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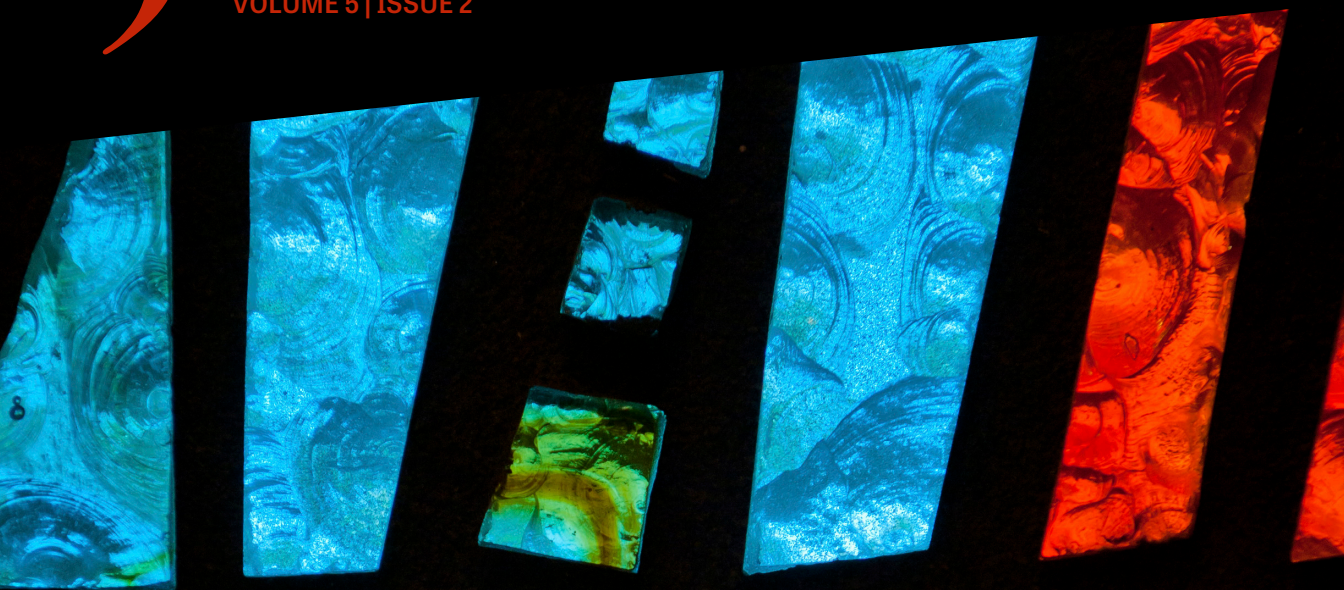

The Catholicity of the Church:

An Interdenominational Exploration

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"We Have Come to Fullness": Toward a Pentecostal Catholicity

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At least at first glance, given what many consider essential to the movement, it would be impossible to craft an authentically Pentecostal account of catholicity. But what follows is an attempt to do just that. First, I briefly sketch the sectarianism that has haunted Pentecostalism from the beginning, explaining why Pentecostals should reject it and how they can do that without disavowing the best of their own tradition. Then, in the remainder of the essay, I lay out a theology of catholicity that is recognizably Pentecostal and catholic, true to both Azusa Street and Nicaea, beginning with the claim that belief in the church's catholicity is nothing less than a confession that the church shares in the fullness of God's nature, the fullness of which is the hope of all creation. I argue that catholicity is best understood as a summons toward that fullness and that it is not merely to be hoped for. Sometimes, in moments of faithfulness, catholicity breaks through into worldly experience, primarily because of the faithfulness of holy women and men who lead the church in repentance, usually during deeply troubled times. Whenever it does break through, this catholicity is seen in the lives of the faithful as inherently cruciform and missional, a self-denying sharing in the lives of those who seem abandoned by God. In conclusion, I argue that the Pentecostal experience of speaking in tongues bears a unique witness to catholicity as communion with an infinite God, and suggest that this means Christian belief and practice must resist institutionalism and fundamentalism of all kinds.

Beyond Sectarianism

As a rule, Pentecostals, at least those in the classical traditions, have given little thought to the doctrine of catholicity. In fact, given their restorationist concerns and ambitions, it is perhaps closer to the truth to say that they have been opposed to it. Early Pentecostals argued their "latter rain" experience of the Spirit set them apart from other Christians who, due either to ignorance or infidelity, had not (yet?) received the promise of the Father. They believed that because they had been baptized in the Spirit, they enjoyed a fullness of revelation unknown since the apostolic times reported in Acts.

This belief becomes clear, for example, in J. H. King's introduction to G. F. Taylor's *The Spirit and the Bride*. King, then the presiding bishop of the Pentecostal Holiness Church and a leading theological figure in the wider movement, insists that, since divine revelation had been given share by share over a long stretch of time, the truth of the "full gospel" was necessarily "progressive in its unfoldment."[1] He continues:

> This progressive discovery of the meaning of truth, as we approach the ultimate completeness, implies limitation individually and dispensationally. No literature belonging to any particular epoch of the Christian Church bears the stamp of perfection. Revealed truth peculiar to each dispensation may to its adherents embrace all there is of truth, and thus present completeness in scope, but subsequent discoveries prove this to be a serious, as well as injurious, mistake.[2]

In King's account of the history of revelation, the Reformers, and especially Luther, had rediscovered long-forgotten truths, as, in their turn, had John and Charles Wesley and, following them, the Wesleyan holiness movements. Each of these epochs, King says, "Produced a vast volume of literature, presenting truth beyond the range of former discoveries," but, in spite of claims to completeness, they nonetheless remained imperfect. King concludes these teachings—in particular, the teachings about justification by faith alone and entire sanctification—brought good-faith believers "into the vestibule of Pentecostal power and fullness, and not into its possession." But Pentecostals do possess the Pentecostal fullness, and so would produce new literature "leading the people out into larger fields of truth, which [would] enrich and empower the soul for better service."[3]

Now, King's restorationist vision is sure to strike most of us as undeniably sectarian and elitist, at least insofar as we are ecumenically minded. And inasmuch as Pentecostals hold to it or one like it, it will prove difficult if not impossible to affirm the Nicene doctrine of catholicity. Of course, not all Pentecostals feel the need to affirm that doctrine. Steve Land, in his seminal *Pentecostal Spirituality*,

1. J. H. King, introduction to *The Spirit and the Bride: a Scriptural Presentation of the Operations, Manifestations, Gifts and Fruit of the Holy Spirit in His Relation to the Bride with Special Reference to the "Latter Rain" Revival,* by G. F. Taylor (Falcon, NC: Falcon Publishing Company, 1907), 7. There were, to be sure, early Pentecostals who criticized the sectarianism and elitism, perhaps most notably, William Hamner Piper, pastor of the Stone Church in Chicago and editor of *The Latter Rain Evangel* periodical. Piper, for example, in one editorial, castigates those who claim a greater revelation than that known by other Christians: "These fellows go into cities or assembles and split everything up with some great revelation they have just gotten from heaven, so they claim; they are far superior to the universally acknowledged leaders of the past. Before their greatness, Luther's divinely inspired message on justification and Wesley's on sanctification pale into insignificance. May God give His people some sanctified common sense and save them from these ravenous and theological wolves." Against these sectarians and elitists, Piper insists, "There are no differences on the great fundamentals of the Gospel among God's people, Pentecostal or otherwise." Piper, "The Unity of the Spirit in the Bond of Peace," *Latter Rain Evangel,* June 1911, 15.

2. Taylor, *Spirit and the Bride*, 7.

3. Taylor, *Spirit and the Bride*, 8.

acknowledges that Pentecostals have often been accused of sectarianism and elitism, but he is unapologetic in his response. "When the bored, cynical, and unfruitful [Christians] become renewed, joyful, and fruitful, does that make them elitist?" Surely not, he says. Pentecostals are not claiming a superior understanding of Scripture or greater spiritual maturity, even if they are rejoicing in a distinctive experience of the Spirit. Land maintains they would be elitist and sectarian only if they claimed that all Christians must have the same experience they have had, and in the same way.[4] In the final analysis, then, Land holds that most Pentecostals simply want to carry on living the Spirit-filled, Spirit-led life: "When the disinherited and powerless who have become enfranchised and enabled by the gospel in the power of the Spirit hear from non-Pentecostals that they are elitist for teaching a subsequent work of grace, they gladly reply, 'Yes, of course!' or simply, 'Hallelujah!'"[5]

Whatever its virtues as an apologetic, Land's explanation fails to account for the fact that at least some Pentecostals have claimed a deeper understanding of the truth and higher spiritual maturity. Some Pentecostals do suggest that they are superior to other Christians, not least in their accounts of the ecclesial tradition that by and large describes the church's past as a history of overwhelmingly anemic spirituality and a mostly failed witness.

On this front, Macchia comes nearer to the truth, I believe. Pentecostals are not wrong, he says, to respond to the call to revival, to pursue "the deeper things of God." Rightly understood, "There is no necessary contradiction between saying that Christ is all sufficient for the Christian life and maintaining that believers are to seek a greater 'fullness' of the Spirit's working through us from and in Christ." But elitism and sectarianism—to say nothing of schismaticism—simply have no place in Christian thought or practice and must be rejected in no uncertain terms.[6]

Toward a Pentecostal Catholicity

All that to say, I am convinced Pentecostals need to affirm catholicity; otherwise, God's faithfulness to his people and to the world is called into question. What it is more, sectarianism frustrates the desire of Christ for all believers to be one (John 17). The question is, can we affirm catholicity in a way that is true both to our own experience and to the Christian tradition? The answer, I believe, is yes. Arguably, it has already been done. Amos Yong, following Yves Congar, contends that it is the Holy Spirit who affords universality to the church, empowering the whole church in the wholeness of charismatic ministry to proclaim the whole counsel of God to the

4. Steven J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (London: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 215.

5. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, 216.

6. Frank Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 113.

whole world in anticipation of the eschatological fulfillment.[7] Andy Lord draws on Yong's work, but he ultimately takes a different approach. He attempts to articulate a dynamic account of catholicity, one that emphasizes unity-in-diversity and the need to move toward unity via a partnership in mission.[8] Simon Chan is wary of universalizing concepts because catholicity, he argues, has to do primarily with "the wholeness of the *local* congregation that gathers together to share the one loaf regardless of race, culture or sex."[9] Therefore, a local congregation that fails to break free from its ethnocentrism fails utterly to witness to the gospel.[10]

Other examples could be given but suffice to say that I agree with much of what these scholars have said, and my own account develops largely parallel with theirs. So, what follows is an attempt to offer a theology of catholicity that is recognizably Pentecostal and catholic, true to both Azusa Street and Nicaea.

First, I would argue that the church's catholicity is not mere universality," still less a synonym for orthodoxy, ideas which reduce the doctrine to triviality,[11] but an actual, mystical at-one-ment with Christ, and just in this way a share in God's own nature, received, again and again, by the community in its many members from the fulfilling fullness of the fulfilling God (Jn 1:16).[12] Catholicity—like oneness, holiness, and apostolicity, the other "marks" of the church—describes the church only because it is a description of Christ, who is the revelation of God: "The church is one in Jesus and holy in Jesus; the church is catholic in Jesus and it is sent in mission in Jesus."[13]

Speaking of the church, it is an ongoing event, a strange occurrence (like the birth of a child or the burning of a house) in which we are all intimately, mutually involved. Although it is difficult for us to conceptualize, God acts on the community as such, on what St. Paul calls the "whole structure." And just so, it is the church, and not the Christian, who "grows into a holy temple in the Lord" (Eph 2:21). In other words, the Christian is Christ's precisely in the sense that she lives, moves, and has her being in the event that is the church's entanglement with Christ in his relation to the Father, an intimacy so entire that we are identical with him. "We, who are many,

7. Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 143.

8. Andy Lord, *Network Church: A Pentecostal Ecclesiology Shaped by Mission* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), 129.

9. Simon Chan, *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2000), 102. Emphasis added.

10. This concern leads Chan to underscore the pathbreaking work of William Seymour at the Azusa Street Mission, who sought to establish a fully integrated church-community.

11. Rowan Williams, "One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church,"(Address to the Third Global South to South Encounter, Ain al Sukhna, Egypt, October, 2005), para. 26, http://aoc2013.brix.fatbeehive.com/articles.php/1675/one-holy-catholic-and-apostolic-church.

12. And so, aspiring to catholicity entails a desire to see all believers belonging to one community, a readiness to receive and pass on the wisdom of the church, and to take responsibility for her past failures, doing all that can be done to set them right.

13. Williams, "Holy Catholic," para. 35.

are one body in Christ, and individually we are members of one another" (1 Cor 12:5). If we are careful, we can even say that God acts *as* the church and not only through or with her.

Second, the church's teachings and other institutions, as well as the church's ministries, are faithful just to the extent that they bear witness to and call forth this fullness-in-identity, this share in God's own life. As John Meyendorff echoes, "The 'catholic' Church [is] that Christian assembly which [has] accepted the whole of the divine presence in Christ, the whole truth, the fullness of life, and [has] assumed a mission directed at the salvation of the whole of God's creation."[14] In other words, we can speak of this or that dimension of ecclesial life as catholic only insofar as it is Christ-like in the sense that it brings the goodness of God to bear in the world for the good of each and all.

Third, this fullness of life, this wholeness, is by its very nature—the nature of an infinitely gracious, endlessly generative God!—never the community's possession but always entirely a gift.[15] Never owned, it is truly given—and received. At no point is God under the church's control. But at every point, God works within and with the community so that whatever is said and done faithfully in Christ's name is said and done in the power of Christ's Spirit. As the church "hold[s] fast to the head," it grows with a growth from God (Col 2:19). As it abides in the vine, it does the very works of God (Jn 15:5).

Fourth, catholicity is best understood as a calling, a summons toward what the Father has prepared for and promises to give to his children—transfiguration into the image of Christ (Rom 8:29)—but is never fully achieved. It is always only a gift, as previously elaborated. But because it is the gift of the God who is love, given to us in and for our freedom, it is given so that it can be desired, pursued, and entered into. The gathered people of God are Christ's body, "The fullness of him who fills all in all," but just for that reason, they can and must "grow up in every way into him who is the head" (Eph 4:15).

Fifth, because God is faithful, and the church—at times, on some fronts—is faithful too, catholicity can and does sometimes break through into our this-worldly experience; it emerges or manifests in history so that it can be seen and heard. Jesus did not only pray that the church would be one in him and in the Father, one with each other and with God, but also that they would be one "so that the world may know" (Jn 17:20). Christ desires that the church's catholicity, which is inseparable from its unity, can be witnessed, experienced, and known. And the Father promises to fulfill all Christ's desires.

14. John Meyendorff, *Catholicity and the Church* (Crestwood, NY: St Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1983), 7.

15. So Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, 225. He writes, "Talk of the church 'possessing' all grace and virtues in 'fullness' is problematic and can lead to assumptions that support a realized eschatology and an idolatrous identification of the church with Christ as the King or the Spirit as the kingdom."

In Acts, the church is seen and heard as the people of God just as it gives witness to what they see and hear from God. Early in the story, the apostles in Jerusalem maintain, in the face of the threat of persecution, that they "cannot keep from speaking about we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20). And, at the turning point of the story, Ananias prophecies to the recently-called and converted and about-to-be-baptized Paul: "The God of our ancestors has chosen you to know his will, to see the Righteous One and to hear his own voice; for you will be his witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard" (Acts 22:14-15).

This same motif emerges in Paul's letters. Years after Ananias's prophecy, perhaps as many as twenty years, Paul encourages the Philippians to "keep on doing the things that you have learned and received and heard and seen in me, and the God of peace will be with you" (Phil 4:9), echoing the advice he earlier had given the Corinthians: "Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ" (1 Cor 11:1). This idea comes through in Hebrews, as well, "Remember your leaders, those who spoke the word of God to you; consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith" (Heb 13:7). In fact, it is strictly as believers meditate on their leaders' faithful way of life that they see the constancy of God: "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and forever" (Heb 13:8). That is, Christ and his faithfulness to the church is seen and heard precisely in the shared life of the faithful, even—perhaps especially—in their unfaithfulness. Sorrow, repentance, restitution—these can be seen and heard. And so can the anguish that comes in the struggle to set our wrongs right.

We should be careful at this point. Macchia, for good reason, wants to avoid any confusion of the church and the kingdom, and so he emphasizes the "discrepancy between our essence in the Spirit and our actual existence as the church."[16] He is not entirely wrong to say, "If we possessed fullness already, there would be no need to constantly be filled as an ongoing experience of renewal."[17] But, as he himself acknowledges, renewal can and does happen. Yes, as he insists, catholicity is fully fulfilled only in the eschaton. However, even here and now, the people of God at times do live (and die) together in ways that speak promisingly of the coming kingdom. Early Pentecostals were wrong to believe the church had been unfaithful through most of its history, and we should not make the same mistake when we think about the church of the present and the future. We should not think either too highly or too lowly of ourselves; instead, we need a sober estimate (Rom 12:3), one that allows us to face reality without despair, naivety, or presumption.

The Scriptures make clear that the church's visibility—the bodying forth of its oneness, apostolicity, holiness, catholicity—comes to focus in the lives of the church's leaders (τῶν ἡγουμένων ὑμῶν), the successors to the apostles. For Pentecostals, at least, as a rule, this refers not to an ordained hierarchy but to any and all believers (laity or ordained) who speak the words of God and who do the works

16. Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, 225.
17. Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*, 225.

of God.[18] Pentecostals, at least many of them, can agree that ordained ministers serve the community as living signs—sacraments—of God's faithfulness. But they want to insist what matters most is that there are people (laity or ordained, well-educated or poorly trained, experienced or not) whose ministries are truly the work of the Spirit. Leaders in the church, then, are those who embody in small what is true of the church at large. They, in their maturity and faithfulness, do not stand above or outside the community; rather, they stand with and for it.

Sixth, and by implication of the former point, the church may sometimes prove faithful by following the way of life of these leaders in such a way that the fullness of God breaks into our lives. The rest of the time, catholicity is about remaining as faithful as we can be to those times in which fullness has broken through—above all, to the apostolic church as witnessed in the Scriptures—and so to the hope that another breakthrough is possible.

Pentecostals, including Pentecostal scholars, often focus on the New Testament, and Luke and Acts in particular, reading these texts too optimistically, or at least too one-sidedly. They sometimes focus on the faithful lives, the miracles, the growth of the congregations, and the mystical experiences to the neglect of the unfaithfulness and suffering that is also unabashedly described.[19] But the true witness to the apostolic church is given in the whole of Scripture, in the highs and lows, the light and the shadows. Therefore, it is important that we rediscover how, say, Numbers, rightly read—that is, read figurally—has as much to say about who the church is, has been, and shall be as does Luke and Acts.[20] The Laodicean community (Rev 3:14-22), even as it lives in the moment under judgment, is no less Christ's—no less the church—than the Philadelphian community (Rev 3:7-13). Christ declares it plainly: he loves them both (Rev 3:9, 19), and in the end, because they are loved, just as we are, we need the Laodiceans and their story every bit as much as we need the Philadelphians and their story. Many Pentecostals, like "come outers" in other traditions, have tried to be Philadelphian by distancing themselves from the Laodiceans. But Scripture and the apostolic tradition make it clear that this grieves the Spirit, which is to say it does violence to the body, and to Christ himself.

I do not want to downplay how the church has been Philadelphian. But most of the time, far more often than not, the church has been Laodicean, falling out

18. Most Pentecostals, I think, would agree with John Webster's view of ordination and ecclesial office: "apostolicity has less to do with transmission and more to do with identity or authenticity, with the 'Christianness' of the church's teaching and mission. . . . 'Authenticity' cannot by its very nature be 'transmitted,' because it is not capable of being embodied without reside in ordered forms. Forms cannot guarantee authenticity, simply because forms are themselves not immune to the critical question of their own authenticity." Webster, *Word and Church: Essays in Christian Dogmatics* (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2001), 208.

19. See Martin M. Mittelstadt, *The Spirit and Suffering in Luke-Acts: Implications for a Pentecostal Pneumatology* (London: T&T Clark, 2004).

20. See my *Sanctifying Interpretation: Vocation, Holiness, Scripture* (Cleveland, TN: Centre for Pentecostal Theology Press, 2014).

of step with the Spirit and failing to walk worthy of its calling. Even so, I remain convinced that we can learn to carry that failure honorably. Only a few of us will be saints, even if many of us can, from time to time, be saintly. But all of us can live with our unholiness in ways that testify to the patience and kindness of our God and our neighbors, including our neighbors of other faiths or no faith at all. In this way, the tax collector of Luke 18 is as important to us as is the Mother of God. We are called to say, "Let it be." But when we fail to say that, we can still say, "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" The church needs mercy. There is much that the church has done wrong, both to those outside its number beginning with the Jews, and to those inside, primarily "the least of these," the socially marginalized and neglected—namely, women and children, the abused, the disabled and mentally ill, the spiritually immature.

Seventh, therefore, catholicity is necessarily a cruciform and kenotic self-offering (which is not the same as self-negating). It is dedicated to caring for others. It is easy to say but nonetheless true that the church is most like Christ when she is concerned not for herself and her own fullness but for those she is bound and freed to serve. And that means catholicity is possible only where the church is committed to what Rowan Williams calls "catholic mission":

> The whole human person is touched, healed, and transfigured by the Gospel and the catholic church is the church which is able to address every level of human being; heart, mind, and body. A church which promises healing for our material lives, which addresses poverty and disease, both in work and in prayer. A church which does not suppress, but nourishes and purifies the life of the mind. A church which touches our emotions and disciplines and sanctifies them. [At] every level, the whole person is transfigured.[21]

Catholicity is the outworking in our shared life of the nature and character of the God who was, is, and promises to be all in all. As such, catholicity is necessarily always and everywhere concerned with everyone and everything. The church is unified, holy, catholic, and apostolic precisely in the sense that it bodies forth the holiness of God for the common good, the good of communities beside the church, in anticipation of the future of creation with and in the one and at-one-ing God.

Some have suggested the church should exist "ahead of the world as the bearer of signs and promises."[22] But I suspect it is better to say that the church exists beside the world as a midwife, caring for the world as God labors to birth the world into the destiny he purposes for it. Moreover, as often as not, the church is behind the world, running to catch up. It is not without significance that a centurion is the one whose faith most impresses Jesus: "I tell you, not even in Israel have I found such faith" (Luke 7:9). Again, at the cross, it is a centurion who acknowledges that Jesus

21. Williams, "Holy Catholic," para 27.
22. Carl E. Braaten, *Principles of Lutheran Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1983), 54-55.

is indeed God's Son (Luke 23:47), and not Peter or one of the other apostles. As in the Gospel, so in Acts; it is Roman soldiers, not the apostolic community, who run to Paul to save him from the angry mob outside the Temple (Acts 21). This is the lesson the Evangelist teaches us: sometimes, maybe even most of the time, "they" see and hear—and so, say and do—what "we" cannot.

Catholicity, as mentioned, sometimes breaks through in times of great suffering, not only during times of persecution and martyrdom, in which the church is forced into suffering by her enemies but also in times of personal and social trouble (as we see, for instance, in the systematic abuse of Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang, the protests in Hong Kong, the separation of families at the US border, the cartel wars in Mexico, or the ethnic conflicts in Kosovo), in which the church voluntarily enters into the suffering of others—the poor, the homeless, the sick, the abused, the dying, the godforsaken, the forgotten.

Whether suffering alone or with others, believers are tempted to take or offer false consolations, some of which even seem to work, at least for a few people for a little while. However, this false consolation inevitably confuses good with evil and evil with good. The church is catholic, however, just as it refuses all these false consolations, refuses to try to calm sufferers with half-truths about their moral responsibilities or the mysterious purposes of God, and instead simply remains with them as Rizpah remained with the bodies of her children, all the while holding out hope against all hope that God will do exactly what he has promised to do.

Therefore, we must not encourage a cult of suffering, either by making it seem (as so much contemporary theology does) that God suffers in himself or by making it seem that suffering itself is a sacrament. We have no right to romanticize death or dying, pain or loss, misery or tragedy. The catholic church suffers, no doubt, but she suffers not because suffering is good but because goodness refuses to let suffering keep her from helping those in need. We might say, then, that God wills us not to go through suffering but to go to the people who suffer.

Eighth, and finally, catholicity, precisely because it is communion with the infinite—an anticipation of the future God has prepared in Christ for creation, a future that comes as *eschaton*, as the transfiguration and fulfillment brought about in what Bulgakov calls the "cosmic Pentecost"[23]—requires the church to hold itself always open to the other and the stranger, the novel and innovative, the unexpected and inexplicable. A church that seeks to make the future merely conform to the past, that reduces it to a repetition of what has already happened, is not truly catholic. Because it is eschatological, the call to catholicity "should warn the church in history against demanding uniformity in any of its concrete forms of life, liturgy, and leadership."[24] And for the same reason, the call to catholicity forbids any

23. See Sergius Bulgakov, *The Bride of the Lamb* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002), 400.
24. Braaten, *Principles of Lutheran Theology*, 54.

stifling rigidity about the charismatic life and mystical experience, as well as any fundamentalism about doctrines.

This message, in my judgment, Pentecostals and charismatics desperately need to hear, at least as much as those who deny or remain suspicious of the mystical and charismatic. Conversion, sanctification, baptism in the Spirit, calling, anointing—these and other similar experiences must never be routinized or reduced to predictability. All Christians are baptized in water, following the story of Christ, reenacting his obedience and receiving his communion with the Spirit. But life in the Spirit (the working out of the reality signified and effected in baptism in our lives) cannot be scripted or managed. The creation is not yet whole, and God is infinite, so, as early Pentecostal evangelist Elisabeth Sisson puts it, we must always be ready to "consecrate our consecration, [to] trust God to sanctify our sanctification."[25] We have to be delivered from our experiences, so to speak, if they are to do the work in us that the Spirit intends them to do. And this is why Sisson says that prayer leads toward and into "isolation . . . muteness . . . [and] a blessed dumbness."[26]

In keeping with Sisson's reflections, the most recognizably Pentecostal sign of catholicity is perhaps speaking in tongues, both as *xenolalia*, "missionary language" supernaturally afforded, and as *glossolalia*, ecstatic utterance, the breaking down of language under the pressures of bringing to speech the unspeakable. The former, witnessed on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2), testifies to the church's calling to and giftedness for all people, as well as the need to speak the native language of every person, every community. The latter, honored by Paul (Romans 8), testifies to the Spirit's intercession on our behalf when we do not have the words or the heart to voice them, either to console others or to share ourselves. Only after we have come to blessed dumbness, only after we know that we do not know even how to speak to God, much less to others, are we able to hear what needs to be heard or say what needs to be said.

This blessed dumbness needs to come to expression not only in the day-to-day speech of believers but also in ecclesial orders and structures, leading us to turn away from the "idolatry of the institution," which, Donald MacKinnon says, ends in abuses of all kinds. Young women and men are "mercilessly exploited," their energies and talents consumed in ultimately needless service of the institution, exploitation which does "lasting spiritual damage" to them.[27] This abuse is deemed to be necessary by the establishment and powers. MacKinnon sees these powers personified in the character of Caiaphas, who, unlike Jesus, the good shepherd who leaves the many to save even one lost sheep, is willing to sacrifice this or that person for the continuity of the people. That is, these powers devote themselves to achieving security and

25. Sisson, "The Epaphras Spirit: A Strong Plea for Intercessors," *Latter Rain Evangel*, March 1909, 3.

26. Sisson, "The Epaphras Spirit," 3.

27. Donald MacKinnon, *The Stripping of the Altars* (Suffolk: Chaucer Press, 1969), 27.

stability at all costs, and just so set themselves radically against the Spirit of God, who interrupts, unsettles, and disquiets the people of God so that their lives are always being opened up, deep and wide as the mercy of God. Therefore, defending the establishment (that is, preferring the security of the institution to the lives of the people the institution exists to serve) is for MacKinnon the sign of apostasy.[28]

This does not mean, of course, that MacKinnon believes institutions—dogmatic, liturgical, and official—should, or even could, be done away with. And it does not mean that low church is inherently superior, less dangerous, or more promising than high church. Informality and extemporaneity are not somehow more fitting than formality and intention. The Spirit does not need for us to leave room for him, even if some of our neighbors do. God does not work in the gaps of our work. God works within our work. Therefore, these doctrines, these songs, these prayers, and these offices may be lived out in a manner that actually works well in the world, challenging and consoling the world with the hope of the gospel. This is the hope that God, in the end, will set all things perfectly right, filling everyone and everything with his fullness so they are finally fully themselves.

Conclusion

In the preceding, I have argued that a Pentecostal theology of catholicity—one that remains true both to Nicaea and Azusa Street—is not only possible but also necessary. And I have suggested that such a theology regards catholicity as nothing less than a share in God's own nature. As a result, belief in catholicity names the response to a summons toward ever-fuller communion with God and with one another in God. But this should not be taken to mean that catholicity is kept only for the future. Sometimes, this fullness breaks through into worldly experience, often through the witness of courageous men and women who lead the church into faithfulness, and almost always in times of great suffering. Above all, and through all times and in all places, the church is called to be the community of the cross. Believers are to be conformed to the image of the crucified, identifying with those who suffer most because the world is not yet what it shall be when God is all in all. In this sense, catholicity is inherently missional, concerned not only with enjoying God but also with caring for everyone and everything that God has made. Finally, I have insisted that because catholicity is a share in the divine life, a reality signified by the charism of speaking in tongues, we must at all costs resist the abuses of institutionalism and too-rigid accounts of the spiritual life.

28. MacKinnon, *Stripping of the Altars*, 33.