance, if we apply these phenomenological ideas to a church context, then the body becomes a mode in which we can experience God's world beyond ourselves.⁶ Over time, these experiences allow us to become familiar with it. This is grounded in Merleau-Ponty's example of moving around our house. When we do, we know it without needing to think about it, since each gesture "is immediately located in relation to a great number of possible coordinates."⁷

1. Marion, *In Excess*, 87.

2. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, 99.

3. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, 73, 84, 94; Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 88–89, 92.

4. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 152–53.

5. Kain, *Hegel*, 110.

6. See also Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 94.

7. Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology*, 131.

Moreover, embodiment reminds us of the concrete world—particularly the presence of others.⁸ Therefore, embodiment is deeply communal. In fact, Hegel claims that a self-conscious being can only exist because of the self-consciousness of others. Therefore, how I construct myself is dependent on others.⁹ Even in the phenomenology of dance, Sondra Fraleigh affirms that the notion of self depends on the notion of others.¹⁰ Throughout this paper, these communal implications will be significant.

The Encountered Pentecostal Body

In light of the phenomenological considerations of body, we can begin to think how this applies to Pentecostal worship by first outlining some Pentecostal assumptions. To start, believers “become” Pentecostal through particular practices and rituals that shape the body. This signifies that particular bodily participation and engagement are a part of the formative Pentecostal experience. Michael Wilkinson believes this causes the believer to, in turn, embody the cultural assumptions and theological beliefs that undergird these practices.¹¹ While his point may not be true in every case, it does provide a segue for understanding how the body is the site where spiritual experience is “portable and authoritative,” and the location in which the presence of the Holy Spirit can be encountered in tangible ways¹²—something that my own experience would say is reflective of a Pentecostal’s broader culture and theology.

Pentecostal ritual is largely embodied, but it is also incredibly sensory. In Pentecostal liturgy, therefore, bodies act, feel, and sense ritualistically—something that will be more concretely explored in the following sections.¹³ Furthermore, just as our self-constructions depend on others, so do the ritual aesthetics of

8. Strathern, *Body Thoughts*, 2.

9. Hegel, *Phenomenology*, 91; Kain, *Hegel*, 41 (cf. 42, 134).

10. Fraleigh, “Vulnerable Glance,” 15.

11. Wilkinson, “Pentecostalism,” 22; “Worship,” 120.

12. Brahinsky, “Pentecostal Body Logics,” 217, 222; Neumann, “Experience,” 92; Wilkinson, “Worship,” 122.

13. Björkander, *Worship*, 222.

Pentecostal worship. Such aesthetics (i.e., what is being heard, smelled, seen, or touched) are embodied, sensual experiences since they include the ways in which Pentecostals move with respect to others. In a way, one's own worship experience may be informed by the ritualistic context of someone else.¹⁴

It is clear, then, that for Pentecostals, God is deeply concerned with the body.¹⁵ This may find additional support in Daniela Augustine's discussion on the connection between Christ's Incarnation and God's redemptive plan for humanity. According to her, the only reason why faith can be grounded in experience is because of the Incarnation: God is concerned with the body in such a way that the Word himself became an embodied human, ultimately allowing humanity to be transformed into one that is Spirit-filled. Therefore, Christ's Incarnation allows for the human body to be the "preeminent place of divine revelation and encounter," and so the Holy Spirit is able to meet us in the tangible practices that serve as conduits of God's transformative power in worship.¹⁶ Furthermore, it is through the Incarnation that matter—including the human body—participates in the redemption of the cosmos.¹⁷ While Pentecostal worship is viewed as having a redemptive component,¹⁸ it is the body that God uses not only for encounter with his church, but also for her transformation. As Smith explains that our "incarnating God" continually meets us where we are, believers are invited to experience encounter and transformation whenever they are called to inhabit the concrete rituals where the Holy Spirit waits to meet us.¹⁹

One of the ways researchers try to make sense of how these Pentecostal experiences occur during worship is through their own phenomenological approaches. Wilkinson explains that Pentecostals learn their worship through the tactile experiences

14. Ryle, "Laying our Sins and Sorrows," 73.

15. Neumann, "Experience," 91.

16. D. Augustine, "Embodiment," 180, 183; Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 45.

17. D. Augustine, "Embodiment," 184.

18. D. Augustine, "Embodiment," 189.

19. Smith, *Imagining the Kingdom*, 45.

of their rituals, which molds into something he calls the “kines-thetic body.”²⁰ However, such learning does not happen passively since active participation in these rituals allows the shaping of the realities of Pentecostals.²¹ There seems to be a general consensus, as demonstrated by Tanya Luhrman’s team, that in order for the Pentecostal body to experience God it must undergo some learning and training in order to gain more powerful sensory experiences.²²

Likewise, Josh Brahinsky claims that such sensations do not come without time and effort,²³ which may be described as the learned techniques used to identify the presence of God through one’s body. Luhrmann calls this process “metakinesis,” a term often used in dance criticism to account for how emotional experience is sustained in a person’s body.²⁴ While I am hesitant to completely agree that all tangible experiences in Pentecostal worship are simply learned behaviour, I do believe this idea of “learning” can be science’s way of describing a Pentecostal exhortation I commonly heard: We as worshippers must be intentional about being attuned to the way God moves.

Furthermore, Luhrmann’s team draws from the work of Thomas Csordas, who has become known for his notion of “somatic mode of attention.” Such modes, he describes, are culturally informed ways of attending to and with one’s own body amidst other surrounding bodies. He calls this an “intersubjective milieu,”²⁵ and Daniel Albrecht explains this partly by demonstrating how believers collectively represent “living icons” that “suggest” particular forms of worship through gestures and behaviours. This, in turn, produces the enactment of ritual.²⁶ This buttresses Hegel’s idea that our bodies are not isolated from others; rather, they are dependent on them since we live in a

20. Wilkinson, “Pentecostalism,” 22. See also Luhrmann et al., “Absorption Hypothesis,” 67.

21. Scandrett-Leatherman, “Can Social Scientists Dance?” 163.

22. Luhrmann et al., “Absorption Hypothesis,” 66.

23. Brahinsky, “Pentecostal Body Logics,” 223.

24. Luhrmann, “Metakinesis,” 519.

25. Csordas, “Somatic Modes,” 139.

26. Albrecht, *Rites*, 142.

shared intersubjective milieu that prompts us to pay attention to their bodies.²⁷

The Musical Pentecostal Body

At your friend's church, you notice bodies moving differently between the different songs used in worship. During the first song, people clap and smile, and perhaps you catch yourself inadvertently doing a little step-touch with your feet. By the last song, you notice bodies quiet down as they sway gently with closed eyes. What you are experiencing is Pentecostal "musical bodies," something referred to by Peter Althouse and Michael Wilkinson that accounts for music's ability to cause emotional entrainment between bodies.

Even from a secular vantage point, one can generally observe the power music has on emotional and physical expression. To be sure, there is a difference in the effect music has on bodies when it is recorded versus when it is played live. Findings from one neurological study led by Wiebke Trost show that recorded music certainly makes it possible for emotions to be derived and modulated over time. However, this type of music, and its effects, appears to be static. In other words, live music does what recorded music cannot; because of its dynamic nature, live musicians are able to dynamically adapt and enhance a listener's response on an individual level due to the music's ability to more directly influence emotional responses. Part of what makes this process more dynamic is the way in which musicians might also respond musically to their audience, and vice versa.²⁸

In other words, there seems to be some sort of "call and response," with listeners and musicians feeding off the emotional responses from one another. According to Trost and her team, only live music leads to an intimate coupling between musical performance and the subsequent emotional responses evoked in its listeners. As such, this becomes a central mechanism for mu-

27. Csordas, "Somatic Modes," 139. See also Fraleigh, "Vulnerable Glance," 15.

28. Trost et al., "Live Music," 8.

sic as a social entrainment process.²⁹ Mark Reybrouck extends this further when he argues that for music to generate meaning, there is a continual process of dynamic interactions between listeners and the created music. This requires active engagement, a process he refers to as “musical sense-making.”³⁰ This kind of dynamic and social entrainment experience can be observed in most contemporary music concerts. In fact, it is possible that the social entrainment described here might be related to the deepening of existing bonds between concertgoers, as well as the enhanced sense of broadened community, emotional resonance, and shared rituals experienced at such events.³¹

Physical experiences are also likely to be shared by concertgoers. For example, there might be specific ways the body adorns itself (e.g., particular dress codes typically seen at rock concerts), but more relevant to our purposes is the shared synchronization that the bodies of concertgoers experience with certain rituals. For instance, a heightened sense of connection and togetherness might be experienced at electronic dance concerts where bodies rhythmically align themselves in particular dance-like movements. This might look like jumping up and down to the beat all together, with fists punching the air over one’s head.³²

Certainly, then, it is believed that music cultivates embodied experiences. Therefore, it can be said that the Pentecostal body is the site for receiving music, which involves accompanied action (e.g., swaying, dancing).³³ While not the same as secular music concerts, music still has the ability to stir the embodied human and to play a vital role in the rituals of Pentecostal worship.³⁴ For instance, music may have a pervasive role in the structural

29. Trost et al., “Live Music,” 10.

30. Reybrouck, “Music as Experience,” 277.

31. Rickard et al., “Unifying Power,” 596–97, 604–5. Rickard et al. also discuss the liminal spaces created at concerts, which provide transitional opportunities for concertgoers to explore their self and social identities.

32. Rickard et al., “Unifying Power,” 596–97, 606.

33. Althouse and Wilkinson, “Musical Bodies,” 31, 33.

34. Althouse and Wilkinson, “Musical Bodies,” 30; Cooper, “Worship Rituals,” 92.

contexts in which we move (i.e., Pentecostal liturgy), thereby demonstrating how music may be central to the rituals that turn embodied subjects (i.e., Pentecostal bodies) into moral collectivities (i.e., spiritual transformation via worship). Naturally, then, music has the power to shape communal behaviour,³⁵ similar to how it might at concerts. The only difference here is that while believers receive the same positive effects as do concertgoers, they receive even more since they are also encountering the living God.

In furthering the discussion on Pentecostal music, lyrics may also influence embodied experiences. In his study, Michael Tapper used lyrical analysis to examine what precisely is being sung in popular contemporary worship songs used by PAOC (Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada) churches. His results showed that many of the lyrics describe present-tense verbal actions (e.g., “rise,” “come,” or “bow”). Such verbal actions do not all necessarily express worship of God as much as they describe the *act* of worship.³⁶ Therefore, such lyrics may influence the bodily posture of the worshipper, especially if singing requires certain “body techniques” that forge into a “palpable body discipline.”³⁷ For example, at the word “come,” a Pentecostal body may extend both arms forty five degrees laterally with supinated palms; or, at the word “bow,” it may incline its head, covering the heart with a hand.

In conjunction with this comes the observed musical progression and shifts in atmospheric mood that facilitate bodily experience, since things like rhythm, beat, meter, and tone have a phenomenological relationship to bodily interaction and movement.³⁸ For instance, some scholars have noted worship transitions marked by musical shifts; music may begin as joyfully celebrative and be reliant on drums for an upbeat, and then shift to

35. Shilling, *Body*, 118, 128.

36. Tapper, “What Are We Singing?” 169–71, 173.

37. Shilling, *Body*, 120.

38. Althouse and Wilkinson, “Musical Bodies,” 33. See also Cooper, “Worship Rituals,” 81.

that which is solemn, slow, and contemplative.³⁹ Therefore, a Pentecostal worship service leader will select an opening song that is fast and upbeat, thereby facilitating praise both marked by bodily excitement and high energy, and influenced by the entrainment between the song's rhythm and that of the body's.⁴⁰ Additionally, when people begin to clap and "loosen up," Travis Cooper observes that worshippers take in their surroundings—namely, they notice the bodies they are about to worship alongside.⁴¹

After reaching the climax of the worship service's crescendo, things begin to slow down; bodies begin to relinquish some of their energy and quiet down, with some having closed eyes, looking upward toward the ceiling, or gently rocking side to side with slow waving hands. Ultimately, as melodies begin to slow down, so do bodies in their enhanced adoration of God.⁴² As a result, music used in Pentecostal liturgy has the ability to do something more than what a typical concert can; it can take us beyond ourselves and into a world that is beyond our own—a world where God himself resides.⁴³

The Moving Pentecostal Body

One of the first things you noticed on entering the sanctuary of your friend's church was the large screen projector hanging at the back centre of the stage. As songs were played, lyrics appeared on the screen, but it almost seemed like many people were familiar with the songs already; with the various ways bodies were being used, people were not always reading the lyrics. There thus seemed to be a shared familiarity with the music that

39. Cooper, "Worship Rituals," 81; Poloma, *Main Street Mystics*, 48.

40. Althouse and Wilkinson, "Musical Bodies," 31, 38; Cooper, "Worship Rituals," 80.

41. Cooper, "Worship Rituals," 80.

42. Althouse and Wilkinson, "Musical Bodies," 31; Cooper, "Worship Rituals," 80–81; Pype, "Pentecostal Commoning," 42.

43. See also Althouse and Wilkinson, "Musical Bodies," 33; Shilling, *Body*, 130, 134.

allowed worshippers to move beyond their place in the pew and meet God right where they were—or in the aisle next to you.

When Pentecostalism first emerged as a Christian movement, a separation from more rigid traditions allowed for a “renewed freedom and flexibility.” This held space for the spontaneous move of God, and for worshippers to encounter him in unpredictable ways.⁴⁴ Ultimately, this change revolutionized the way bodies are able to participate during Pentecostal liturgy. For example, screen projectors have supplanted hymn books, allowing the Pentecostal body to choose a preferred posture or behaviour.⁴⁵ But what are the varying movements and bodily “rituals” that the Pentecostal body can engage with during worship? A few have been briefly addressed, such as raised hands and swaying side to side. However, sometimes movement can be more aggressive, such as running in the sanctuary, jumping, or even shouting.⁴⁶ From what I have seen, one or both arms may be outstretched toward the ceiling with heads lifted; upper bodies may be oscillating up and down at the waist; or bodies may fall prostrate before God. Bodies may also make various shapes, such as circular revolutions with arms. Any of these may occur standing or sitting in one’s chair.⁴⁷

In Afropentecostal services in particular, Craig Scandrett-Leatherman records a form of “bodily exercise” that uses “large muscles” alongside varying vocal volume. In fact, in these churches there seems to be a distinct connection between voice and body that Scandrett-Leatherman describes as “body-talk.” This includes “the shout,” which is commonly a loud “Glory!” or “Hallelujah!” This climaxes the actively engaged body, whose head nods up and down and whose feet are either stomping or tapping the floor. Such body-talk forms a triangulated connection between the worshipper, others, and God.⁴⁸ Furthermore,

44. Friesen, “Classical Pentecostal Liturgy,” 54. See also Björkander, *Worship*, 239.

45. Björkander, *Worship*, 240.

46. See Brahinsky, “Pentecostal Body Logics,” 226.

47. Björkander, *Worship*, 241; Cooper, “Worship Rituals,” 81.

48. Scandrett-Leatherman, “Can Social Scientists Dance?” 163–64.

prayer may be included in worship, where bodies prepare for armed battle as they embark on spiritual warfare against Satan. Eyes are typically closed, while bodies enact motions of physically cutting, breaking, pounding, or stomping on demonic forces. In this way, the body becomes a means where the worshipper is transmitted from the sanctuary to the battlefield.⁴⁹

Likewise, dance is very significant in Afropentecostal churches, but this has been my experience in others as well. Nonetheless, dance is almost *expected* to occur during a worship service as something either spontaneous or choreographed within a structured dance ministry. In researching a Pentecostal church in Kinshasa, Katrien Pye documents that such ministries are meant to “raise the ambience” in church. Ultimately, dance for these Pentecostal bodies is spiritual work, and it includes the *whole* body.⁵⁰ Fraleigh writes that when we dance, the body is not merely moving, but it is being inspired by some motivational source that undergirds the movement which, in turn, will be brought to the mind of the dancer.⁵¹

In my own liturgical dance practice, this motivational source was always God. Ironically, I was never comfortable to dance spontaneously during services, although people often encouraged me to. However, I did sometimes do structured, choreographed liturgical dancing in front of the congregation. During my choreographical process, I was intentional with partnering with the Holy Spirit to give me the right movements. When danced in service, I would often hear audible accounts of congregants experiencing God through my dance. I think this can partly be explained by the assumption that while God is the motivational source in all forms of liturgical dance, he becomes the primary image that is brought to the minds of Pentecostal bodies—whether they are the ones dancing or witnessing the dance of others. If we use Fraleigh’s approach to observing dance, this gives us

49. Pye, “Pentecostal Commoning,” 36; Richman, “Machine Gun Prayer,” 474–77.

50. Pye, “Pentecostal Commoning,” 33–34. Cf. Scandrett-Leatherman, “Can Social Scientists Dance?” 164.

51. Fraleigh, “Vulnerable Glance,” 14.

opportunity to not only perceive but consciously construct the dance of others.⁵²

Regardless, when we dance, our bodies and spirits conjoin to create something new and meaningful in worship, which allows us to move from physical to spiritual mobility⁵³—thereby transporting us into God’s world outside ourselves. For Pye, “mobility” and “movement” are at the heart of the Pentecostal discourse, which she connects to what she calls the “nexus dance-agency.” Indeed, she argues that Pentecostal dance generates spiritual mobility for the worshippers, since it is in dance that human spirits travel along the “soul-body nexus” and become empowered by and toward the Holy Spirit.⁵⁴ Pye thus describes this as “Pentecostal commoning,” in which there is a collective embodied effort to materialize the divine through dance. In return, there is a collapse of the mundane-sacred dichotomy that ushers in a sense of “Pentecostal becoming.”⁵⁵ In other words, the worshipping body is no longer restrained by its own inner world, nor by the physical world in order to encounter God. An example of such transitional mobility and “commoning,” I believe, is in the use of dance I have often seen coupled with the type of embodied, “militant” prayer mentioned previously.

Ultimately, the moving Pentecostal body involves what Marcel Mauss calls “bodily techniques,” which account for the ways people know how to use their bodies each in distinct forms (e.g., upbeat versus solemn forms of movement). These techniques provide the Pentecostal body with opportunities to “enter into communion with God” according to what has been

52. Fraleigh, “Vulnerable Glance,” 12.

53. Pye, “Pentecostal Commoning,” 35; Scandrett-Leatherman, “Can Social Scientists Dance?” 164.

54. Pye, “Pentecostal Commoning,” 35.

55. Csordas, “Embodiment,” 7; Pye, “Pentecostal Commoning,” 36. In drawing on the works of other philosophers, Csordas explains that there is a distinction between the world of thought (i.e., our inner world) and the material world. He argues that a principal characteristic of embodiment is the collapse of the dualities between subject (i.e., our bodies) and object (i.e., God). Pye appears to be applying this to the mundane natural world and the sacred one that is accessible through spiritual mobility.

learned⁵⁶—perhaps through somatic modes of attention and conscious construction. Such techniques may also be viewed as performative events, since they seem to be doing *something to* the body, whether it is manifesting a response, representing something about God, or fine-tuning one's sensory capacities.⁵⁷ Collectively, these techniques and events are ways the Pentecostal body moves into a realm in which they sense a presence perhaps familiar, yet belonging to a world beyond their own.

The Surrendered Pentecostal Body

Pentecostal minister Charles H. Mason recounts an encounter he had with the Holy Spirit. Such encounter not only had him speaking in tongues, but it made him feel something in his mind and body. He describes the Lord “lifting” him to his feet and “filling” him with heaven's light, crediting God as “taking charge” of his tongue and preaching in different tongues beyond his control. According to Mason, the various gestures he was engaged in were not his own but God's. The aftermath was an “in-describable peace and quietness” that was transmitted throughout his entire body.⁵⁸

With Mason's account, we can learn that a Pentecostal body may reach a point of embodied surrender before God through learned bodily techniques and ritual. This is typically where tangible sensations and manifestations of Holy Spirit occur in one's body as opposed to mere movement,⁵⁹ and these can be described and experienced in various ways. For one, Andrew Singleton describes this as the “out-of-control” body, as it becomes the site of God's explicit power in which the body reacts involuntarily. While it is difficult to discern the legitimacy of such encounters, this may include shaking or falling over, which Singleton notes as experiences that commonly occur during wor-

56. Mauss, “Techniques,” 70–71; Richman, “Machine Gun Prayer,” 470.

57. Williams, “Spiritual Landscapes,” 50.

58. See Ware, “Can Religious Experience Be Reduced to Brain Activity?” 117–18.

59. Williams, “Spiritual Landscapes,” 50.

ship services. More specifically, falling over is primarily referred to as being “slain in the Spirit,” essentially describing the body moving under the power of the Holy Spirit—sometimes being “shot with electricity.”⁶⁰ Bodily experiences like these are intrinsically linked to the Pentecostal body that intentionally loosens rational restraint and allows the Holy Spirit to have his way with it. In this context, the body postures itself so that it may be overcome by God—the ultimate object in worship who, in turn, “colonizes” the body.⁶¹

Along with shaking and falling over, other experiences in which the Holy Spirit manifests are more discretely “tangible, tactile, and palpable.” These may include sensations moving across the skin, down the spine, or through arms. This also may include a “blooming” sensation in the forehead.⁶² Others may experience burning heat, tingling, or shivers.⁶³ There comes a point in the service where all these bodily experiences culminate into an experience of “entering in” to the presence of God, which requires “leaving the self behind.” This does not mean, however, that Pentecostals believe these to be “out of body” experiences, but rather the embodiment of foregoing one’s inner world for the sake of meeting God in his.

This whole process in and of itself is a form of movement,⁶⁴ where the surrendered Pentecostal body is intentionally aware of what his or her body is doing—even though the physical manifestations of the Holy Spirit are seemingly beyond one’s control. When applied to the embodiment of music, this sense of “spiritual travel” typically occurs during the solemn phase of the worship when things begin to slow down.⁶⁵ A “slain” body is also one already “filled” with the Holy Spirit—an additional descrip-

60. Brahinsky, “Pentecostal Body Logics,” 222; Singleton, “Rise and Fall,” 381, 383.

61. Scandrett-Leatherman, “Can Social Scientists Dance?” 164; Singleton, “Rise and Fall,” 390.

62. Inbody, “Sensing God,” 351. Cf. Cooper, “Worship Rituals,” 78.

63. Brahinsky, “Pentecostal Body Logics,” 216, 222; Inbody, “Sensing God,” 345.

64. Cooper, “Worship Rituals,” 82, 84.

65. Cooper, “Worship Rituals,” 81.

tor used by surrendered Pentecostal bodies to account for the energized, intimate, and discernable experiences of God's presence.⁶⁶ Nonetheless, being "filled" certainly leads to movement and more tangible manifestations, similar to what has been described.⁶⁷

Wilkinson connects this to Pentecostal doctrine, essentially claiming that what is described as being "slain" or "filled" is actually the embodiment of Holy Spirit baptism.⁶⁸ In a different sense, this deliberate surrender is sometimes not so deliberate, as with Mason's encounter, which seemed to come unexpectedly. Such is the case for those invited to answer the altar call in Pentecostal churches, in which impromptu invitations are sometimes given during worship time. Some have described having conscious loss of bodily control, where God colonized their body to the point that they were "carried" up to the altar.⁶⁹ In fact, it is at the altar (i.e., the space in front of the stage) where bodies undergo the ultimate form of surrender to encounter God as they transform into "living sacrifices" (Rom 12:1).⁷⁰

The Interactive Pentecostal Body

Peter Neumann believes that experiencing God means that we do so in collective worship involving physical interaction with others. One way interaction can be embodied is through what Wolfgang Vondey claims as being the most "intimate form of embodiment"—that being the laying on of hands. This is a prayerful means of conferring power and the baptism of the Holy Spirit to another person. In fact, it is believed that the laid hand, sometimes visibly trembling, spiritually becomes the hand of

66. Brahinsky, "Pentecostal Body Logics," 217, 222.

67. Scandrett-Leatherman, "Can Social Scientists Dance?" 164; Stone, "Toward a Holistic Pentecost," 27. Stone explicitly connects this to speaking in tongues. Cf. Neumann, "Experience," 91.

68. Wilkinson, "Worship," 122. "Baptism" here connects to the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2).

69. Luhmann, "Metakinesis," 524.

70. Rice, *Pentecostal Liturgical Theology*, 183, 187–90; Ryle, "Laying our Sins and Sorrows," 78.

Christ.⁷¹ In my experience, I usually saw receiving bodies either shaking, crying, or needing to be caught by a designated “catcher” because legs would become weak. Often times, they would lie on their backs for a moment with their eyes closed—something a Pentecostal might explain as being “slain” by or “filled” with the Holy Spirit.⁷²

Additionally, while “soaking prayer” is often documented as being part of revival meetings, I have been to Sunday services where time has been given to this phenomenon. This is a ritual that takes place during a solemn part of worship, where music is often soothing, relaxing, and atmospheric. Pentecostal bodies collectively find places in the sanctuary to rest or lie down next to other bodies, and the result is usually more bodily experiences attributed to God’s presence. This might include feeling a heavy weight on one’s chest if lying on one’s back, smelling unique aromas, or seeing highly detailed visions. This usually takes place through the interaction with others, where hands are laid, but experiences are also all vocally shared with one another.⁷³

Conclusion

In conclusion, the body is the mode in which Pentecostal bodies may encounter God in a world that lies beyond the inner self. This often occurs through interacting with and observing others, as can be explained through intersubjectivity and somatic modes of attention. Bodies are also modes of encountering the world of the *other*, where one’s own worship experience is informed in some way by shared bodily rituals and techniques. Additionally, Pentecostal bodies are kinesthetic ones that actively participate. While researchers advocate for some kind of training for these experiences to occur, I argue that such training (i.e., “metakinesis”) is likely the result of Pentecostal bodies deliberately being

71. Vondey, “Corporate Embodiment,” 142; Williams, “Spiritual Landscapes,” 50.

72. Singleton, “Rise and Fall,” 383. What I describe here is consistent with Singleton’s observations on Pentecostals being “slain” or “filled.”

73. Wilkinson, “Worship,” 120–21.

attuned to the movement of God. This can be shown through their deliberate and responsive movement, surrender, and interaction—all against the backdrop of intentionally selected music.

Although not addressed, it is important to ask how this all applies to disabled bodies—particularly those who are limited with movement, or those who are deaf and cannot hear music or the sharing of experiences. At a preliminary level, it is true that not everybody will be able to engage in the physical rituals in the same way as a fully abled person might. Nevertheless, one step to addressing this issue might be in the reassurance that God's Spirit is not limited by disability.⁷⁴ While a person might not be able to move, hear, see, or feel in the ways described in this paper, this does not mean the Holy Spirit cannot still meet them in their body, nor that their body cannot still be used as a mode of encounter. While a disabled person's participation might look different (and discussing this is currently beyond the scope of this paper), I believe their body still has the ability to spiritually move into a space of encounter—even if it means not using their full body for movement.⁷⁵

In my own Pentecostal experience, for instance, I have seen older women in wheelchairs experience God in their own tangible ways. Therefore, I believe in the possibility that someone in a wheelchair (or someone with a different kind of physical limitation) can still be slain in the Spirit since their limitations are not real obstacles for encounter. In other words, falling to ground, I am sure, is not the only way someone can experience being slain.

74. Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome*, 186 (see also 167–68, 171, and 174–75). Yong's discussions on "limitness," relational and Christological views on *imago Dei*, and how God can work with physical limitations might be helpful places to begin thinking about how disabled bodies can still be used in encounter, as presented in this paper.

75. See Albright, *Choreographing Difference*, 57, 66, 90–91. As a dance professor, Albright dedicates a chapter in her book on what it means for contemporary dance to include disabled bodies. Potentially helpful to the question on disability and Pentecostal movement are her discussions on accepting disability, exploring movement possibilities in different kinds of bodies, and recognizing the potential unity in dance occurring between those who are abled and those who are disabled.

In fact, I have witnessed abled believers be slain right in their seats. Nonetheless, the uncertainty that accompanies Pentecostal liturgy and disabled bodies is as an important question that should be included in future research.

Ultimately, I encourage every believer to examine how they might be able to use their body in their own liturgical context. As mentioned in the introduction, being Pentecostal is not a requirement, and I am not arguing that it is necessary for the Christian faith—or even that *all* Pentecostal encounters are legitimate experiences of the Holy Spirit. However, understanding the Pentecostal body may inform us about how we may be aware of our own bodies during worship.

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