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Charismatic Pneumatology as Ecumenical Opportunity: Orthopraxy, Subjectivity, and Relational Ontologies of the Holy Spirit

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Abstract: The majority of new Christian communities have been appearing in Charismatic and Pentecostal movements, especially in the Global South. Along with these shifts emerge new possibilities to better understand the diversity of Christian perspectives and to rethink what it means to be “in relation” to a global Christian community. After opening connections between pneumatology and relational ontology, this article engages the work of three emerging Pentecostal/Charismatic thinkers in particular, whose pneumatologies provide novel opportunities to think more carefully about “relationality” and ecumenical unity: Nimi Wariboko, Amos Yong, and Clark Pinnock. Wariboko’s pneumatology helps us acknowledge the very kind of relational ontology God has with Godself, as a split subject, thereby disrupting not only our all-too-human meaning-making process, but also the way God signifies the world for us. Yong’s pneumatology emphasizes human practice or an “orthopraxy” that is polyphonous, historically rooted, and oriented around spiritual gifts not only for sanctification but also for worldwide witness. Finally, Pinnock emphasizes the connections between creativity and relationality, pointing to how at-one-ment is also the telic work of the Spirit.

Keywords: pneumatology; Charismatic; Pentecostal; Yong; Wariboko; Pinnock; relational ontology; Open Theism; Pentecost



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“Those who want to know the power of reality in the depth of their historical existence must be in actual contact with the unrepeatable tensions of the present.” (Tillich 1948, p. 75)

“Everything is swaying in the wind (pneuma).” (Wariboko 2018, p. 25)

1. Introduction

The majority of new Christian communities have been forming not in the Global North, but in the Global South. Most growth has not been in traditional Churches, but rather in more Charismatic and non-institutional movements. With these shifts emerge new possibilities to better understand both the Christian faith and its intricate relationship with the (universal and particular; unifying and diversifying) cultures out of which it appears. Although we should not ignore the many challenges facing the Unification of Christians today (e.g., critiques of colonialism, “unity” as a western hegemonic concept, or the fears that all must follow a Western system of management and organization in order to be counted as ecumenical), ecumenical dialogue needs to turn attention to the confrontations between, especially, the traditional expressions of the faith and the movements of Global Pentecostalism; between orders of the orthodoxy of *des quae creditur* and the orthopraxy of *des qua creditur* (Conradie 2015, p. 67).¹ One opportunity for doing so is found in recent and emerging pneumatologies of thinkers associated with Pentecostalism or Charismaticism. Their work has opened new possibilities to rethink what it means to be “in relation” to a highly diverse faith community.

Although ecumenical dialogue more often than not has taken place through Christology, it is by no means unusual or novel to reflect on Ecumenism through pneumatology.

After all, and as the *Ecumenical Directory* confirmed decades ago, the unification of the church, for which Jesus prayed on the eve of his death (“that all may be one” John 17:21) is to be achieved through the work of the Holy Spirit. Similarly, as the founding decree on ecumenism, *Unitatis redintegratio*, states: “The Lord of Ages . . . has fostered by the grace of the Holy Spirit a movement for the restoration of unity among all Christians” ([Conciliar Decree on Ecumenism 1967](#)). This work even extended at the time an invitation for, and interest in, how the “Spirit movements” of Charismaticism and Pentecostalism can promote unity.² As the Orthodox Church has recognized for centuries, the Holy Spirit binds the Eucharistic community together, helps lead to fuller communion, and organizes unity in order to counter any overly individualistic spirituality that might threaten unity. This raises some important concerns: if the Holy Spirit indeed is the Uniter of churches, yet also the founding gesture of the “many tongues” of the Church at Pentecost, then how might we truly understand this paradoxical relationality via diversity? How might the idea of the “many diverse tongues” of Pentecost actually help provide this *relational* unity?

Since its 20th century inception, Pentecostal Theology has become increasingly focused upon developing deep practices that express new perspectives in pneumatology. Although “Renewal”, “Charismatic”, or “Pentecostal” theologies bear fruitful similarities to “Evangelical theology”, it would be a mistake to assume that they are simply “Protestant” or “Evangelical Theology plus” some different beliefs about Spirit Baptism, gifts, and healing tacked-on ([Yong 2013](#), p. 249)³. Instead, these theologies’ focus upon pneumatology reshapes the entire meaning of what it means to “do” theology. McDonnell bemoaned this problem 40 years ago:

“In the West we think essentially in Christological categories, with the Holy Spirit as an extra . . . we build up our large theological constructs in constitutive Christological categories, and then, in a second, nonconstitutive moment, we decorate the already constructed system with pneumatological baubles, a little Spirit tinsel.” ([McDonnell 1982](#), p. 142)

In order to take this movement seriously, then, we must begin likewise with their pneumatologies. One way to engage their work, and to demonstrate its potential for ecumenical and relational unity, is to consider in what ways Charismatic pneumatologies trade out the traditional form of modern subjectivity for a “relational ontology”. By attempting to expand creatively the “pneumatological imagination”, these thinkers seek connection with the very person of the Godhead who throughout the scriptures is responsible for creation. In addition to creation, and the sanctification of humans, one of the central features of the Holy Spirit is the giving of power and gifts in order to strengthen persons’ relations to God, in social movements, and in churches globally.

After setting the context and possible connections between pneumatology and relational ontology, this article engages the work of three Pentecostal/Charismatic thinkers in particular whose work provide novel opportunities to think more carefully about “relationality” in the context of pneumatology: Nimi Wariboko, Amos Yong, and Clark Pinnock. Nimi Wariboko’s pneumatology helps us think more closely about the very *kind* of relational ontology God has *with Godself*, as a split subject, thereby disrupting not only our all-too-human meaning-making process, but also the way God signifies the world for us. Amos Yong’s pneumatology emphasizes human practice or “orthopraxy” that is polyphonus, historically rooted, and oriented around spiritual gifts for not only sanctification but also worldwide witness, while Clark Pinnock emphasizes the connections between creativity and relationality, pointing to how at-one-ment is also the telic work of the Spirit. Each of these thinkers stress the absolute priority of a “relational” encounter with Christ made possible by the Spirit who links human hearts ([Yong 2014](#)). Considering these three thinkers alongside one another helps demonstrate the unifying (Romans 8:1–3⁴), liberating, and revelatory power of pneumatology in an increasingly globalizing world. If the Holy Spirit is indeed the uniter of persons and communities, then to rethink pneumatology or to develop novel appraisals of it is to reassess, simultaneously, ecumenical unity.

2. A Relational and Ethical Context of Pneumatology

When the Holy Spirit's sanctifying work is limited *only* to individual persons, a critical moral piety can arise at the expense of the inter-social elements essential to ecclesiological life. Perhaps one reason for this is that we have envisioned the work of the Holy Spirit as cut-off from one of her primary roles—the witness and unification of persons. The Spirit, of course, is not the ontologically abstract or metaphysically effervescent “thing” we often imagine, but rather the very way and person of God who interacts with humans by connecting them, mediating their often-conflictual relationships, and creating a unified social ethic. In such a context, pneumatology should help dispel us of both our propensity towards abstraction, and our beloved, but individualist, modern ontologies. Put more polemically, the perennial question of Christian social ethics in an ecumenical context is not only how Christ is a moral exemplar, but is also creatively connecting churches as “Emmanuel, meaning the God of relation” (Raschke 2008, p. 31).

Pneumatology provides us therefore with a better appreciation for “relations” according to a sphere of human meaning whereby the self-other relation is ever active. As such, it helps provide a grounding “realization” and mediation of Christology in the life world; namely, through a functional social ethics of similarity via difference (Wagner 1995, p. 119). When it comes to difference, there of course are essential distinctions to be made, especially between “division” and “non-acceptance” and between “unity” and “uniformity”. Uniformity can delimit how others can affect, impact, and “differentiate” us: “The desire for uniformity is the opposite to the desire for unity” (Noble 2018, p. 21). We instead should seek “unity”, which helps establish a practical social ethic that can grant meaning to the connections between persons via the Holy Spirit. This is one reason why Pentecostals will begin with the orthopraxy that begins with right actions. These connections demonstrate the co-presence of self and other. Via the “gifts of the spirit”, practitioners realize that the gifts given do not “belong” to any one specific individual like any typical possession. These gifts are like small revelations that serve to connect us to God and to others. Such a pneumatology helps us see revelation as a product of God's own inter-triune communication and unity.⁵

The interconnections between individualism and pietism of course have Modern philosophical roots. Instead of prioritizing relations, we have tended to prioritize “things” in their unchanging nature or *esse*, often in order to make estimations and assumptions about how they will be “for us” in the future. Known as the “relational turn” in recent philosophy and theology, “relational ontology” argues that the priority does not belong to the substance of things (a “substantivist ontology”), but rather a complexity of “relation” via a network of causes that connect entities and persons. The human experience is based in intricate and intrinsic relations, such those on emotional, moral, logical, or inter-religious levels. Some relations are simple, while others are complex. Even down to the atomic level we know of collisions, causations, entanglements, energy fields—all relations (Wildman 2010, p. 56). In religious terms we think of love, communion, salvation, compassion, and even judgment in terms of relations. On the cultural level, we know relations express values, virtues, patterns of recognition, intimacies, identities, or nations—bundling us together in love, or binding us in common enmification. This relational turn of course is not entirely new (it has resonances, for example in both Leibniz' monadism or even ancient Hinduism). Yet, it has found novel cultural expression in recent years, indeed pointing to something new: “the basic vision of reality [has] shifted from giving priority to permanence to that of change. Substantive ontology was dead, and relational ontology was born” (Simmons 2014, p. 35).

Lacking the space here to go too deeply into relational ontology (which accounts for a wide variety of phenomenal relations in the world ranging from the Platonic “forms” or Kantian “categories”⁶), we might at least recognize that such a metaphysic may help in overcoming any strong overemphasis upon identity and individualism in modernism, and subsequently inspire connection to the world, nature, other people, and God. Of course, both entities and relations are equally important. It should not be necessary that we must

choose between *either* substantivist *or* relational ontology as correct/incorrect. Yet, it does seem that relational ontology provides opportunities both to balance-out our extreme prejudices for substantivist ontology, and to give the Christian community even more reason to rethink carefully the “relationality” of the Holy Spirit. It may be that our ignorance of relations, and perhaps false prioritization of substance over relation, is a by-product of our failures to acknowledge the work of the interconnecting God—the Holy Spirit. If indeed the “God-world relation is the metaphysical basis for all relations” (Wildman 2010, p. 59), and if we tend to lack creative appraisals of that relation (especially pneumatologically), then our acknowledgement of the unifying relations between churches, persons, and the Triune God-head would be limited.

3. Wariboko’s Pneumatology Founded on Trinitarian Difference

As Nimi Wariboko emphasizes, there are various and necessary “splits” in those unifying relations. Wariboko offers a Nigerian Pentecostal Perspective that is highly influenced by American Systematic Theology, as well as Contemporary European Critical Theory. There are three ways in which we might characterize his contributions to rethinking the relationality of pneumatology: (1) God has a “split subjectivity” that marks a unique self-relation grounded in the work of the Spirit; (2) the unlikely praise of contradiction opens creative pathways between God and humans; and (3) we should accord priority to natality through the inter-relational “Pentecostal Principle”. In *The Split God: Pentecostalism and Critical Theory*, Wariboko points to the positive potentials of Pentecostal Pneumatology today, especially in the context of protestant discourse, and in a way that challenges some of the most basic, metaphysical presuppositions of any systematic theology that would place “thought” before “practice”. Via reflection upon the day of Pentecost, he provides an analysis for how the originary and founding gesture of the Christian church results by no means in a blind or flat unity, but rather a wild diversity that is reflective of the richness of what he calls “the split God”. Through engagements in “microtheologies” of actual Pentecostal orthopraxy that help support these theoretical and analytic depictions, Wariboko examines how the pneumatological practices and presuppositions of Pentecostals/Charismatics (e.g., the spiritual discernment of miracles, a more playful engagement with the differences between the sacred/profane, and the bodily freedom of worship practices) demonstrate the gaps in a “split reality” that help empower humans towards freedom from calculation via grace.⁷

The celebratory claim for Pentecostal pneumatology is that the paradigm of “multiple tongues” at Pentecost relieves us of needing an all-inclusive “systematics” that is harmonious (Wariboko 2018, p. 33), whole, cohesive, and decoupled from culture.⁸ This classic, systematic hermeneutic is flawed because the very nature of God is “split” in a way that this God is internally diverse, often unpredictable, and sometimes even contradictory. Wariboko harmonizes with relational ontology in this regard, namely, by insisting upon a dynamic relation over substance. Such an acceptance has helped aid the diverse growth (Wariboko 2018, p. 33) of Pentecostalism over the last 50 years. A Pentecostal pneumatology that begins with the Holy Spirit and Triune life can teach that the God whose very subjectivity is “cracked” (Wariboko 2018, p. 37) is much more relatable than some traditional depictions of a God, whose self-enclosed unity or integrity would serve to limit any value of God’s relation with the world. A split God, on the other hand, bears an internal otherness that prioritizes relation in their very identity and personhood.

Of course, it is not novel to claim that God is the “greatest” or “highest” expression of otherness. However, to point to an internal otherness within God as a “split subjectivity” opens new pathways for thinking about relational pneumatology. The split image of this God entails not only that God is “structured precisely around an openness” to alterity, uncanniness, or uncanny strangeness (Wariboko 2018, p. 515). It also has an analogical effect upon how humans relate with others. By pointing to how otherness is one of the *founding features* of Triune Godhood, it inverts the paradigm of needing to base theological claims upon sameness. Instead, we might begin Pneumatology in this *open way*; especially

by accepting the enigma of Otherness instead of trying to domesticate or “integrate” it into *our* (possessed) concept of the whole of reality. Otherness is not “an obstacle”, and even God has this fundamental experience of extreme otherness: “What is familiar is ultimately grounded on strangeness: God moves in mysterious ways, the unfinishedness of reality means that it is also a stranger to itself, and the believer is indeed a stranger to herself” (Wariboko 2018, p. 515). God is elusive to Godself, yet this is precisely what demonstrates for us the importance of the founding gesture of creative diversity.⁹

3.1. In Praise of Contradiction

A *second feature* of Wariboko’s (relational) pneumatology is that it embraces disharmony and even contradiction. This, of course, has social trinitarian implications for both God the creator and God the Son. This split God can inhabit incarnationally the “in-between” of the transcendent/immanent. If the Holy Spirit truly performs miracles, then our theologies are faced with the daunting task of accepting that, for this God, multiple incompatible possibilities exist that may even appear to be contradictory. Thus, Wariboko seeks to turn the critiques many pose against Pentecostalism (such as their “inconsistencies, unorthodox practices, and orientations to be explained”, Wariboko 2018, p. 39) into their very “positive condition”. Pentecostal pneumatology is characterized by the attempt to live-out the theological reality of being made in the image of such a “split God”.¹⁰

Again, instead of bemoaning contradictions, or surrendering the theological enterprise altogether, Wariboko thinks that this can inspire awe at the transcendent other for whom we await to penetrate the natural world miraculously. The creative Spirit who created the “order” of nature purposefully built within it an “ontological incompleteness” (Wariboko 2018, p. 54). This incompleteness provides essential “cracks” that allow this split God to enter nature at unpredictable points and bring about unforeseeable miracles.¹¹ God is not some “master-signifier guaranteeing the harmonious order of reality” (Wariboko 2018, p. 58). Rather, God enchants us through the disruption of the wooden “orders” of reality we like to erect.¹²

Although Wariboko is influenced by Western “Liberal Christianity”, his concern is that traditional “death of God” theologies, which properly drew attention to the inauthenticity of fundamentalist movements, failed to offer any viable or practical alternative.¹³ Instead, in many cases, such theologies turn out to be just another form of fundamentalism: in believing they may have a “comprehensive (All) notion of reality or God” (Wariboko 2018, p. 62), they have become fundamentalists. Where Liberal Christianity failed, Pentecostalism has thrived: “While still believing in their capacity to penetrate the noumenal realm, conservative Pentecostals did what the liberal Christians could not do; they transformed the epistemological obstacle to positive ontological condition: the gap between us and God has now become a positive feature of God” (Wariboko 2018, p. 68). Pentecostal theology, in his view, can avoid the critique of fundamentalism, while both (A) maintaining the infinite qualitative difference between God/humans; and (B) reinvigorating faith with a new ontology of divine, relational activity. These were two of the founding aims of mid-20th century Liberal Christian Theology.

This comes back to how Wariboko celebrates how reality is essentially fractured: “the gap between us and God has now become a positive feature of God” (Wariboko 2018, p. 68). It is true that Pentecostalism often operates in a theologically “promiscuous” way, projecting “the threatening image of a community with uncontrolled boundaries” (Wariboko 2018, p. 21). Yet this uncontrollability, diversity, and possibility of emergence is the product of the natality and creative work of the Holy Spirit. Wariboko points to such natality as the “pentecostal principle”: the capacity to always begin again. This principle is an expression of the gift of divine freedom to not be bound by anything—not even logic. This natality is entirely consistent with what others have interpreted to be one of Pentecostalism’s defining characteristics: a “radical openness to God” (Smith 2010, p. 33) to bring about another “breakthrough”, another event of creation, another break with the past.

Although at times Wariboko's theoretical language is unfamiliar and lacking explanation, and in some cases borrowed from thinkers whose primary motives are antithetical to Wariboko's aims, his approach demonstrates that difference and creativity are what drive unity and help overcome the xenophobia of newness. It is not the cohesiveness of a community's affirmative beliefs about itself, its God, and world that, in the end, can unite them with other diverse communities. Rather, the beautiful "enigma" of unification of a culture with any other culture will be found (borrowing from Žižek) in the overlapping of those communities' *weaknesses*, and blind spots. That is, their weaknesses provide the universal context of hopeful transformation via diversity. The gaps, weaknesses, and inconsistencies make room for the experience of the miraculous "God-drenched world of the expected unexpected" (Wariboko 2018, p. 418).

3.2. The "Pentecostal Principle"

The *third feature* of Wariboko's work that helps us think about the relationality of pneumatology appears in his depiction of natality in the "Pentecostal Principle". There is a relational-creative effort of not simply connecting persons, but also having a social influence upon "structures". This creativity is ever *disruptive* of the status quo, and this is why even liberal theology is critiqued for its dogmatic and fundamentalistic insistence upon a "closed reality". Tillich, using Jaspers' language of "boundary situations", developed his "protestant principle" to determine that there is no way to make "absolute" claims about "relative" reality. This drove a wedge through reality, in essence.

Wariboko admires Tillich's work yet insists upon a different principle that is more reflective of everyday Pentecostal ecclesial practice. This "Pentecostal Principle" is the constant "capacity to begin" (Wariboko 2012, p. 1) and access to an open-ended and constant renewal. Reflective of emergence theory, creation is a "pure means" that prioritizes "possibility" over actuality, yet in a way that does not denigrate the material world. (Wariboko 2012, p. 212) The material world thus becomes "charged" with the Holy Spirit's original and continuous initiation of creative freedom. Thus, Wariboko's ecumenical gesture is to employ pneumatology to insert some "Catholic substance" into the "protestant principle", and to draw attention to the necessary tension between relational ontology (relativity) and substantivist ontology (absolutism) through bridging the noumenal and phenomenal:

"The Pentecostal principle is the power of emergent creativity that disrupts social existence, generates infinite restlessness, and results in novelty. The notion of the Pentecostal principle rethinks the idea of the Protestant principle as the spirit of creativity, the creative transforming energy that operates within the structures and throughout the process of creation as its law of motion". (Wariboko 2012, p. 44)

The insistence upon a certain wild diversity therefore is relevant not only for Pentecostals, but for all Christians. That is, Christian diversity is not antecedent to, or happenstance of, but rather *central* to the Christian experience. This pneumatology represents the deconstructive hope to maintain tradition while simultaneously making space for newness in a "paleonomic gesture" that simultaneously "erases and preserves the Christian tradition". It maintains its "old name in order to launch a new concept" (Wariboko 2018, p. 82). This penchant focus upon newness and creation helps make sense of how Pentecostals often are accused of dancing too close to the threatening flame and "boundary of heresy" (Wariboko 2018, p. 82). Their pneumatology seems to weave in and *out* of Christian tradition or orthodoxy.

The Pentecostal Principle helps us acknowledge that generation and creation are essential to developing a relational pneumatology. Distinct from past systematic theologies that seek to capture God as an "idealized image" in "theological tomes", this pneumatology expresses the opposite—a creative distortion of "the reality or traditional notions of God in order to accent other features that resonate . . . [in] intensive participation in the divine being" (Wariboko 2018, p. 92). This pneumatology is more like Expressionism than Impressionism. "Impressionistic" Theology would attempt to capture and describe

reality by taking a “photograph of God” in a present moment so that it later can be shared and appreciated (Wariboko 2018, p. 92). In contrast, an Expressionistic Theology seeks an existential experience and alteration of reality so as to stir-up new moods, affects, and inter-social perspectives. Overall, Wariboko contributes to rethinking relationality by insisting upon (1) the Trinitarian focus upon God’s “split subjectivity” mediated by the Spirit, and as an inspiration for humans; (2) the freeing affirmation of how what may seem “contradictory” can open new inter-relations between God and humans; and (3) emphasizing (in the “Pentecostal Principle”) the inter-social need for natality, new beginnings, and breakthroughs.

4. Amos Yong’s Polyphony and Relational Diversity

Although similar to Wariboko when it comes to relationality, Amos Yong employs a different style and means by which to think about pneumatology. Yong bridges a vast number of Christian identities (e.g., Chinese, American, Pentecostal) and provides a refreshing account of renewal theology that serves to bridge hospitably and, surprisingly, a number of perspectives we typically think are incompatible. His work furnishes an understanding of relationality via pneumatology through emphasizing the global diversity or “polyphony” of churches. Although Charismatic and Pentecostal church bodies are quite diverse, they can be critiqued for a more conservative and less “open” perspective on the topic of pluralism. Yet in many ways, their particular pneumatological approach, based on the very plurality of the “many tongues of the Spirit” that were “poured out” in the events of Acts 2, provides a model for a different kind of inter-relational openness to even those of other faiths. The diversity and globalization of language at Pentecost can be witnessed today in churches associated with charismatic movements. Necessary here is a deeper description of the role pneumatology can play in better understanding this diversity, not only for these communities, but also for the ecumenical church at-large.

Some may worry that Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Renewal Theologies are incredibly inconsistent. Over the last century, very little has been made available to make systematic sense of this movement as a cohesive whole. This has been further complicated by their aforementioned focus upon practice over doctrine. Yet instead of mourning these inconsistencies, Yong embraces them (Yong 2013, p. 242; cf. Yong 2005). We should praise these differences because they demonstrate not a fixed set of beliefs, but beliefs that still are unfolding, dynamic, and deeply reflective of a “polyphony of Pentecostal pneumatologies” (Yong 2013, p. 242). Perhaps even, and in many cases without knowing it, the Pentecostal God “turns out to be a Pluralist” (Smith 2010, p. 59).

Yong argues that an essential part of this polyphony and dynamicity is *relationality*: “At the heart of the renewal movement is a spirituality characterized by relational encounter with the living Christ through his Holy Spirit” (Yong 2014, p. 33). Further, Yong believes that this relationality needs to be unfolded more carefully not through theological investigations of the Holy Spirit, but more specifically, pneumatological theologies that can *interrogate the entire* theological project and ensure that it secures this relational background for systematic thought.¹⁴ Yong is not alone here. Others (Pinnock 1996; Wariboko 2018) have called for how pneumatology challenges us to rethink the overall way we presume our theologies to be coherent, cohesive, and consistent. Although the classical confessions of the faith (at Nicene or Westminster, etc.) spend less time on the personhood of the Holy Spirit and the specificity of this relationality, they indeed affirm the Holy Spirit is the “Giver of Life” (John 6:63, cf. Article 3, Niceno-Constantinopolitan Creed). As Giver of Life, the Holy Spirit connects through dynamic relationality. Thus, what we stand to gain by beginning with a relational pneumatology is the opportunity to rework the very idea of what it means to be “systematic”. Such a relational approach also serves to restrengthen the trinitarian commitment: “given the relational character of the Holy Spirit (who is both the Spirit of God and the Spirit of Christ) a pneumatological approach ought also to open up to a relational and Trinitarian theology” (Yong 2014, p. 32).

Inter-Relational Witness and the Gifts of the Spirit

Further supporting this praise of diversity and dynamic relationality is Yong's *Orthopathic* ("right emotions") pneumatology. This more "open" approach demonstrates the essential role the affective dimension of human life plays. Instead of the classic, Western Epistemological, cognitive-behavioral model of understanding the human, it makes more sense to imagine a more holistic approach that takes emotional life just as seriously as it takes thinking and logic. This provides another grammar of articulating the already active pneumatological theology built into the practices of those often non-Western, Charismatic, and Pentecostal movements. Yong's pneumatology engages all of these elements (polyphony, orthopraxy, relationality) in rich genealogies of Pentecostal pneumatology.

Such a genealogy begins with diversity from the very start. Although many trace the formal "birth" of the Pentecostal movement to the "Azusa Street" revivals in Los Angeles in 1906, contemporary charismaticism has multiple origins (Anderson 2004). Yet the two major streams that confluence in charismatic pneumatological movements are the Wesleyan and the Reformed streams. For Yong, their differences reflect centuries-long theological disputes, and in ways that their relevance for pneumatology is not immediately clear. The more Reformed stream's general emphasis of a high Christology of *justification* has focused on how the holiness of Christ is imputed through full salvation at a person's point of conversion. On the other hand, although not necessarily a Christology "from below", the more Wesleyan (or "Holiness") stream's focus has been more upon how souls get regenerated by the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit towards greater maturation and moral Christ-likeness (See here especially Menzies 2006).

This debate is especially relevant in consideration of relationality. The Holiness movements have emphasized the necessity of Spirit empowerment in a kind of "two step" conversion that has soteriological consequences as well; namely, via the Spirit Baptism reflective of the Spirit's empowerment for the purposes of mission and "witness" and continual grace found in Acts 1:8. Those associated with these movements creatively have sutured Spirit Baptism into the original four-fold gospel of Jesus as sanctifier, savior, healer, and king. Each of these four essential aspects also reflects a role for Spirit Baptism, and here the debates between these two streams becomes more acute: does the Spirit empower for witness (Reformed position) or *more so* for individual sanctification (Holiness position)?

This distinction is fundamentally indicative of those church's attitudes towards persons it deems to be on the "outside" of Christianity, and it is therefore relevant for thinking about inter-relationality and plurality. Those who recognize Spirit Baptism as a part of sanctification have a *less* social gospel, and more private, individual expression of spirit gifts. Meanwhile, those who see Spirit Baptism mostly as a part of witness situate Spirit Baptism as a means of empowerment for missionary representation on earth (Yong 2013, p. 246). Although Yong situates himself as a part of the Assemblies of God Church, he is quick to acknowledge that Spirit Baptism is for individual sanctification, the church, and for missional witness. Although the differences over Spirit Baptism can be a hurdle to ecumenical dialogue, Yong demonstrates that the very *plurality* and *polyphony* of differences such as these should be something to celebrate so long as these communities are open to dialogue, and do not enmify other Christian communities.

It of course is not novel to stress the importance of pneumatology for *communion* and inter-relationality. Orthodox theology has done this quite well for centuries. Yet, the originality in Yong's approach is how it helps us acknowledge that communion, and its ensuing ethics and ecclesiologies should be rooted in the sociopolitical reality of the early Church's "many tongues". The diversity of languages (which are not only spoken, but visibly seen and heard) establishes, from the very beginning, a celebration of the paradigm of diversity and inter-cultural interpretation. Languages (*Glossolalia*) are not simply "functional" or tools of media, but rather a combination of semiotic signs that represent the unique ways cultures express meaningfulness. Cultural differences at times get too quickly misunderstood as ethical and moral differences that need to be dissolved. Although there is something to be praised about the universality of the Christian message

and the way it connects humans, Yong emphasizes how this connection is made possible precisely through diversity.

To summarize three positions that make Yong's pneumatology unique: (1) he attempts to draw connections with other inter-religious communities *precisely because* of his emphasis upon the diversity of tongues that express the outpouring of the Baptism of the Spirit. (2) He highlights an inter-relationality beyond the Church: the *Parousia* came about through following the Great commission. The tongues and languages were given for mission, and this sutures pneumatology to social change in the outside or "fallen world".¹⁵ (3) He draws attention to how the Gifts of the Spirit are focused on activity over doctrine, "orthopraxy", and "orthopathy" are just as important as "orthodoxy", as they connect us to a *dynamic relationality* over static substance. This inter-relationality finds similarities in the Cosmic Pneumatology of Clark Pinnock.

5. The Cosmic Pneumatology of Clark Pinnock

Once dubbed the "Canadian Charismatic Pilgrim" (Studebaker 2010) and an "Evangelical Maverick" (Strange 1999), Pinnock theologized from a highly ecumenical and interdisciplinary approach deeply influenced by Charismatic theology. Despite being most known for his role in helping pioneer the "Open and Relational Theology" movement, he demonstrated a standing interest in unfolding the role of the Holy Spirit in thinking about relationality. From his dissertation on pneumatology in St Paul to his most "systematic" work, *Flame of Love*, Pinnock sought to reform pneumatology in light of Charismatic practice. Two aspects of Pinnock's pneumatology stand out for thinking about relationality via the Holy Spirit: (1) dynamic creation and imagination, and (2) interpersonal unity via newness and atonement.

As for dynamic creation, Pinnock challenges us to see how the Holy Spirit calls us likewise to create and expand our imaginations. Christ referred to the Spirit as the *giver* of life (John 6:63), and Pinnock points to this creative aspect of the Spirit, who *not only* "hovers over" the primordial waters (Genesis 1:2) and breathes into Adam's lungs (Gen 2:7) in some finished event of creation, but also still is creating today. In short, the Holy Spirit is a designer who helps us not only recognize the "difference between creator and creation" (Link-Wieczorek et al. 2004, p. 49) but also engage in creation itself. That is, creation is not simply "in the beginning" but continuous, active, and participatory. This demonstrates the Spirit's role of not creating chaos, but of continually turning "chaos into cosmos" (Pinnock 1996, p. 50). This broadens the perspective for pneumatology and furnishes a *telos* for her gifts. The central role of the Spirit is to help creation reach its goal, which is the transformation and renewal of this created order (nature, persons, relations) to reflect godliness and to establish connectivity of persons through Christ's redemptive work (Pinnock 1996, p. 60).¹⁶ This emphasis demonstrates how Pinnock's "compelling ecumenical pneumatological advance gives a refreshing account of the prevenient Spirit's role in the creational process" (Swoboda 2013, p. 86).

The prevenience of gifts, love, and grace connects the "originary" creation act to the present and the future, sustaining creation that is an ever-giving life for all. One of the novelties of Pinnock's approach is a reversal of the order of how we typically understand creation in relation to redemption. Although we typically begin our systematic theologies foundationally with "the beginning" of the creation of the world, we often move on too quickly to focus on the redemption and unity of persons. This unfortunately results in over-emphasizing redemption at the expense of forgetting that the Spirit is *first* an imaginative creator of spaces. It makes sense to dwell on the overall vision of what is being redeemed and how. As Pinnock sees it, we need to retrieve these creative or "cosmic functions" for theology; namely, because "the cosmic functions (of the Spirit) keep before us the unity of God's work in creation and redemption. Spirit is the power of redemption only because he is first the power of creation". (Pinnock 1996, p. 62)¹⁷

Interpersonal Unity via Newness and Atonement

Pinnock's pneumatology also can be seen as expressing a unique, interpersonal unity. As a founding member of the "Open and Relational" theology movement, Pinnock holds to a theology that does not begin with the classic dogmatics of the doctrine of God's all-encompassing knowledge, power, benevolence, holiness, etc. Although some of these factors are causal of other important theological characteristics that result from Pinnock's Christology and pneumatology, many of these doctrines get deconstructed along the lines of subsuming them first under the "omega" qualification of God as loving and relational. This helps make sense of Pinnock's claim:

"Let God not be defined so much by holiness and sovereignty in which loving relatedness is incidental, but by the dance of trinitarian life. And let us see Spirit as effecting relationships, connecting Son to Father, and us to God. Spirit is the ecstasy of divine life, the overabundance of joy that gives birth to the universe and ever works to bring about a fullness of unity. When we render God in this way, not only atheists might come to love him, but even Christians, for we ourselves often lack a sense of God's beauty and adorableness. God is the ever-expanding circle of loving, and the Spirit is the dynamic at the heart of the circle". (Pinnock 1996, p. 30)

Although dressed in non-traditional and even affective language, this approach to the Spirit as a "dancing" circle of uniting and dynamic love is reflective of Gregory of Nazianzus' chosen metaphor for the mystery of the trinity—the dance of "circumincession" (*perichoresis*). "Dance" here is appropriate because it creates space and represents movement in relation to other persons, yet without sacrificing individual identity. This expresses the primordial nature of life and mirrors it into human relationality, participation, and reciprocity. For Pinnock, "Trinity means that shared life is basic to the nature of God. God is perfect sociality, mutuality, reciprocity and peace" (Pinnock 1996, p. 21).¹⁸ This ideal transcendent society of interpersonal communion that does not leave persons alone in isolation is the kind of relation humans also should emulate. This runs contrary to any rugged individualism or "uncontrolled subjectivity" that limits our attunement to the Spirit's guiding of community (Pinnock 1996, p. 135; cf. Williams 2017).

These ideas of pneumatological creation and triune "shared life" provide us a different expression of unity. The Spirit plays a fundamental role in creating unity between God and humans. At-one-ment or *atonement* gives expression to unity through reconciliation (Romans 5:11), and this is primarily a *relational concept*, not simply one of soteriological justice or salvation. Atonement points to "the loving relationality into which the Spirit is drawing people" (Pinnock 1996, p. 88). By acknowledging the originary role of the Holy Spirit in establishing reconciliation and atonement, we might better grasp the complexity of the *very idea* of unity. Pinnock recognizes that although in some cases we might think of unity as "a relatively simple notion", it often is highly complex. Indeed, "The higher the entity, the more complex unity seems to be. Think of the unity of a work of art . . . Why expect divine unity to lack complexity? Trinity is a mystery, but it is not an irrationality. It epitomizes the complexity in unity that we find everywhere in experience" (Pinnock 1996, p. 29).

Pinnock carefully sits therefore between two prevailing tensions of divine mystery and divine anthropocentrism, between apophatic and kataphatic theologies. Instead of trapping us in not being able to speak of God, the complexity of God is precisely an invitation to creatively explore this personhood; namely, because this God is a personal God who binds Godself to the interests, projects, and problems of humans in history.¹⁹ Consistent with Pentecostalism's ontological priority of grace and healing, Pinnock's "free-will" theology emphasizes human freedom and God's relationship with "the world" in which God kenotically invests Godself into creation. Pinnock's account seeks to not fall into a dualistic or even Gnostic trap of pitting the spiritual against the material. When such a pneumatology can truly prioritize inter-relation, unity, and creative dynamicity, and can

display how God's Spirit is available for *all* and not merely a "secured possession" for only the few "chosen", new doors are opened for ecumenical connectivity.²⁰

To summarize Pinnock's position: to be relational is to be dynamic, and to be dynamic is to be connected to newness and creation. This approach to the Holy Spirit follows from Pinnock's emphasis upon the creation account, also ensuing from his conception of redemption via natality. The intimate entanglements of God-world-person demonstrate once again his interest in "a more relational model" (Pinnock 1996, p. 149). By focusing not simply upon "unity" for its own sake, but rather upon the shared goals of "new creation" (Pinnock 1996, p. 155), Pinnock insists we might arrive at a more sustainable unity (which always is in various *degrees*) as communities that creatively make transcendence together. A pneumatology of newness and change is expressive of becoming more aligned with the creative efforts of Spirit.

6. Conclusions: Toward a Relational Pneumatology

Pentecostal, Charismatic, and Renewal Pneumatology are emerging attempts to give description to the practices of those communities "committed to Jesus Christ and are grasped by the Holy Spirit" (Wariboko 2018, p. 93). This article has turned to recent and creative reappraisals of pneumatology in especially Charismatic thought *not* in order to *critique* other, past theological accounts, but rather more essentially to build bridges of inter-cultural possibility, precisely through the *relational ontology* provided by the Holy Spirit. We indeed are in need of more careful "reflection on the nature of spiritual ecumenism" (Link-Wieczorek et al. 2004, p. 308), and one thing to be learned from worldwide Spirit-driven movements is how the elevation of pneumatology can help *renew* Churches and theological education (Yong 2020). This growing sector of Charismatic Theology in particular attempts to breath new life and faith into struggling Churches worldwide, and therefore offers surprisingly novel spaces for understanding ecumenical dialogue. At least since the Second Vatican Council, Catholic theology has pointed to the need to more consistently acknowledge how the Holy Spirit is present already at the moment of creation (*Semina Verbi*), and still is creating and establishing the kingdom in this present *cosmos*. This is an inter-relational bridge that could be used to further connect these movements, networks, and traditions.

In conclusion, it is important to note that even among these three emerging Charismatic perspectives, there is a great deal of diversity. They represent how Charismatics should not be labeled "conservative or fundamentalist", but rather "radical and nonorthodox" (Wariboko 2018, p. 22). As an attempt to be radical, Pentecostal and Charismatic theologies cannot simply be dismissed as a cultural fad, or a temporary, passing movement. Perhaps the spread of these many Christian expressions of spirit-driven Charismaticism is a result of the core drive of *homo religiosus* or an "ideal expression" of a Bonhoefferian "religionless Christianity" via a return to pneumatology (Cox 1995). Perhaps Pentecostal pneumatology has had such a global spread not because it is *new* or *novel*, but for precisely the opposite reason: because it is radical and *primal*. The primal piety (healings, miracles, gift expressions), primal speech (multilinguality), and primal spirituality (surprising and spontaneous expressions of the spirit in church settings) of these movements can be interpreted as expressions of a *retournement* to certain Christian freedoms suppressed in Modernity (Cox 1995).²¹ In this context, perhaps the "relational turn" or contemporary attraction of "relational ontology" also is an expression of what has been missing from the human project in a modern era so overly committed to establishing epistemological foundations in which truths, persons, and contexts are decidedly "unchanging" and self-sustaining. Or, put in theological terms, perhaps the radical return to pneumatology is a way to *retrieve*, or at least gain renewed awareness of, what Wariboko, Yong, and Pinnock each deem central to Christian experience: a creative and freeing, yet complex and relational, unity born of the recognition that the differences of other Christians (and of God) should not be seen as disabling threats, but rather as conduits of a creative and primal freedom.

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Notes

- 1 As Sawa recently summarized quite well, “A description of a Pentecostal spirituality in the broad sense should also recognise the following differences with respect to the Catholic or Reformation traditions: experience over doctrine, prayer and praise over the credo, references to life over theological deliberations, developing trust in God over the knowledge of catechism, and spontaneity over formulas. All these generate a new quality of spirituality”. (Sawa 2021, p. 626).
- 2 “Today, in many parts of the world, under the influence of the grace of the Holy Spirit, many efforts are being made in prayer, word and action to attain that fullness of unity which Jesus Christ desires”. *Unitatis Redintegratio* p. 4. See also Secretariat for Promoting Christian Unity (SPCU), *Ecumenical Directory, Ad Totam Ecclesiam*, AAS 1967, 574–92; AAS 1970, 705–24. *Directory for the Application and Principles and Norms on Ecumenism* (Dicastery for Promoting Christian Unity n.d.). <http://www.christianunity.va/content/unitacristiani/en/documenti/testo-in-inglese.html> (accessed on 2 February 2022)
- 3 Yong here refers critically to M. Horton’s (1995) edited *Systematic Theology: A Pentecostal Perspective*.
- 4 “Therefore, there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit who gives life has set you free from the law of sin and death”.
- 5 Here Wagner’s depiction of pneumatology as a concretion of love and freedom is helpful: “Liebe, die in der Hingabe an anderes—Personen, Institutionen und Sachverhalten—zu sich selbst kommt, und Freiheit, die die nicht haltbare Alternative von Selbst- und Fremdbestimmung durch Selbstdarstellung im Fremden überwindet.” (Wagner 2014, p. 391)
- 6 In support of a relational ontology, Wildman contests the validity of Aristotle’s example of the keyring: “Aristotle thought that relations are ontologically subordinate to entities. We can think of the manifold relations attributable to a set of keys on a key ring—what they can unlock, whether we know where the keys are, and so on—but those relations only exist so long as the key ring itself exists. Moreover, the key ring’s relations can easily be changed (say, by changing locks) without affecting the substance of the key ring. This is why Aristotle included relation on his list of categories as subordinate to the primary category of substance, which he interpreted as the bearer of all properties, including relational properties. Some idealist philosophers have argued that Aristotle erred when trusting common sense as a guide in this instance. In fact, the key ring’s substance, *properly understood* (i.e., understood contrary to common sense), *does change* when its relations change. Change the locks and key ring is no longer useful in the way it once was, and this affects the substance of the key ring because substance is more than merely chemical constituents and shape”. (Wildman 2010, p. 57).
- 7 For Wariboko, “Microtheology is an interpretative analysis of everyday embodied theological interactions and agency at the individual, face-to-face level. It is a study of everyday social interactions of individuals or small groups that demonstrate the link “ages between spirituality (practices and affections) and embodied theological ideas (beliefs)”. (Wariboko 2018, pp. 102–3).
- 8 For Wariboko, not only do multiple languages create a kind of disharmony, but miracles can as well: “Because Pentecostals believe that there are cracks in reality, tears in the phenomenal curtain over the noumenal that allow “miracles” to eventuate or spirit-filled believers to access things-in-themselves, their actions cannot reflect a harmoniously ordered God”. (Wariboko 2018, p. 58).
- 9 He continues “The point is that the enigma of the Other that Pentecostals think is an obstacle to integration with the Other is also an enigma within/of Pentecostalism. What eludes the Pentecostals’ grasp about the Other eludes not only their own grasp about themselves, but also the Other’s grasp about itself”. (Wariboko 2018, p. 516).
- 10 Wariboko argues “that Pentecostalism’s limitation to a split God, that is, the very practices, beliefs, rituals, and interactions that prevent Pentecostals from relating to or conceptualizing a harmonious, consistent God, is, at the same time, the positive condition to its access to a living, active, miracle-working God, and this partly explains its robust growth”. (Wariboko 2018, p. 33).
- 11 For Wariboko, “The God, qua a notion of Christian God, who inhabits this “between” with them is imagined by Pentecostals to be cracked, a real deity and its fantasmatic supplement; in him multiple, incompatible possibilities exist. From an infinite distance, the notion of pentecostal God is crafted to inspire awe”. (Wariboko 2018, p. 37).
- 12 Others have described this aspect of Pentecostal theology as an “enchanted” theology of creation that is “charged” with invisible or inconspicuous principalities and powers. Such a “nondualistic affirmation of embodiment and materiality” (Smith 2010, p. 41) serves to put into question the way we make clear-cut distinctions between the immanent/transcendent and the sacred/profane.
- 13 Wariboko hopes to reveal “that the God that ‘died’ in the 1960s and the God who was ‘resurrected’ in the 1980s are not the same. God is now a radically split God. Pentecostals have crafted from the materials of their everyday lives a notion of God that is not in (or cannot come into) full identity with Godself, and God is forever interacting with a reality that is ontologically incomplete. Time and again, we see Pentecostalism professing a traditional doctrine of God, yet its very practices continually set the stage for the unraveling, liquidation, or reconstitution of that doctrine”. (Wariboko 2018, p. 24).

- ¹⁴ As Yong claims, we need not simply “theologies of the Holy Spirit . . . rather, they should be pneumatological theologies”. (Yong 2014, p. 32).
- ¹⁵ Relevant in this context is how scholars have tracked racial differences among early American Pentecostal movements. As Alexander and Yong have argued (Yong and Alexander 2011), Black Pentecostal communities have been quicker to engage in social justice and civil rights movements than white communities.
- ¹⁶ For Pinnock, “Spirit is the power by which this present age will be transformed into the kingdom and which ever works to bring about that ultimate fulfillment. As the power of creation, the Spirit does not call us to escape from the world . . . but keeps creation open to the future”. (Pinnock 1996, p. 61).
- ¹⁷ See here Wenk, who also recently argued for the necessity of retrieving the role of the Holy Spirit in creation. (Wenk 2022, p. 191).
- ¹⁸ Pinnock continues, “As a circle of loving relationships, God is dynamically alive. There is only one God, but this one God is not solitary but a loving communion that is distinguished by overflowing life”. (Pinnock 1996, p. 21).
- ¹⁹ “God is bound together with us by choice. This is why he acts in history and relates to creatures. He loves to exist in dynamic relationship with the world. God has pledged himself to this situation so full of promise and of risk”. (Pinnock 1996, p. 30).
- ²⁰ Swoboda fittingly asserts that “A truly pentecostal theology acknowledges that God’s Spirit is not the secured possession of the Pentecostal church . . . when we revisit the Holy Spirit in all of creation, not merely the human community, we will find God’s mission to bring prosperity, health, and vitality to all that God has made”. (Swoboda 2013, p. 410).
- ²¹ Cox (1995); see also Wariboko (2011). It also is of note here that such expressions of Christianity, despite concerns about its inclusive exclusivism in its models of Spirit Baptism, is often seen to empower “individuals apart from or alongside cumbersome institutions, authorities, and traditions” (Yong 2013, p. 256), and facilitate modernization of developing nations, and even democratization of economies. (Martin 2002).

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