

Day of Pentecost

The Founding Violent Gesture of Splits

Introduction

When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly, a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them. Now there were staying in Jerusalem God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven. When they heard this sound, a crowd came together in bewilderment, because each one heard their own language being spoken. Utterly amazed, they asked: “Aren’t all these who are speaking Galileans? Then how is it that each of us hears them in our native language? Parthians, Medes and Elamites; residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya near Cyrene; visitors from Rome (both Jews and converts to Judaism); Cretans and Arabs—we hear them declaring the wonders of God in our own tongues!” Amazed and perplexed, they asked one another, “What does this mean?” Some, however, made fun of them and said, “They have had too much wine.” Then Peter stood up with the Eleven, raised his voice, and addressed the crowd: “Fellow Jews and all of you who live in Jerusalem, let me explain this to you; listen carefully to what I say. These people are not drunk, as you suppose. It’s only nine in the morning!” (Acts 2:1–15 NIV).

The thesis I want to pursue in this chapter is the idea that the current pentecostal notion of a split God and the practices, rituals, and interactions articulated around this notion are (partly) rooted in the inaugural event of Pentecost. I want to show that when the event of Pentecost is approached at its most theoretically accessible point—which is not necessarily its strongest theological point—the violent gesture of splits lies at the origin of the movement. Here I develop an analysis of Acts 2 that illuminates the startling function of the split nature of speaking in tongues and freedom of life-in-the-Spirit in Pentecostalism. The analysis also demonstrates that while at one level the story of Acts 2 illustrates basic religious belief in a complete chain of causality, in fact, the event exemplifies the transgression of this belief. With this chapter, the analysis begun in the preface and introduction reaches a decisive point, profoundly grounding the split-God image of Pentecostals in the *ur*-moment of the church.

The Violent Gesture of Language

The founding event of Pentecostalism—language, speech in tongues in Acts 2 or here in America (Azusa Street, Los Angeles; or Topeka, Kansas) “bars” (in the Lacanian sense) subjectivity of both God and human beings. For the disciples or the faithful to step into the new era of the Spirit, into the new symbolic order, so to speak, they had to speak a new language. The disciples at Jerusalem did not understand the language they were speaking at the inaugural event, but their hearers did. Speakers and listeners at Azusa/Topeka did not understand what was spoken. As Jacques Lacan teaches us, language designates the entire symbolic order, and the price of acquiring it is the splitting of the subject—subjectivity is barred. Disciples and believers were torn from the psychosocial forces of the old order and the codes that regulated their flow and nourished them, and they were thrown into the new one. Language at least introduced symbolic division between subject (disciples, believers) and the old order (mater, mother, M-Other).

Glossolalia is the language of the other. The “of” here is polyvalent. The language of the other is the Other’s language, and it is *speaking* through “I.” It might be speaking the desire in me that I am unconscious of. It may well be that my language is the language of the other, “that is the unconscious itself.” The “language of the other” also means my language *for* the Other and it can also be understood as the desire *for* the Other.¹ Glossolalia represents the experience of the Other, the divine as

an “outside that is inside, that forever faulting [the speaker’s] identity.”² Identity is not oneness.

There is also a split for the Other, the Spirit. The language (desire) *for* the Other is the desire for the Spirit. To speak the language or fulfill the desire, I would have to do or to be what the Spirit desires. What does the Spirit want (lack)? I guess it is human beings (flesh) who can worship God in spirit and truth (John 4:23–24). This want, desire, lack opens up a gap, a split, between aim and goal, an in-between in the path toward the end and the end itself, between drive and desire.

The language of the Other as well as the Other in language is a game of cleavage, which inevitably splits God, as it were. The Other in language is *difference*, which in the words of Martin Heidegger is the temple of everything. Building on Heidegger’s idea of language being the temple of Being, Mark C. Taylor states, “Language exhibits the contrasting rhythms characteristic of all cleaving. The *poiesis* of language both joins and separates. . . . While language holds together opposites usually set apart, it also holds apart the opposites it brings together. In this way, language eternally returns to the difference—the difference that is the . . . temple of everything that is.”³

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit united the disciples and three thousand others into a new community, but each person remained singular, and linguistic difference marked the whole group. Commenting on the place of language on the day of Pentecost, political theorist Anne Norton says, “At the moment in which they recognize themselves as the *demos*, the people are united by the *heilege geist*, that common mind and spirit that realizes itself in language, more precisely in linguistic difference. . . . Their work is in language and through language: not one language but in the diverse forms that language takes. They are all to speak, to write, to bear witness; each is to do so in a particular language, a particular tongue.”⁴

On the day of Pentecost, language was both the unifying medium of the immanent community and its extension to include the other, and the distinguishing marker of the persons/groups in the commons. Diverse tongues, each person speaking to others and being understood, became the symbol of the interplay between likeness and difference. Norton notes, “Language is a human capacity, but it appears in wildly diverse forms among human beings. One does not learn language, one learns a language, and so becomes human in a distinctive and particular manner. That which is common to all is achieved only in ways that are not common to all.”⁵

Let us get back to Heidegger to further theoretically ground the observations of Taylor and Norton. Language’s key role is to articulate

“the between” where communication can take place. The between keeps alive the ceaseless oscillation of difference; it does not allow difference to turn into identity. In one of Heidegger’s articulations of the differential between that mediates Being and being, he states,

For world and things do not subsist alongside one another. They penetrate each other. Hence the two traverse a mean. In it, they are one. Thus at one, they are intimate. The mean of the two is inwardness. In our language, the mean of the two is called the between. The Latin language used *inter*. The corresponding German term is *unter*. The intimacy or inwardness of world and things is not a fusion. Intimacy obtains only where the intimate—world and thing—divides itself cleanly and remains separated. In the midst of the two, in the between of world and thing, in the *inter*, division prevails: *dif-ference*. The intimacy of world and thing is present in the boundary of the between; it is present in the dif-ference. The word difference is now removed from its usual and customary usage. What it now names is not a species concept for various kinds of differences. It exists only as this single difference. It is unique. Of itself, it holds apart the mean in and through which the world and things are at one with each other. The intimacy of the difference is the unifying element of the *diaphora*, the carrying out that carries through. The difference carries out world in its worlding, carries out things in their thinging. Thus carrying them out, it carries them toward one another. The dif-ference does not mediate after the fact by binding together world and things through a mean added on to them. Being the mean, it first determines world and things in their presence, i.e., in their being toward one another, whose unity it carries out.⁶

The sum of what we have stated in this section is that language as the characteristic feature of the day of Pentecost, both as “language of the Other” or “language for the Other,” causes a splitting in the subjects. This is the implicit violent gesture that is often missed in the theological analysis of the xenolalia, and by extension glossolalia, of the inaugural event of Pentecostalism. This is because they are not approached at their theoretically most accessible point. Let us now examine another type of split that occurred on the day.

Tongues-Speech as Revelation and Reveilation

Speaking in tongues (glossolalia), uttering mysteries in the Spirit (1 Cor. 14:2), is both a revelation and reveilation.⁷ It conceals communication (*communicare*, to make common) or the commons (the interspace of persons) by uttering only what the Spirit understands. By withdrawing from the community, interspace, the tongues-speaker is neither a person nor a nonperson. By this (non)placement she is one who is “set apart.” Note that “set apart” is polyvalent. It means in the usual sense that she is “holy,” touched by the Spirit, the one who is privileged, though many will come to be so privileged. In another sense it means she is set apart because she is uttering “secrets” that the others in her immediate community cannot understand. This second sense plays on the etymology of the word “secret,” which is *secernere*; *se*, apart, on one’s own, plus *cernere*, to separate. Tongues that reveal divine presence amid believers only by not revealing harbor the secret of division in the body of Christ, splitting the body from within. Speaking in tongues is that which “set apart” true believers as classical Pentecostals understood so well. But what was unthinkable by them and what is unsaid in their position is that the secret of tongues, the secret they cherish, is also the secret of God. In descending into the human realm (in immanence), God is also “set apart.” God’s position is both an ex-position and “parting” of God’s self. God turns to human beings at Pentecost by turning away from God’s self. Similarly, a turning to sinful human beings at the moment of the cross means God turning from God, God forsaking God, God withdrawing from himself (Matt. 27:46). The secret of the cross is also the secret of Pentecost.

Let us put things differently. Glossolalia, the founding event of Pentecostalism, enables the communication between humans and God by “withdrawing” from language. This withdrawal creates a hole in both human beings and God, so to speak. This hole represents the “originary lack” that births Pentecostalism—at least at Azusa/Topeka. This lack, which marks humans and God alike (or mimics God withdrawing from himself), “is neither the absence of a presence nor the presence of an absence, is not the *arche* but an *anarche* that re-moves the ground that once seemed secure. This unground that undercuts every *Ungrund* is always lacking and hence is ungraspable and incomprehensible.”⁸ The excess of Pentecostalism and its imbrication in the split-God image—the undercutting of orthodoxy and unsettling of theological grounds—can be traced to this “originary” lack. This tendency to re-move the grounds

that seem secure will be further illustrated in the analysis of the various kinds of speaking in tongues.

Three Types of Speaking in Tongues

There are three types of tongues-speech in the Bible: xenolalia (Acts 2, and possibly Acts 10:44–48, 19:1–7), interpreted glossolalia (1 Cor. 14:13), and noninterpreted glossolalia (1 Cor. 14:6–10, 23). I will use these three terms to name some kind of agency that nudges Pentecostal believers, God's subjects, to act ethically, even as it splits them (their identity). In the first case, the ecstatic speaker does not (necessarily) understand the language, but his or her audience does.⁹ In the second case, the unknown spiritual language is interpreted for the speaker and audience and it becomes a prophecy. In the final case, both the speaker and the audience (if any) do not understand what is being said. Paul in this case says, “Unless you speak intelligible words with your tongue, how will anyone know what you are saying? You will just be speaking into the air [empty space]. . . . So if the whole church comes together and everyone speaks in tongues, and inquirers or unbelievers come in, will they not say that you are out of your mind [crazy, mad]?” (1 Cor. 14:9, 23 NIV).

I want to read these three forms of tongues-speech in accordance with Lacan's triad of Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real (I-S-R)—only as a heuristic device.¹⁰ In simple terms, the imaginary refers to identification with ideals (including dreams, imitation of another person, the ego ideal, idealized self-image, some supreme good, some positive determination of the paramount goal of society/institutions/god) in lived experience. The symbolic order refers to the laws, regulations, meanings of our community, institutions, or culture. In fact, it is the so-called “society” that structures a person's experience of reality. It is the whole trans-subjective symbolic order that conditions a person's existence. It stands to a person as an external reality. It also refers to a subject's point of symbolic identification in community. The Real is the enigmatic, impossible demand of the symbolic order, the “Big Other” that eludes symbolization or representation and thus fills the subject with uncertainty and anxiety. As it is not directly observable, experienceable, or symbolize-able, a person is only able to discern through its effects. There is no guarantee that a person gets it right or wrong, which raises a lot of anxiety and marks the person as guilty even before he or she acts.

Table 1. Forms of Speaking in Tongues and Lacan's Triad

<i>Forms of Speech</i>	<i>Lacan Triad</i>	<i>Ethical Suggestion</i>
Xenolalia	Imaginary	Separate
Interpreted Glossolalia	Symbolic	Incorporate
Noninterpreted Glossolalia	Real	"Speak up"

Table 1 summarizes upfront the analogy I am making between three forms of tongues-speech and the Lacan triad. The Acts 2 event, where the disciples spoke to the people who had come to the holy city Jerusalem from more than a dozen countries / linguistic groups, exemplifies the ideal of forming a new (ecclesial) community. At that moment the promised ideal of giving of the Holy Spirit had come and now the church was formally born. Jesus had asked the disciples not to leave Jerusalem and to wait for the gift of the Holy Spirit. Their speaking in tongues, among other gifts, fulfilled this promise and brought into being the church. The kind of tongues they spoke on that day enabled them to reach this positive good. The attainment of this good was through a subtractive process, a new community had to be formed by separating (or beginning the separation of) followers of Jesus Christ from Judaism. Those who had faith in Christ were separated from those who did not by a new line of separation within the Jewish ethnic group or within Israel. The tongues spoken on that fateful day were an instrument of drawing a new line of identity to build up the remnants of Christ working in anticipation of his second coming, a project Peter and company identified with. This kind of separation is at the heart of the Gospel message. The audience in Jerusalem heard the message for them to betray their tradition, split from their organic community, turn away from their generation, and come into a new one, to a new universal truth. Peter implied that in this new community, the Jews in Jerusalem were asked to cut or separate themselves from their "tradition" and participate in Christ who has already overcome all separations and cuts. Put differently, they were being asked to enter into a new humanity by literally excising themselves from their old humanity—a point Paul made explicit and elaborated upon in Galatians 3:28: "neither Jew nor Greek . . ."

The overall lesson here is that the form of tongues-speaking that best identifies with the supreme good of Christianity (or the emerging ecclesia) is the type the listeners understand, and it calls them to become followers

of Jesus Christ by subtracting from their particular lifeworlds. But let us not forget that this operation on the day of Pentecost and even today is a violent gesture of creating a new community, of separating people from their own communities. When the people heard Peter's sermon, they were cut to their hearts, as the Bible says, and asked Peter what they needed to do (Acts 2:37). This cut was not just about the pain of sinfulness, doubt, failure, or unpreparedness for the new thing God was doing in their midst or what the message provoked in them, but they were being asked to split from their "ethical substance," the norms and theological ethical practices and prescriptions that constituted the Jewish tradition.

The violent gesture of separation that the first form of tongues-speaking initiated seems to be countered by the second form, which incorporates believers back into their communities. This second form is the translated glossolalia. As Paul noted in 1 Corinthians 14, a person speaking in untranslatable or noninterpreted glossolalia is constrained into his or her private space while in the midst of the church community. The person is in fact speaking into an empty space, for her "language" is not part of the symbolic order (in the Lacanian sense) of the church community. But interpretation or translation incorporates the speaker and the meaning of her tongues-speech into the community and into social discourse and signification. For Lacan, language not only incorporates its speaker into the symbolic order, but it is synonymous with the symbolic order or the domain of culture.¹¹ So precisely, the demand for glossolalia to be interpreted, to be translated into known language, is to incorporate the speaker into the symbolic order (the law and structure) of the new (church) community.

This incorporation may imply also "reincorporation" to the bigger (more-than church) community, and if this is the case, the reincorporation balances the earlier subtraction. In this dimension the incorporation might just be like the "as-if-not" religious stance that Paul talks about in the same first letter to the Corinthians.

Each person should remain in the situation they were in when God called them. . . . I mean, brothers and sisters, is that the time is short. From now on those who have wives should live as if they do not; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away. (1 Cor. 7:20, 29–31 NIV)

Paul is here telling them that given the messianic time that remains they should participate in the world, but with an attitude of suspension. This stance does not legitimize the existing culture or power relations, only a refusal to be interpellated by the symbolic order. "I use the symbolic obligations, but I am not performatively bound by them."¹²

Giorgio Agamben, in his book *The Time That Remains*, argues that Paul's intention is not to abolish the law (symbolic order), but to render it "inoperative," though it is in force it loses signification.¹³ The messianic vocation in this stance of "as though not" is "revocation of every vocation."¹⁴ According to Agamben, Paul's "as if not" makes the law (symbolic order) "freely available for use."¹⁵ He elucidates further: "Use: this is the definition Paul gives to messianic life in the form of the as not. To live messianically means 'to use' *klêsis* [vocation]; conversely, messianic *klêsis* is something to use, not to possess."¹⁶ Agamben goes even further to argue that the law becoming an object of free use, the symbolic order deprived of signification, is based on Paul's understanding of the logic of grace. For Paul, "Grace cannot constitute a separate realm that is alongside that of obligation and law. Rather, grace entails nothing more than the ability to use the sphere of social determinations and services in its totality."¹⁷

Let us now turn to the third form of tongues-speech, the noninterpreted (uninterpretable) glossolalia. The uninterpretable tongues-speech is the Real (of the Spirit, the divine-human relation), which demands impossible commitment from Pentecostals. This Real resists their grasping or full understanding no matter how close the Pentecostals approach the Spirit. The tongues-speech is uttered with the full complement of the body and its senses, but it (or the Spirit) can never be "represented" in meaning. The Real transpires or shines through their reality or bodies, forever slipping through their fingers.

Uninterpretable tongues-speech is the enigma of God's desire, which is completely impenetrable and resists every attempt for the believer to understand it as it resists, eludes, symbolization. The speech opens up a gap of what is in the divine-human relation more than the divine-human relation, of the *thing* in the relation that resists symbolic identification. This kind of tongues-speech confronts the world with the impossible Real that is God, with the empty, pure formality of an injunction, "Speak up!" leaving the believer to translate it into something determinate. This is the void of an unconditional divine command, which compels the believer or the recipient to translate it into a concrete issue to address, preach, or evangelize about while offering no guarantee that the translation is right.

The speaker not only bears full responsibility for how she interprets and enacts this ethical obligation, but she cannot invoke any external circumstances or social constraints as an excuse for not interpreting, enacting, and obeying it. For this precise reason, like Žižek in a different context, “one is tempted to risk a parallel with Kant’s *Critique of Judgement*: the concrete formulation of a determinate ethical obligation has the structure of an aesthetic judgment, that is, of a judgment by means of which, instead of simply applying a universal category to a particular object or subsuming this object under an already-given universal determination, [the] I as it were *invent* its universal-necessary-obligatory dimension, and thereby elevate this particular-contingent object (act) to the dignity of the ethical Thing.”¹⁸ The formal indeterminacy is at the core of what Kant means by ethical autonomy of the free enlightened subject. Pentecostals want and cherish freedom, freedom in the Spirit, and this is it and its responsibility in the sublime dimension. The free, believing God’s subject is confronted with the necessary, unconditional authority of an untranslatable, uninterpreted speech. While the believer is “compelled” to speak because she can and must speak, the question of “What am I to say?” remains an open question. Herein lies the lure and terror of tongues-speech. The uninterpretative tongues-speech also has the character of the empty, formal demand of Kant’s categorical imperative. The “Speak up,” you “ought to speak,” is like the abstract *Sollen* (“ought to be”) of the categorical imperative in its formal indeterminacy.

This “ought to speak” has something else going for it. We can also interpret it as the openness of the Spirit-Pentecostal relations to new beginnings. Within the very unforeclosed character of the demand to speak up, in its very formal indeterminacy, the born-again believer is called up to reimagine the relationship. The openness of the relations, its incompleteness, leaves it up to each believer or community to live up to the impossible demand of the abstract “Speak up,” to initiate something new, to decide his/her or the community’s form of natality. The very formal indeterminacy undermines any enchainment of the believer to her inherited ethical substance, the given constraints of a particular (denominational, racial, national, ethnic) identity or tradition, for she has to posit a decision and without this contingent act of a free subject there is no translation of the “Speak up” and taking responsibility for it. There is no ethical act or listening to the voice (demand) of the Holy Spirit without breaking out of constraints. This is the “negative,” the power of the uninterpretable tongues-speech that when it irrupts in us or in our community it stands as a reminder of the disruptive power of God’s grace.

By way of reaching conclusion on this section, let me relate the language phenomenon to that of Babel (Genesis 11). It is often stated that Pentecost is the negation of Babel; instead of the confusion Babel signifies, the former signifies reconciliation and mediation. What if we turn this commonplace knowledge around and generate the thought and say Pentecost (in its broad meaning of the knot of three forms to tongues-speech) delivers humanity to the *Real*. Without renouncing symbolic understanding and articulation, Pentecost expresses (attempts to express) the inexpressible Real. Even if we can now “understand ourselves,” language is pressured by the Real. This pressure is felt in at least two ways. The pure void of “Speak up” compels Pentecostals (if they really want to know the truth of their desires) to cut off symbolic discourse about God from the Real. Second, Pentecostals’ daily (ritual) language now convicts them of guilt, already always guilty for not speaking out. This guilt splits the believer from within.

If Babel represents a displacement of human beings from one another and by implication from God, then Pentecost is a displacement of the subject, self from the self, limiting her identity with herself. The closeness of God is a traumatic kernel (intrusion) in the core of the person, a tiny bone caught in her throat that forces the believer to stutter or stammer in a presymbolic way when talking about the promptings of being-itself in her. In other words, Pentecost is in a sense the negation of the Babel negation but does not issue in a new, deeper synthesis. There is only a “formal” difference between it and Babel. In the world of Babel, language separated people by communication gap, whereas Pentecost is the gap itself. The untranslatable glossolalia is a kind of obstacle that makes it impossible for any two persons even within one language group to communicate or anyone to become identical with itself. Speaking in tongues represents an excess that cannot be fully incorporated into any synthesis.

Excess and Limit within Pentecost: Another Image of Splitting

If we examine the day of Pentecost from the perspectives of the 120 disciples and their audience, we will see a marvelous image of a split God. The bacchanalian revel the audience saw and simply labeled as drunkenness portrays a God of excess and extravagance. The gifts of the Spirit were poured out lavishly. Peter’s speech framed this excess, defined

its boundaries, and insisted that the behavior of the disciples was within limit (Acts 2:14–40). The speech performed an Apollonian observance of limits. These two dimensions or activities are the work of one God. The interplay of excess and control, contending and cooperating forces, is a characteristic feature of Pentecostalism. Even if for nothing, Pentecostals do not let us forget these two sides of God: form and formlessness, beauty and the sublime. The split in God occurs—as we can read it phenomenally through the lens of Pentecostalism—when the two sides are out of balance. The logic here is that the external opposition between the two forces may well gesture (if not, correspond) to the internal opposition in the “economic” work of God, that is, in the relations between God and humans in the process of human flourishing.

The move to go from pentecostal activities to the nature of God is based on pentecostal sensibility. Pentecostals attribute what they do or what happens in their lives to God, to what God is doing in their midst. Like the Psalmist who says this is the Lord’s doing and it is marvelous in our eyes, Pentecostals sing, “Come and see-o; come and see. Come and see what the Lord has done; come and see what the Lord has done.” Does what God is (presumably) doing reflect God’s nature or not? If there is no correspondence between what God is doing and God’s nature, there is a split between being and doing. If there is correspondence and what we observe in pentecostal life, event, and circumstance exhibits split tendencies, then we also need to turn to God to “ground” them. Of course, if what is happening to the Pentecostals or the Psalmist has nothing to do with God, this whole interconnection between my question and my answer collapses. And this collapse begs a different question: Does any religious claim or belief by any set of believers have anything to do with God? Can any vision, prophecy, or scriptural writing be attributed to God? If no, then religion, any religion, is a huge deception of man by man. Some may say the answer is yes, but there are internal criteria within any religion (or sect) to identify the true act of God. Such criteria will always be open to debate. More importantly, the principle of drawing a line of correspondence or correlation between events in pentecostal lives and God’s acts is (should be) internal to Pentecostalism.

The logic here is the logic of “by-their-fruits-we-shall-know them.” The reasoning here is that from the fruits we can decipher the kind of tree that produced them. Trees stand behind their fruits. The fruit is an epistemological shortcut to its mother-tree. Insofar as we consider Pentecostals’ acts as divinely inspired (induced, led) or *theurgic*, then such

acts are revelatory of (their) God, the God they serve. Their acts are in a sense the corporeal signatures of their God.

The behavior of observable divine presence (manifestation, power) is (points to) the immanent form of God. This kind of epistemological move is made all the time in science. The behavior of observable phenomena or objects is said to reveal the “truth” about the unobservables. Statements about entities, objects, particles, atoms, molecules, and so on, which are not open to direct observation, “can only be said to be verified by the behavior of certain characteristics of observable phenomena which are assumed to be ‘symptoms’ of variations in the unobservables.”¹⁹

The connection I am making between God and pentecostal activities holds, as anthropologist Robin Horton (who is also an Oxford-trained chemist) similarly argues, “by virtue of an assumption that variations in the observable are symptoms of certain variations in the unobservable—an assumption which in both cases [that is, a modern scientific conception of unobservable theoretical entities and a Nuer/Kalabari conception of Spirit] can have no further justification.”²⁰

I do not want anybody to lose his or her temper over this methodology. It is only an axiom, a fundamental organizing assumption for old-fashioned speculative philosophy. It is nothing but a point of departure for a speculative-empirical study of the imbrication of God in a religious movement.

Freedom Implies a Radically Split Entity

The freedom inaugurated on the day of Pentecost that Pentecostals celebrate also harbors a splitting tension, which may be correlated with the divine also. The split is akin to the inevitable split between freedom and necessity (system). Any action or person in (submitted to) a system is ordered by the law, *arche*, the principle of the system. But freedom is essentially breaking up the chain of causality organized by a system’s *arche*. The freedom (“general economy”) cherished by Pentecostals is a liberation from the law, the “Name-of-the-Father” (“restricted economy,” the extant network of causes and effects). There is a tension between these two forces or tendencies.

This tension, as F. W. J. Schelling taught us, starts in the divine as the tension between ground and existence, expansion and contraction—the rotary movement between natality and necessity within God. Schelling’s

audacious speculation of the existence of God begins with primordial “Freedom,” a neutral “Will” that wants nothing.²¹ This is only a potentiality, and in the process of conversion into actuality, in actualizing itself, the pure will (the primordial freedom) changes into a pure contraction, which translates to the annihilation of all determinate content. It actively wants nothing outside itself. In Schelling’s reasoning the perfect freedom, that is, self-contented will (the mode of potentiality), is no different from a destructive fury (mode of actuality) that threatens to swallow everything. A parallax shift of perspective is needed to see that this conversion is purely a formal one; the indifferent will and the will that actively wants “nothing” are of the same being: “the same principle carries and holds us in its ineffectiveness which would consume and destroy us in its effectiveness.”²²

Note that the moment the primordial freedom attempts to actualize itself, the will is split into two: the will-to-contraction and the will-to-expansion. At the inception of this contraction (the fury of destruction), the will negates itself to become one that wants something, wants to expand. How is this tension within freedom going to be overcome? This positive will (expansion) cannot overcome the antagonism of the negative (contraction) and in this primordial tension the two wills frustratingly move in rotary form, the positive will not able to break out. The Godhead cannot withdraw completely into itself or open itself up, to admit Otherness. As Žižek puts it, “Every attempt at creation-expansion-externalization collapses back into itself. This God is not yet the Creator, since in creation the being (the contracted reality) of an Otherness is posited that possesses a minimal self-consistency and exists *outside* its Creator.”²³ God did eventually create, expansion won. Schelling calls this progress the movement from freedom (impenetrable ground of existence, self-limitation, contraction, pure will, potentiality) to free act (subject, actuality of freedom). In Schelling’s unorthodox view, God as free Subject, free Creator has to put a distance between God’s ground and himself, and this was a primordial decision. There has to be a split between Ground (the contractive will) and Existence (will-to-expansion) in God. This split, which is atemporal, cannot be accounted for as it has to be retroactively posited.

Based on this reasoning about God, Schelling proceeded to aver that the act of human freedom also involves not only the atemporal gesture of differentiation of being and becoming and a passage from pure freedom to free subject, but also the atemporal decision has to be “repressed.” “Freedom is for Schelling the moment of ‘eternity in time,’ the point of groundless decision by means of which a free creature (man) breaks up, suspends,

the temporal chain of reasons and, as it were, directly connects with the *Ungrund* of the Absolute.”²⁴ This is how Schelling links his concept of atemporal freedom to eternity, his “notion of freedom as the subject’s free relating to the ground of her existence”²⁵ is to be a radically split entity.

That primordial deed which makes a man genuinely himself precedes all individual actions; but immediately after it is put into exuberant freedom, this deed sinks into the night of unconsciousness. This is not a deed that could happen once and then stop; it is a permanent deed, a never-ending deed, and consequently it can never again be brought before consciousness. For man to know of this deed, consciousness itself would have to return to nothing, into boundless freedom, and would cease to be consciousness. The deed occurs once and then immediately sinks back into the unfathomable depths; and nature acquires permanence precisely thereby. Likewise that will, posited once at the beginning and then led to the outside, must immediately sink into unconsciousness. Only in this way is a beginning possible, a beginning that does not stop being a beginning, a truly eternal beginning. For here as well, it is true that the beginning cannot know itself. That deed once done, it is done for eternity. The decision that in some manner is truly to begin must not be brought back to consciousness; it must not be called back, because this would amount to being taken back. If, in making a decision, somebody retains the right to reexamine his choice, he will never make a beginning at all.²⁶

There is another crucial angle to this analysis of the connection between freedom and split identity, or ground and existence. Human beings, according to Schelling, also have split nature: material and spiritual entities. This split opens up the possibility of evil in them as the two sides, combined in one person, struggle for dominance. And for those whose spiritual side have been well elevated, evil could be raised to the power of the spirit, that is, “spiritualized.” The woman is a split being, she is by nature split. She is a natural organism and, at the same time, a spiritual entity, part of nature and somewhat raised beyond nature. If she is merely a part of nature, she will live in harmony with (be at home in) nature or her environment as any other animal or plant. With the seamless inclusion in the circuit of nature she would not fundamentally be a

threat to nature. If she were a spirit alone, she would not relate to nature as an object of exploitation “but maintain a relationship of contemplative comprehension with no need to intervene actively in it for the purpose of material exploitation.”²⁷ The problem or possibility of evil arises from the combination of the two features in every human being and their difference posited as such. With their spiritual nature, the normal purpose of exploiting nature for survival becomes domination of the same and exacerbating it to the power of the spirit. Because the unity of two principles has been severed (weakened), they are internally split.²⁸ The more spirit cuts off its links with nature (and tries to dominate it) the more evil it generates.²⁹

Day of Pentecost as Time of Divine Manifestations and Manifestation of Splits

Let us begin by restating the terms and frames of a pentecostal worldview. According to this viewpoint, there is phenomenal divine manifestation. It is observable, perceivable at the level of existence, human existence. This view also holds that the divine manifestation has its *ground*, that is, God. So we have existence and its ground when it comes to divine manifestation. Now Pentecostals also believe that some of their spiritual leaders can misuse divine manifestation, presence, or power. For the possibility of such misuse or the actual evil manipulation to occur, there has to be a crack, a gap, a split in the Absolute, a scission between God’s actual existence and its impenetrable ground as put forward by Schelling.³⁰ This inherent gap, adapting Schelling’s thought about the Absolute, forever prevents every divine presence from becoming “fully itself.” The fact that there is this something about real presence means divine manifestation, miracle, anointing, potentially implies evil (manipulation, misappropriation, striving, longing or willing outside orthodox, orthopraxis bounds of commonly accepted divine commands) as its constitutive gap or openness. Is it not true then that the sacramental item, the bearer of (past or present) divine presence is marked with a gesture of withdrawal from such divine presence or with radical ambiguity, demonic opposition to the divine?

More thought provoking is the question: How is it that the divine presence or the Absolute splits itself from itself that such evil (misuse of divine presence) or ambiguity slips in? This problem is akin to what Slavoj Žižek calls the problem of “phenomenalization” of God.³¹ How does it happen that the Absolute slips on bodies and objects and thereby

“discloses” or appears to himself? Divine presence is not only an appearance for human beings, but it is also appearance for the omnivoyant God. Now the crucial question is not about the anointing that enables Pentecostals to see the noumenal itself beyond or behind the phenomenal veil, but “the true problem is how and why at all does this In-itself split from itself, how does it acquire a distance toward itself and thus clear a space in which it can appear (to itself)?”³²

Let us return to our “evil pastor” or moral evil as a crack in divine manifestation. Following Immanuel Kant can we argue that the moment the divine presence cracks the phenomenal veil over reality it suffers a split that allows moral evil to penetrate it or the pentecostal subject? Kant argues that human beings can act morally, fulfill their duty only if their noumenal realm is not accessible to them. If a person were to go beyond the epistemic horizon and come directly with the *noumenal Thing*, he or she would lose his or her freedom, autonomy. He or she would have known the totality of the myriad causes and events in the universe and would be living in a totally deterministic world, a “causally closed cosmos.” Kant writes:

Instead of the conflict which now the moral disposition has to wage with inclination and in which, after some defeats, moral strength of mind may be gradually won, God and eternity in their awful majesty would stand unceasingly before our eyes. . . . Thus most actions conforming to the law would be done from fear, few would be done from hope, none from duty. The moral worth of actions, on which alone the worth of the person and even the world depends in the eyes of supreme wisdom, would not exist at all. The conduct of man, so long as his nature remained as it is now, would be changed into mere mechanism, where, as in a puppet show, everything would gesticulate well but no life would be found in the figures.³³

Is Kant here not describing some pentecostal leaders who can do or perpetuate evil because they think they have direct access to the noumenal realm? They alone understand the whole network of causes and effects in all of existence and they are the only mere divine machines fighting to subdue free autonomous agents (of Satan). But this supreme stance hides something untoward. “G. K. Chesterton . . . views the causally closed cosmos of the deterministic/mechanistic materialist as ‘about the smallest

hole that man can hide his head in’—in other words, the notion of being as a fixed, predictable One-All, a seamless flow of causes and effects, is a seductively comforting image hiding something very unsettling.”³⁴

Day of Pentecost:

The Tension between Abstract and Concrete Elements in God

The divine manifestations on the day of Pentecost are not only instances of *real presence*, but also an exemplification of the inherent tension in divine-human relations or an inherent obstacle in the idea of God in all religions. There is the dialectics of the absolute (universal, abstract) and concrete (particular) elements in the idea of God. As Paul Tillich has argued, this is an inherent tension in the Christian trinitarian thinking about God.³⁵ The tension between the absolute and the concrete elements arises because human beings want concreteness in their ultimate concern, which drives them to polytheistic structures, but the reaction of the absolute element (ultimacy) initiates a movement toward monotheistic structures. The need for balance between the concrete and the absolute drives them toward trinitarian structures. The Christian triune God is concrete monotheism, the affirmation of the living God in whom the ultimate and the concrete are united.³⁶

What is clear from Tillich is that these two drives are not only inherent in the trinitarian idea and nature of God, but are also in the very way human beings relate to God. What happened on the day of Pentecost when the abstract God manifested concretely, immanently, on the bodies of believers—as tongues of fire on their heads, their embodied voices as xenolalia, and as felt motion on their sensuous skin with the vibrations of wind around them—is nothing but the union of the abstract and concrete elements of God.

While the main part of “mainstream” Christianity is satisfied with the tension of the abstract and concrete elements in the idea of God as settled in the trinitarian conception of the divine: God is absolutely concrete and particular in Jesus Christ and yet he is absolutely universal (abstract) at the same time.³⁷ But for Pentecostals the theological frame of the trinity as it relates to the immanent God may heal the split (tension between the two elements), but not in the continuous, everyday outworking of the “economic” side of the God in the midst of God’s children because human beings still want concreteness in their ultimate concern. The Holy

Spirit, the Spirit of Christ, in this pentecostal understanding is absolutely concrete and particular in real presences and community of believers, and yet he is absolutely universal (abstract) at the same time. Does the Acts 2 event of the day of Pentecost not exemplify this imaginary of today's Pentecostals and Charismatics?

The split between the abstractness and concreteness is extremely important for understanding Pentecostals' and Charismatics' practices and for getting a handle on their view of the divine realm. The split between the concrete and the abstract is what creates the phenomenal encounter with God or real presence; that is, God's abstractness establishes the concreteness (phenomenal, finite world and/or God's concreteness) as limit. Alternatively, the limit of the concrete is what gives abstractness, beyond-the-concreteness. As Clayton Crockett states, "the split between phenomena and noumena creates a noumenon; that is, the barrier that renders the 'thing-in-itself' unknowable is what provides certainty that there is a 'thing-in-itself.'"³⁸

The Split between Power and Glory: Inoperativity of Pentecost

Jesus Christ told his disciples just before his ascension that they will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon them. Ten days after this promise the Acts 2 event occurred as its fulfillment. The power came, but the way of its materialization was split: power and glory, or power and three-pronged glory—the classical divide between being and acting. The power (*dunamis*, *dynamis*) of God is one, but the *oikonomia*, the concrete display of glory, the glory of power is threefold: wind (*pneuma*, "expansive will"), fire ("contracting will"), and word (*logos*, the pronouncement that breaks the deadlock between the two modes of the single will, as per Schelling).

This Schellingian preontological perspective should now yield to an Agambenian historical one that demonstrates the split between power and glory of the Pentecost event. First of all, Giorgio Agamben, in his book *The Kingdom and the Glory*, shows that power needs glory to accompany it in order to function.³⁹ He traced the root of this distinction or differentiation between power and glory to the fracture between being and praxis, God's immanent nature and God's government of creation, which the concept of *oikonomia* introduced into the Christian understanding of God, and this eventually led to the notion of being as praxis.

Power and glory, according to Agamben, are two modes of the same activity, but they can never come into full identity or coincidence. In their coincidence there is always a remainder.⁴⁰ This misalignment or gap is covered over or hidden by the glorification of power. That is, cracks between being and praxis are papered over by glory.⁴¹ Power needs not only administration and execution (governance), but also glory (the liturgical, ceremonies, and acclamations) to function and sustain itself. Glory is not just an ornament of power, but it functions to correlate the two faces of the same machine of power. “It allows, that is, for us to bridge that fracture between theology and economy that the doctrine of the trinity has never been able to completely resolve and for which only the dazzling figure of glory is able to provide a possible reconciliation.”⁴²

From this insight, Agamben proceeds to demonstrate that the economy of trinity (*oikonomia*) and the economy of glory (*doxa*) are mutually constitutive.⁴³ They have a dialectical relationship. “Glory is the place where theology attempts to think the difficult conciliation between immanent trinity and economic trinity, *theologia* and *oikonomia*, being and praxis, God in himself and God for us. For this reason, the doxology, despite its apparent ceremonial fixity, is the most dialectical part of theology, in which what can only be thought of as separate must attain unity.”⁴⁴

So on the day of Pentecost when we see the effectivity of God’s power demonstrated as baptism of the Spirit (accompanied by the whole July Fourth fireworks, the vortex of wind that belittles the suction power of a turbo engine, and the open acclamation for the brilliant, wonderful work of God) we also see being and praxis of God. There is the Holy Spirit who is administering the whole display, especially the release of power to speak in tongues and for boldness for evangelism. And we also see the accompanying glory. Peter’s speech explaining what has just happened to the people of Jerusalem is a peculiarly long acclamation, which concerns Christ, the vindicated one, the person who united God’s plan in heaven and earth, and his death and resurrection made him peerless among Israel’s prophets and kings. This acclamation was constitutive of the Pentecost event. Peter’s acclamation was integral to the emotionalism, the affect of the day. One is even tempted to view the whole Acts 2 event as a liturgical service that began in Acts 1 and somewhat analogous with a typical pentecostal service of today. The disciples had gathered in the upper room to pray and praise God with Peter and to spend time “sharing the word.” Suddenly the anointing and gifts arrived. Then the pastor (Peter) spoke again, and the people themselves asked for an “altar