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Dissolving the Binary between Words and Experience: Pentecostal Theology, Worship,
Structures, and Traditions

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Abstract

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By Jane Xie

This thesis explores the overcorrection that scholars have made in their turn toward religious experience as the lens to analyze the essence of religion. This thesis argues that discursive approaches through theology, institutions, and traditions are not only not antithetical to bodily experience, but also that these extra-subjective factors can actually function as magnifiers of the subjective religious experience. This can especially be seen through the theology, musical worship, and institutional structures found within the mystical tradition of Pentecostalism.

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Introduction

In the cavernous arena of TD Garden, emotional, melodic lines soared throughout the arena, reverberating from the vocalists, acoustic guitars, electric guitars, pianos, synthesizers, basses, drums, and worship pads that occupied the stage. Coupled with the dark mood lighting and smoke machines, you could see thousands and thousands of people following along with the lyrics projected on the screens and losing themselves in the music – swaying and singing in time to the beat. People all around the arena, including several of my friends, closed their eyes, tilted their faces to the sky, smiled, and sang out the lyrics to the songs with all their hearts. As the first few sets of songs came to a close, the music began to die down and the worship band gradually stopped playing. Brooke Ligertwood, the head worship leader of Hillsong Worship, set aside her guitar, and pulled out a small, brown Bible. In complete silence, she opened her Bible and began reading from Matthew 21. As she read verse 9 — “And the crowds that went before him and that followed him were shouting, “Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest!”— cheers, shouts, and applause erupted and swelled around the arena. After she finished reading, she declared, “As we sing this next song, let’s lean in. Let’s believe in Jesus, his name, and his reign”. This instruction was met with yet another round of applause and shouts from the stadium. The worship band then transitioned into playing a soft, dreamy intro to the song Hosanna by Hillsong Worship. As I surveyed the arena, I was in awe of the sight of thousands of people with their eyes closed and hands lifted high in worship.

In the fall of 2019, I had the opportunity to attend a Hillsong Worship music concert at the TD Garden arena in Boston. Prior to attending, I had known that Hillsong Worship was iconic within the Christian music world due to the distinct, charismatic quality of their musical worship. Hearing their musical worship live, surrounded by 20,000 people, evoked a sort of

spiritual euphoria that swept over the entire stadium. While the band played throughout the concert, I saw people raising their hands high in the air, closing their eyes, dancing, praying, crying—worshiping without any inhibitions. Given how well the worship seemed to be impacting people during the songs, I was surprised when Ligertwood took the time to pause in the middle of the concert and read a passage from the Bible with no supporting instrumentals—just pure silence. This intentional emphasis on the Biblical text seemed to enhance the worship experience for people attending the concert as demonstrated through their body language in shouting agreements and raising their hands in the air. Essentially, it seemed like the Bible passage functioned as a primer and magnifier of the subsequent worship experience.

The Theoretical Landscape: Phenomenological Anthropologists

There has been a shift in religious studies away from logocentric aspects of religion, such as texts, language, institutions, structures, traditions, and theology. In some extreme cases, there is even complete rejection of its role in illuminating the essence of religion. However, through my experience at the Hillsong Worship concert, I witnessed the significance of incorporating both religious text and experience to inform religious experience. This is especially seen through the charismatic nature of Pentecostal theology that is exemplified in the worship music of Hillsong Church, one of the largest Pentecostal megachurches in the world.

Within the field of religious studies, there has historically been a strong preference towards the use of mentalistic tools as the ideal medium to better understand religious life and experience. This dominant preference toward logocentrism mainly arose following the Enlightenment when Protestant Biblical hermeneutics seeped into religious studies (Meyer 2012:14). As a result of this Protestant bias, “religious studies have tended to focus on the great sacred texts, or the theologies” (Vasquez 2011:1). Especially within the tradition of Christianity,

theology has traditionally been the one of the most common informants of ecclesial life and practice. As Birgit Meyer notes, “Within academic theology, too, a mentalistic attitude prevailed, according to which religion was framed primarily as an ‘inward’ domain of religious ideas, feelings, and inner convictions” (Meyer 2012:9). This substantial reliance on logocentrism “offers few resources to explore the constant movement, contestation, and hybridity involved in what has been called popular religion” (Vasquez 2011:2), which has led to both “marginalization of other ways of knowing, other sources of knowledge” (Narayanan 2003:516) as well as ignorance of “important material dimensions of religious life” (Vasquez 2011:12). The shortcomings of solely relying on logocentric lenses within the field of religious studies has catalyzed a rise in criticism of this approach from phenomenological anthropologists. They critique how the academic study of religion has been swayed by a Protestant legacy and bias, and instead, they argue in favor of “life’s irreducibility to models and ideals” (Premawardhana forthcoming:29).

What does the irreducibility of religious “experience” entail and why is it so important to many scholars? This experience can physically manifest itself in various bodily forms through “loss of voluntary motor control, unusual sensory perceptions (kinesthetic, visual, auditory, and tactile)” as well as mental forms such as “discontinuities of consciousness, memory, and identity” which, in combination, may lead to someone having “fits, trances, and visions” (Taves 1999:9). As a person undergoes this sort of religious experience, they are displaced from the typical seat of cerebral agency. Instead, a passive surrender takes place where they are subject to the “religious experience” previously described. This sort of lived immediacy provides a fresh, necessary channel to “explore practice in its multiple forms and expressions” (Vasquez 2011:15),

leading many scholars to emphasize the importance of the experiential over logocentric approaches.

Michael Jackson, a phenomenological anthropologist, argues the importance of this experience in that “phenomenological turn prepares the ground for detailed descriptions of how people immediately experience space, time, and the world in which they live”, (Jackson 1996:12) with the physical body acting as his point of departure in deconstructing religion (Vasquez 2011:112). In doing so, he dismisses the importance of theology’s role by emphasizing the space in between life and thought. Similar to Jackson, Thomas Csordas, another phenomenological anthropologist, views the text as “‘a hungry metaphor’ that has swallowed up everything in its path, including culture, nature, the body, and experience” (Vasquez 2011:113). Csordas presents logocentrism, specifically the over-emphasis on language and discourse, as restrictive in its inability to fully encapsulate the extent of phenomenological experience and how it significantly informs not only the essence of religion, but also human experience. As a result, his perspective parallels Jackson’s, in that studying phenomenology within religious contexts rather than logocentrism “gives us embodiment in order to understand being-in-the-world” (Csordas 1999:184). This phenomenology of embodiment is also seen within the work of Paul Stoller. Similar to Jackson and Csordas, Stoller is a phenomenological anthropologist, and he uses his exploration and research in spirit possession to also argue that the physical body, rather than logocentrism, serves as the focal point of departure for religious experience (Stoller 1997:53). This is the reason why “embodiment is not primarily textual; rather, the sentient body is culturally consumed by a world filled with forces, smells, textures, sights, sounds, and tastes, all of which trigger cultural memories” (Stoller 1997:54). The significance Jackson, Csordas, and Stoller bestows upon embodiment and bodily experience challenges “cognitive, linguistic, and

idealist models of meaning” (Premawardhana forthcoming: 8) that have traditionally been revered in historically traditional approaches such as theology, institutions, and structures.

Pentecostal churches have typically been recognized for their display of spiritual experience. Baptism in the Holy Spirit, speaking in tongues, spiritual gifts, and prayer are all conducive to fostering the sort of mystical, experiential environment—both on an individual and communal level—that phenomenological anthropologists seek after, while simultaneously standing as core, distinctive facets of Pentecostal theology. For example, the book of Acts in the Bible specifically depicts being overwhelmed and overtaken by the Holy Spirit, and serves as a foundational textual tenant to Pentecostal theology. However, this loss of control to an external force also demonstrates the loss of agency so common to the experience phenomenological anthropologists emphasize. To develop a more thorough understanding of how theology and experience can function as complements for each other, specifically within the context of Pentecostalism, we need to turn to the history of the Pentecostal church, its growth over the years, its global context, and its theology.

The History of Pentecostalism

Today, Pentecostalism is one of the largest, most prolific religious movements in the world. (Warrington 2008:1). With around one in every thirteen people and one in every four Christians claiming to be Pentecostal, Pentecostalism and the Pentecostal Church have sculpted the lives and experiences of hundreds of millions of people on an international scale (Stewart 2012:3). Given its extensive impact, it is essential to discuss its history, theological distinctions, and ecclesiology.

When, where, and how did the Pentecostal movement originate? While many scholars find it difficult to pinpoint where and how this movement began, most would agree that it

emerged around the beginning of the twentieth century (Hollenweger 2004:162). Given the multiplicity of influences, it is difficult to determine a singular origin or founder. Rather, many scholars agree that Pentecostalism was birthed from multiple roots such as the “Protestant revivalism of nineteenth- and twentieth-century Anglo-America” (Stewart 2012:3), radical evangelical missionary movement, African American religion in the United States, the healing and Wesleyan Holiness movements of the Western world in the late nineteenth century (Hollenweger 2004:162), significant events such as the Azusa Street Revival, and key figures such as Charles F. Parham, William J. Seymour, William H. Durham, and more. Due to its ambiguity in origin, Pentecostalism is best understood as “a truly global, polygenetic religious movement with multiple points of origination” (Stewart 2012:4).

The Azusa Street revival played a critical role in the widespread circulation of Pentecostalism throughout the United States and abroad. After studying at Charles F. Parham’s school, William Seymour was offered a temporary pastoral position at an African American Holiness church in Los Angeles. As he began his position, he immediately began sharing the radical features of Parham’s theology with the congregation members. The distinctive aspect of Parham’s theology was that he proposed a third blessing of the baptism of the Holy Spirit following justification and sanctification. According to him, this blessing was only deemed authentic if there was confirmed Biblical evidence of glossolalia, otherwise known as speaking in tongues. To many members of the mainstream Holiness movement at the time, the suggestion of a third blessing was considered heresy as they believed justification and sanctification were the only “two works of grace” leading to salvation (Stewart 2012:44). Because of his radical teaching, Seymour’s position was terminated, and he was invited to stay with Edward and Mattie Lee (two former parishioners) until he found a new job. They began a small prayer meeting in

their home. During one of these meetings, Lee fell to the floor speaking in tongues, and as Seymour shared this experience with more people, flocks of people began to attend their prayer meetings until their house was no longer a sufficient space for the sheer number of people who wanted to join. Seymour ended up securing a lease for a church at 312 Azusa Street and “Azusa street began to draw large numbers of not only African Americans and other racialized minorities but also many whites” (Stewart 2012:45). This marked a significant turning point in the diversification of the Pentecostal body.

Given the strong influence of various cultural lenses (African, Latin, Asian, etc.), the Pentecostalism tradition is undoubtedly a mosaic of diverse entities holding many perspectives. Because of this diversity, there is a plethora of theological positions, making it difficult to hold to a singular framework of theology. While there are three main branches: Classical Pentecostals, Charismatics, and Neo-Pentecostals, specific nuances in theologies vary between the three branches. Neo-Pentecostals are typically thought to have incorporated some “aspects of Pentecostal theology and spirituality, but who are not affiliated with either classical Pentecostal or traditional Christian denominational bodies” (Stewart 2012:4), and the Assemblies of God are thought to fall under this category of Neo-Pentecostals. However, overall, there is a strong significance placed on glossolalia, as well as baptism in the Holy Spirit. Glossolalia is understood as “consequence of the overwhelming experience of the Holy Spirit” (Stewart 2012:95), and Pentecostal theology derives its importance from the book of Acts in the Christian Bible. There are several accounts and references to glossolalia in passages like the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1-4), Peter preaching to the Gentiles (Acts 10:46), and Paul speaking to the disciples of John the Baptist (Acts 19:6). Pentecostal Christians draw on these passages and view glossolalia as a signifier of immersion into the presence of the Holy Spirit.

In relation to Christology, there are various “theological motifs of Jesus as the Savior, Sanctifier, Spirit Baptizer, Healer, and King soon returning [which create] a dynamic Christocentric spirituality of hope and healing” (Stewart 2012:89) within Pentecostal theology. These theological themes have arisen in large part due to Biblical texts such as the book of Acts, where there are accounts of Jesus and Paul’s healing ministries. However, since Pentecostal theology does place stronger emphasis on religious experience, it takes a more holistic approach when it comes to Biblical interpretation and its implications: “Pentecostal hermeneutics strategy would want to negotiate the meaning of a text through a conversation between the Holy Spirit, community, and Scripture” (Stewart 2012:115). This is especially exemplified through the importance placed upon worship: “Worship is probably the most crucial aspect of the church’s spiritual life. In worship the church is engaged in a form of communal practice [...] In worship the church regularly re-enacts its beliefs, that is to say, it practices its beliefs regarding who God is. Worship is essentially practicing theology in the proper sense of the work” (Chan 2000:36). In other words, the significance of worship is ingrained in Pentecostal theology, and it is crucial in the development of ecclesial life and health. Stoller also argues that music can be a conductor of religious experience: “Musicians, praise-singers, and priests use a variety of expressive media to entice spirits (external forces) to leave non-human realms and enter human bodies” (Stoller 1997: 53). To view this in a contemporary context, we can look at the worship music of Hillsong Church, its history, its contemporary content, its global reach, and its impact on religious experience.

A Background History of Hillsong Church, Pentecostal Megachurch

What has come to be known as the internationally recognized name of “Hillsong Church” or “Hillsong” originally stemmed from an organization of Pentecostal churches in Australia

known as the Assemblies of God in Australia (AGA), which was renamed Australian Christian Churches (ACC) in 2007. To understand the roots of Hillsong Church's theology, practice, ecclesial structure, and worship, one must first turn to the history of the AGA. The AGA was founded in 1937 and was a "movement of Pentecostal churches in voluntary cooperation" (acc.org). The AGA was formed when the Assemblies of God Queensland and the Pentecostal Church of Australia merged together as the leaders of both groups sought out "a more harmonious, co-operative and unified relationship" (Who We Are). Although this movement's growth was initially very slow, the election of Pastor Andrew Evans as the General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God in Australia initiated a period filled with substantial, quantifiable church growth for the movement in congregation size and number of church plants. Evans' leadership proved to be instrumental in shaping the course of the AGA's development as well as the ecclesial structure, culture, practices and theology embedded within Hillsong Church. For example, one of Evans' most notable contributions was his revolutionary distribution of leadership. Originally, many assemblies ascribed to "democratized congregational ecclesiology" (Austin 2017:24). However, under Evans' leadership, this quickly morphed into "Presbyterian structures with vested governmental authority in the senior pastor and church board/eldership" (Austin 2017:24). These implementations can be seen in most modern Pentecostal churches today, especially in Hillsong Church. The importance placed on senior pastor-driven leadership allowed for the rise of charismatic leaders in Australian megachurches as demonstrated in the ecclesial hierarchical structure of Hillsong today. Additionally, Evans played a large role in revolutionizing contemporary Christian music: "Evans' enthusiastic endorsement of contemporary worship practices, gleaned from New Zealand Latter Rain preachers, led the AGA to embrace a freedom in worship that later encapsulated Hillsong Church" (Austin 2017:23).

Overall, the installation of Andrew Evans as AGA General Superintendent allowed the implementation of contemporary ecclesial practices, especially ones utilized in Hillsong Church.

The next chapter of Hillsong's history consisted of the formation of Sydney Christian Life Centre (Sydney CLC). In 1977, Frank and Hazel Houston founded the Eastern Suburbs Christian Life Centre in Sydney. Despite its humble origins, by the following year, Eastern Suburbs Christian Life Centre was renamed Sydney Christian Life Centre, and its growth was so rapid, it had quickly outgrown two church sites. Sydney CLC was instrumental in continuing the policies implemented by Andrew Evans that were shaping leadership of the church as well as liturgical practices such as worship music played within the church. One of Frank Houston's primary visions was to "attract the best musicians in Australia" (Austin 2017:25). This intent to modernize worship music within the church was catalyzed by the addition of famous icons within the music industry that had come to identify themselves as Christians (e.g. Trevor King, David Moyes, Jeff Beacham, Peter Kelly, etc.). Another priority of Frank Houston was the importance of church planting within AGA culture. This value was exemplified in the rate of church planting that took place in a year: "Between 1982 and 1983 alone, an AGA church was started in Australia every nine days" (Austin 2017:27). "David Cartledge also developed a national church planting strategy that fostered 'church planting churches' as centers of influence" (Austin 2017:28).

This culture of church planting eventually led Frank Houston's son, Brian Houston, and his wife, Bobbie Houston, to found the Hills Christian Life Centre (Hills CLC) in 1983, and Hills CLC would ultimately come to be known as Hillsong Church (Austin 2017:28). Sydney CLC staff played an instrumental role in training and raising up leadership within Hills CLC (Austin 2017:28). In 1989, Hills Christian Life Centre officially became Hillsong Church (Riches

2010:88). Brian Houston was elected as new National President of AGA in 1997. Adhering to the pattern and system set up by previous leaders like Andrew Evans and Frank Houston, Brian Houston was implemented as the Senior Pastor of Hillsong which prompted “the leaders of Hillsong [to] aggressively [pursue] an apostolic model of leadership” (Marti 2017:379). Today, the AGA, and resultantly Hillsong, prioritizes “loving God, celebrating his presence through dynamic praise and worship, carrying out Holy Spirit empowered mission and declaring his infallible word through contemporary ministry” (McIntyre 2007:176).

Worship undoubtedly forms one of the most central - and attractive - aspects of Hillsong Church. Many members are drawn to Hillsong due to its heavy emphasis and modern interpretation of musical worship. One reason why Hillsong’s worship has grown so popular both within its congregation and in many churches around the world is because “At Hillsong, God is experienced through music, and it is the medium through which one can be connected to both God and the congregation” (McIntyre 2007:177). This can be seen through its dedication to composition of contemporary Christian music and the prolific production of albums. By programming Hillsong’s music into regular weekly services, as well as massive conferences with thousands of people, the distribution of its music to the masses not only demonstrates its significance within Hillsong Church, but has also contributed significantly to Hillsong’s widespread fame and fortune (McIntyre 2007:177). With church plants and influence in countries all around the world, Hillsong has quickly become a dominant force and organization within the Christian world.

A Background History of Vineyard Church, Pentecostal Megachurch

Vineyard Church is another Pentecostal megachurch that emerged around the late 1970s. It was inspired by the “The Jesus People movement” in the 1960s which was essentially “a

spiritual awakening within hippie culture in the United States, as thousands of young people found themselves on a desperate search to experience God” (Vineyard USA). This movement was extremely influenced by organizations such as Calvary Chapel in Costa Mesa, California (Vineyard USA) as demonstrated through Calvary Chapel’s sending out of Kenn Gulliksen. Gulliksen ultimately started what would come to be the first Vineyard church in West LA in 1974 (Vineyard USA). From this first, original church plant sprouted many others: “From Gulliksen’s church, the first Vineyards were planted in 1975” (Vineyard USA). In the span of eight years, seven Vineyard Church sites were planted.

Around this time, John Wimble, a key figure in Vineyard Church history, assumed leadership within the network of Vineyard Churches. Wimble, who “converted to Christ out of the music industry” (Jackson 2005:133) had incredible influence over the course of Vineyard’s history and development: “John Wimber’s influence profoundly shaped the theology and practice of Vineyard churches, from their earliest days until his death in November 1997” (Vineyard USA). He held tightly to the Pentecostal theology of experiencing “empowerment by the Holy Spirit” (Vineyard USA) and its ability to manifest spiritual gifts and conversions within congregants. This was largely derived from “the kingdom theology of George Ladd, which gave him the exegetical foundation for the ongoing ministry of the Spirit in the church” (Jackson 2005:134). This was especially seen through a charismatic outbreak of tongues that occurred in May 1982. At one of their gatherings, Wimber asked Lonnie Frisbee, a member of the Jesus People movement, to share his testimony. After doing so, Frisbee invited all the attendees aged up to twenty five years old to step forward. Similar to the Azusa Street Revival, he then “invited the Holy Spirit to bring God’s power. What happened is now legendary in Vineyard folklore.

The young people were filled with the Spirit, began to fall over, speak in tongues and shake” (Jackson 2005:134).

Having taught at Fuller Theological Seminary as an adjunct professor, one of Wimble’s defining characteristics was his emphasis on the “radical middle”. This concept essentially referred to finding “the radical middle between his historic, doctrinal evangelicalism and his desire to have Pentecostal power” (Jackson 2005:134) as manifested through “embracing both the gifts of the Evangelical tradition and the gifts of the Pentecostal/Charismatic traditions” (Vineyard USA). Essentially, “John’s perspective could be captured in the adage: ‘All Word and no Spirit, we dry up. All Spirit and no Word, we blow up. With the Spirit and the Word, we grow up’” (Vineyard USA). However, the same sentiment was not shared by Calvary Chapel. This led to Wimble officially splitting off from Calvary Chapel in 1982 and ultimately the birth of the “church-planting movement” (Jackson 2005:135) that is now known as the “Association of Vineyard Churches” (Vineyard USA), or “AVC”. Although Pentecostal theology was adopted, many of the congregations from these church plants were composed of a demographic that spanned denominational distinctions: “All over the world people were singing Vineyard songs and laying hands on the sick for healing; Baptists, Lutherans, Presbyterians collaborated side by side with charismatics and Pentecostals, singing the same songs and yearning for the same demonstrations of God’s power” (Jackson 2005:140)

Currently, there are over 2,400 Vineyard Church sites planted around 95 different countries, demonstrating its wide reach across the globe. They describe themselves as “empowered evangelicals [that] seek to blend the best of the Evangelical traditions with their focus on Christ-like character and regard for the Scriptures, with the best of the Pentecostal and

Charismatic traditions of welcoming the empowering of the Holy Spirit for life, ministry, and acts of service” (Vineyard USA).

Pentecostalism: A Bridge Between the Binary

As illustrated through the perspectives of Michael Jackson, Paul Stoller, and Thomas Csordas, phenomenological anthropologists have shifted away from theology and have instead turned toward experience, emotion, and phenomenon. In extreme cases, some phenomenological anthropologists completely reject the use of theological language and its role in understanding the human experience. However, as Don Seeman points out, “by elevating the rejection of theological language to an unwavering analytic principle [...] this approach may also blind us to facets of lived experience to which theological language might at least on occasion bear better witness than the constructs of theorists favored by contemporary anthropologists” (Seeman 2018:354). In their effort to completely deconstruct the biased, mentalistic Protestant reliance on theology and text, phenomenological anthropologists have mistakenly overcorrected in their response. While bodily experience has historically been undermined within the field of religious studies, the complete rejection of theology and its ability to inform lived experience is a severe overestimation. There are specific theologies that are critical to not only informing details of lived experience, but also magnifying the experiential dimensions phenomenological anthropologists esteem. In this thesis, I argue that Pentecostal theology, worship, structures, and traditions present as a challenge to the phenomenological anthropologist’s complete dismissal of theology and its importance when weighed against experience. I argue that this binary way of thinking must be dissolved, this chasm bridged. The heavy emphasis on experiential aspects found in the book of Acts, such as baptism in the Holy Spirit, glossolalia, spiritual gifts, prayer, and more, are deeply embedded within Pentecostal theology. Immersion into the presence of the

Holy Spirit, which is signified by speaking in tongues, reveals how theology can not only be congruent with the experiential, but also act as a facilitator and enhancer of religious experience. Given the importance of worship within Pentecostal theology, as well as its ineffable nature, this symbiotic relationship between Pentecostal theology and experience can especially be seen through the musical traditions of Hillsong Church.

Hillsong Church, one of the largest Pentecostal megachurches in the world, is widely recognized on an international scale due to its worship music and the potent religious experience it creates for its congregants and listeners. Through their worship, Hillsong Church intentionally aims to cultivate an environment where music acts as a medium through which participants can fully and wholly surrender themselves to God. In doing so, Hillsong Church exhibits and combines its Pentecostal theology with the bodily experience phenomenological anthropologist's dwell on. This thesis will explore the theological language used within Hillsong Worship's most popular songs, the musicology behind them, and the charismatic environment created consequentially, in order to argue that religious discourse and religious experience are not at odds with each other, but rather deeply and intimately intertwined. Additionally, Vineyard Church, another influential Pentecostal megachurch, is also widely recognized due to its emphasis on the power of the Holy Spirit in the lives of its congregants. This thesis will explore the institutional structures in place at Vineyard Church and their impactful role in enhancing religious experience. Lastly, this thesis will look at Pentecostalism's historical roots in mystical traditions in order to illustrate the understated importance of traditions in the study of religion. In doing so, this perspective will contribute a more holistic point of departure for both theologians and phenomenological anthropologists in their studies of theology, religious life, and religious

experience. In order to explore this further, I will employ secondary scholarship and virtual ethnography.

Given the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and its limitations on in-person research, I will employ virtual ethnography and rely heavily on secondary scholarship to provide the empirical material that will inform this thesis. The abundance in scholarship surrounding Pentecostalism and Hillsong Church provides me with ample sources to draw from. However, the lack of scholarly first hand accounts of interactions with Hillsong Church leads me to turn to virtual ethnography as a mode of data collection. Ethnography is a research method that sheds light on the “interconnectedness and interdependence” (Anthropology @ Princeton) of human experiences. Traditionally, ethnography has been conducted in a physical space, a “tendency” which is “exacerbated by the historical roots of anthropology in the study of relatively isolated communities” (Hine 2000:58). However, given the rapid development of technology, especially the Internet, the employment of virtual ethnography has grown increasingly more common. Especially given the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, there has been a general emergence in appreciation among researchers for virtual ethnography: “There is a recognition among researchers that virtual spaces are no longer an extraordinary or separate domain but spaces in which culture can and should be examined” (Hua 2016:255) Despite some limitations, virtual ethnography is “acknowledged in academia as an appropriate method to investigate how users make sense of the Internet and its possibilities” (Hua 2016:256) and thought to be a valid and “well-established method” (Winter, 2021). The researcher still holds the same intention of immersion into a social or cultural environment; however, the mode differs in that it is through an online culture. Virtual ethnography serves as an extension of traditional methodology in that it

“examines how computer-mediated-communications and digital technologies are used to shape, transform, and produce culture” (Williams, 2013).

There are strengths and weaknesses of virtual ethnography to consider. In one sense, virtual ethnography equips the researcher with the tools to explore and study “newly situated socio-cultural tensions” (Paech 2009:195) within the expanding environment of the Internet. One benefit of using virtual ethnography is that due to developments in software and hardware, applications “can be set up and run on automatic pilot [which] allow hands free immersion for the researcher – they can configure their technology to record proceedings as they wish, then sit back and observe, or participate, without ongoing attention. These solutions can also provide an added dimensionality to virtual ethnography; letting the consumer of the research ‘live’ the community experience through multimedia playback (an extensible immersion not generally possible in classic offline ethnographies)” (Paech 2009:210). However, features such as bias may also impede the objectivity of virtual ethnography. For example, in this thesis, I will be attending a virtual church service through a YouTube livestream. In doing so, I will only be able to observe the community through the lens of the videographer as well as the editor. This may influence the extent of the observations I can draw from the environment itself.

However, given the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic, the benefits of secondary scholarship and virtual ethnography outweigh the drawbacks. When the pandemic emerged, it took a significant toll on the research community. All non-essential research (research unrelated to COVID-19) “came to a sudden standstill” (Yanow, 2020). This restriction placed significant constraints on the efficiency of operations” (Omary, 2020). Given the travel restrictions and safety precautions enacted, it is incredibly difficult for any research unrelated to COVID-19 to take place.

In the following sections, I employ secondary scholarship and virtual ethnography to depict the themes and lyrics derived from Pentecostal theology within Hillsong's music, the institutional structures in place as seen through a Vineyard Church, and the mystical yet historical roots of Pentecostal tradition. This is supplemented by the narrative account of a Musical Director from the Hillsong branch in Boston, Massachusetts as well as a virtual attending of the main branch of Hillsong Church in Sydney, Australia. In doing so, we will develop a more robust understanding of how the discursive facets of Pentecostalism work congruently with experiential facets of Pentecostalism to facilitate this charismatic experience.

Chapter 1

In this chapter, I establish the significance of musical worship within Pentecostal theology and look to the musical worship within Hillsong Church in order to explore how the union between theology and religious experience is not only possible, but compatible for facilitating and enhancing the religious worship experience for an individual. There has been an under-emphasis from phenomenological anthropologists on the importance of theology's role in understanding religious experience; however, through an interview conducted with a Musical Director from Hillsong Boston, as well as a thematic and lyrical analysis of several songs from one of Hillsong Church's virtual Sunday services, I demonstrate the ability of theology and music to work in tandem in order to elevate subjective religious experience. This is especially seen through a specific emphasis on the power of the Holy Spirit both within Pentecostal theology as well as Hillsong's musical worship.

Lack of a formal Pentecostal theology of worship

In order to understand the importance of worship, especially musical worship, woven throughout Pentecostal theology, we first need to look into what Pentecostal worship is exactly. Pentecostal worship consists of many complex dimensions and is a multi-faceted, fluid tenet within the Pentecostal tradition. As their point of departure, many Pentecostals turn to the passage of Revelation 7:14-15 in the Bible to inform their model of worship. The passage describes "the great multitude of those who have been redeemed by the blood of the Lamb; their constant activity is to stand before God's throne and serve him day and night" (Nel 2016:1). This image of active service serves as a reminder that not only does worship within Pentecostal churches include musical worship, but it also encompasses "belief, lifestyle, witness and all that believers do [...and] Christian identity in Christ" (Nel 2016:2). Therefore, one aspect of worship

can be defined as “the integration of beliefs and practices in the affections which are themselves evoked and expressed by those beliefs and practices” which can “touch the emotions in the realm of qualitative distinctions, the place at which people live out their lives and help others to encounter God in a way that affects all aspects of the believer’s life, including the intellect” (Nel 2016:2). Pentecostal worship also functions as the space where “divine-human encounter can take place” (Nel 2016: 2). However, whenever Pentecostals refer to worship, it is usually specifically referring to the portion of the Sunday service that consists of music and congregational singing (Albrecht 1999:110). Essentially, due to the foundational Pentecostal theology that believes God intervenes directly in everyday life (Jenkins 2002:77), worship is an alternative method of declaring the ‘presence of God’ among the people of the church (Albrecht 1999:109). In a musical sense, “worship comes in diverse and interactive expressions. At times the congregation “worship and even sing in tongues together; at other times, they sing and praise in their mother tongue, they pray for the sick and prophesy, perform miracles, laugh and dance, also when the thanks offering is given” (Nel 2016:2). The importance of glossolalia, also known as speaking in tongues, is derived from the book of Acts in the Bible and forms a central aspect of Pentecostal theology. Additionally, Pentecostal worship consists of the essence of rapture (Gause 2009:28) which is the “quality of ecstasy that is inherent to Pentecostal worship, consisting of overwhelming surges of praises that cannot be suppressed without quenching, even grieving the Spirit. Among these ecstatic expressions are forms of prophetic speech, including prayer, song and glossolalia encased in the universal language of music” (Nel 2016:4).

However, due to the diversity found within Pentecostal tradition and its inherent free-form nature, there has surprisingly been a lack in formal Pentecostal theology of worship: “It proves to be a difficult endeavour because the diversified practices within Pentecostal and

charismatic churches complicate the attempt to write a history or description of Pentecostal worship, and its emphasis on spontaneity and liberty rather than on a set liturgy and uniformity as well as its lack of a central authority, standard prayer book, liturgical handbook or church calendar contribute to a bewildering diversity of worship styles and practices” (Nel 2016: 2). As a result, Pentecostal theologians have not written much about a theology of worship, so Pentecostals’ worship practices are not necessarily theologically well-grounded” (Nel 2016:1).

How worship is still foundational within Pentecostal theology

Nevertheless, this does not, by any means, imply that worship is not a foundational aspect of Pentecostal theology: “The centrality of worship and music has many times been affirmed by scholars writing about global Pentecostalism” (Prosén 2020:166). Worship is still viewed as a core element of Pentecostal theology because “Pentecostals affirm the power of Pentecost in worship where they experience the Spirit’s revelation of Christ and teach and preach about worship” (Nel 2016:1). Additionally, “Pentecostals primarily find their authentic identity in the primary Pentecostal experience of Spirit baptism as a leap into a new dimension of encountering God” (Lovelace 1985:112) and the “exercise of the charismata” (Richie 2006:23). Resultantly, the Pentecostal emphasis on spiritual or charismatic experiences places worship as the “highest occupation of the church, fulfilling the ultimate purpose for which the people of God are redeemed” (Nel 2016:1). This can be seen in many Pentecostal churches where worship and praise form one of the foundational rites within Pentecostal life (Albrecht 1999:152). While there is no formal Pentecostal theology of worship, “at the heart of Pentecostalism is its spirituality, and its spirituality was found in worship, one of its major expressions” (Prosén 2014:87). Since Biblical texts, especially passages like Acts, compose a vital component of Pentecostal theology, in the book of Acts, reception of Spirit baptism was always in ‘situations of divine worship’”

(Nel 2016:2). This illustrates how “The Holy Spirit is what makes the difference in Pentecostal worship and participation in the experience of Spirit baptism is therefore vital to worship meaningfully” (Nel 2016:2). Therefore, “A Pentecostal worship of theology can be explained in terms of the church’s charismatic structure, where the movement of the Spirit is expected and encouraged” (Nel 2016:3). Essentially, the theology of worship can be rooted in the importance of the Holy Spirit and its movement among the church body.

The significance of musical worship as demonstrated through Hillsong Church

Worship is especially exhibited through the form of musical worship, oftentimes as congregational singing, due to music’s ability to not only “carry emotional meanings where semantic parameters are less critical” (Nel 2016:4), but also the fact that “Music is rhetoric and a viable language that has been used to embody theology for many centuries, enabling theological reflection to get away from argumentative controversy generated by doctrines” (Nel 2016:4). Furthermore, “singing creates temporality that gives participants a sense of self through cultivating their emotional responses in the engagement with the songs that transcend the mundane and take people out of themselves” (Nel 2016:4). For this reason and the fact that “there is something about the human voice in song to God that serves as a vehicle for God’s presence - that indeed is God’s presence. Singing, as a certain kind of sound, conveys that presence in itself” (Engelke 2007:207), Pentecostal worship and praise has most often manifested in the form of singing and music. The function of music is that it “is intended to help individuals to taste heaven and the significant visual sight of fellow-worshippers stimulates the participant to be immersed into worship, seeing in one another the object of worship, their God” (Nel 2016:5). This worship is often loud, exuberant, and emotional: “The Word of God’s first major radicalization in the domain of worship came with the introduction of loud praise. The

principle behind loud praise is that collective praise for God is more "edifying and expressive of real feeling" the louder it is. Worshipers should thus attempt to "raise the roof" with loud vocalization and hand clapping” (Csordas 1997:109).

The importance of worship in Pentecostal theology can be seen through the role of worship services in Hillsong Church where “At Hillsong, God is experienced through music, and it is the medium through which one can be connected to both God and the congregation.” (McIntyre 2007:177). Musical worship especially stands as one of the largest attractions for church goers as the “music of Hillsong Church has been part and parcel of its identity” (Cowan 2017:78). It is undeniable that worship takes a primary role in influencing the religious experience of its congregants: “Music and religious experience are nowhere more mutually influential than in Hillsong live worship services, either weekly in church or within the much larger context of the Hillsong conferences” (McIntyre 2007: 178). Hillsong “songs represent and reinforce the theological views of the church” (Riches 2010: 49-50). Additionally, I attended a Hillsong Church service through a YouTube livestream. The service took place on May 23, 2021 which was Pentecost Sunday, a day that observes the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles. I specifically wanted to attend this service given the significance of this day within the Pentecostal tradition. The service took place at the main campus of Hillsong Church in Sydney, Australia. Within the service, more than one third of the service was dedicated to a time of worship and praise. This division of time is another signifier of worship’s prevalence within Hillsong Church’s services. I also had the opportunity to interview one of the Musical Directors from the branch of Hillsong Church located in Boston, Massachusetts. Hillsong Boston hosts a service every Sunday in the Royale, a nightclub located in the heart of Boston. As someone who has been at Hillsong Boston for almost four years and also identifies as a Pentecostal Christian,

he details the characteristics, features, and importance of worship within Hillsong services.

When asked what role worship plays within Hillsong Boston, he said:

“A lot of what Hillsong is known for is really their worship. It’s really their ability to create a moment in, you know, the Spirit. It’s really cool and I think worship is a huge, huge element. At least for me, I’m very musically inclined, so having worship moments that can change someone’s life and having worship moments that can alter just how people behave and how people do things in life, it’s a huge thing [...] I think worship in the sense of being at Hillsong Boston...It plays a big role in why people want to come to Hillsong”.

Evidently, musical worship and praise forms a central aspect of Pentecostal theology and life, as shown through Hillsong Boston.

How Hillsong Church’s musical worship heightens the experiential

Within Hillsong Church’s musical worship, both the language and lyrics of the worship as well as the musical aesthetic play important roles in the religious experience of the congregation. Their worship songs are especially recognized and esteemed due to their special “aesthetic - a text and tune synthesis - in which one cannot be evaluated without the other” (Cowan 2017:98).

Lyrics

The language employed within worship songs is heavily influential in the congregation’s experience: “Text plays a crucial role in teaching and reinforcing expectations placed upon worship by the congregation” (Riches 2010: 99). This is because “Worship, especially through

song text, provides space for the individual to actively transform towards God's immutable character, following repentance" (Riches 2010: 99). Given that the purpose of Hillsong's songs are to "represent and reinforce the theological views of the church" (Riches 2010: 49-50), the significance of theologically rooted lyrics is extremely valuable. While "the lyric of text is an important element of any Christian music [...] At Hillsong, text assumed a number of roles in this manner, including encouraging the believers towards spiritual maturity" (Riches 2010:49). The importance of the language used within lyrics of worship music is also seen in Hillsong Boston as well:

"I grew up playing piano when I was very, very young, and um what really got me at Hillsong and listening to Hillsong music and what made it stand out was the lyrics. Having really impactful and meaningful lyrics goes a long way [...] Don't get me wrong, there are times when simple stuff gets really really good, but you know, having really really valuable and really important lyrics and being really mindful of what is written, really really changes the course of how worship goes."

What do these lyrics usually consist of? Thematically, Hillsong's music has encompassed a wide range of focuses (e.g. Christology, hope, positivity, purpose, missions, etc.). Hillsong's motivation also seems to be "theological as well as pragmatic, and that the theological foundations of their activity are quite distinctively pentecostal" (Davies 2017:212). However, "Hillsong Music emphasizes, above all, Jesus's role in the salvation of humanity" (Cowan 2017: 97). This can be seen in the experience of my interviewee at Hillsong Boston:

“I think a lot of the themes personally for me that I've seen have been love. Before I went to Hillsong my faith had very much been a “I have to follow a certain amount of rules and those rules are what makes me a better Christian” as in when I got to Hillsong, yeah there are still rules but the main focus is love and Jesus’s love for you. And from my personal point of view, when I went to a different church it was very much “Follow these set of rules” and there was no emphasis on Jesus’s love... Jesus died on the cross for you and he loves you very very very much and I think that was my turning point when I got to Hillsong, and that’s something that attracted me so much is being loved [...] I know for sure we teach love above everything else. One of my all time favorite things is when Easter comes around they have this huge promotional - well, not promotional - but this huge event where cross equals love. That’s everywhere, it’s all over my Instagram feeds. They love that because it's awesome. It's the whole message of what we're trying to teach.”

This emphasis on love can also be seen within Cowan’s comprehensive study of Hillsong music’s lyrics: “Of all the doctrinal categories queried, atonement ranked highest, followed by justification, far outnumbering other doctrinal references” (Cowan 2017: 97). Atonement, whose theological definition can be defined by Oxford English Dictionary as “the reconciliation of God and humankind through Jesus Christ”, emphasizes the role of Jesus Christ and His love in the salvation of humankind. In doing so, it supports a “comprehensive understanding of the traditional pentecostal model of spiritual empowerment for service to the world”(Davies 2017:206). Essentially, this theme also draws heavily from theology found from the New Testament of the Bible, specifically the Gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, where they detail the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. This echoes the proleptic nature of

Pentecostal worship where “worshippers re-experience the biblical events in unity with the church” (Nel 2016:4), thus highlighting the importance of theology within the language of Hillsong’s musical worship.

A vehicle of enhancing individual religious immersion and transformation has been the perspective from which Hillsong’s worship songs are written: “Over 60% of contemporary worship songs are written in the first person” (Riches 2010:97). In doing so, “it is clear from the text that Hillsong writers believe transformation does occur in worship” (Riches 2010:81). This is because “Singing ‘I’, a common trope in experiential charismatic worship, is more relatable and accessible to all participants, while the ‘we’ component is manifested in communal ritual performance” (Cowan 2017:94). Through singing in the first person, Hillsong worship aims to act within the individual and transform not only their worship experience, but also their lives. This is seen in how the worship experience can be described as a tailored experience:

“I’d like to say [the worship experience] is personalized, if I could put a word on it, it’s personalized.”

This can be seen through two of the worship songs from Hillsong Church’s service on May 23, 2021: Open Heaven (River Wild) and The Stand. In Open Heaven (River Wild), the main chorus goes “Holy Spirit rain, falling like a flood, break upon my praise, as I sing of Your love, Holy Spirit fire, burn within my soul, as I call on Your Name, as I call on Your Name”. This chorus uses the first person to call on the presence of the Holy Spirit, as well as its love, thus both adhering to the traditional theological emphasis on the importance of the Holy Spirit, utilizing the first person perspective to emphasize the individually tailored transformation associated with acceptance of the Holy Spirit, as well as the emphasis on Jesus Christ’s love through the Holy Spirit. In The Stand, the song immediately starts off with the first verse: “You

stood before creation, eternity in Your hand, and You spoke the earth into motion, my soul now to stand, You stood before my failure, and carried the cross for my shame, my sin weighed upon Your shoulders, my soul now to stand”. In referencing the cross, humanity’s sin, and Jesus’s sacrificial love, this section explicitly refers to the crucifixion of Jesus. It refers to how through Jesus’s crucifixion, the debt of this sin was transferred to Jesus and alleviated through his death. This death acts as reconciliation of God and humankind through Jesus, reinforcing the theme of atonement so present within Hillsong’s music. The rest of the song is built upon the individual’s response to the life-altering implication of Jesus’s sacrifice on the cross.

Additionally, the lyrical structure of Hillsong’s music “reinforces the possibility of immediate access as the repeating of verses, chorus, and bridge create an ascending experience” (Cowan 2017:87). This can be seen in all three songs where the worship leader chooses to break the written structure of *Fresh Wind*, *Open Heaven (River Wild)* and *The Stand* in repetition of certain verses, choruses, and bridges. The choice to do so creates the “ascending experience” and feeling of being spontaneously led in the Spirit.

Music

Not only does Hillsong’s worship reflect classic Pentecostal theology, it is also “supported by complexly layered, sonically rich instrumentation” (Cowan 2017:98), thus leading it to be “conducive to religious experiences” (McIntyre 2007:177) of God that are “relevant and engaging” (McIntyre 2007:177). Within their musical textures and instrumentation “There is that same sense of freedom and feeling [...] with people reaching out and swaying or dancing and singing along. This is particularly the case with Hillsong conferences where tens-of-thousands of people may be worshipping together. The style of music compliments the style of

worship, which is lively, free and exuberant” (McIntyre 2007:178). The importance of a rich sonic landscape is emphasized through the interview:

“And I think it's very important to have a balance of really great great lyrics that have deep foundation in faith and having exceptional music, having music that's not just simply repeating chords and simple stuff.”

Alan Moore, a music scholar, has also “described the recorded texture of the Hillsong sound as ‘immersive’ which he goes on to qualify as ‘highly resonant, emotive, medium-paced stadium rock with little virtuosity’” (Evans 2017:75). This immersive experience acts as an amplifier of the religious experience of worshippers within Hillsong Church. Hillsong’s intentional musical choices during their worship also acts as enhancers of religious experience for their congregants. For example, during worship services, the worship team will often draw out instrumental sections, where they hover over repeating patterns of chords. During these instrumentals, the worship team often refrains from any singing or vocalization, allowing space for congregants to respond in their form of religious expression, whether that is prayer, singing, etc. In doing so, the space that is created elevates the religious experience of the participant. Other choices include breaking away from the recorded song structure, and instead, moving toward intentional repetition of certain components of the song (e.g. chorus, bridge, etc.) in order to knit together a sense of ascension. The choice to elongate instrumentals or repeat specific aspects of songs is often attributed to the presence and guidance of the Holy Spirit. This is demonstrated in Hillsong Boston, as the interviewee says:

“Worship was very much like kind of songs are being put out and “We’re going to play these songs in a certain way” whereas now it’s very much become more of

a Holy Spirit led moment. Does that kind of make sense? So instead of being like “We’re going to play a five song set list and see how things turn out”, now it’s like “Okay, how can we anticipate moments where things can be a little different. How can we make things a little bit different?”. So now it’s definitely a lot more spontaneous now than it was a couple of years ago.”

How worship enhances the experiential

This kind of musical worship is not only central to Pentecostal theology, but it is also a crucial component of intensifying religious experience: “During these experiences, worshipers in their subjective perception remain fully aware but lack full comprehension, accompanied by a heightened sense of the presence of the Spirit, and the perception of hearing the voice of God mediated by the Spirit. There is a loss of control within the individual that resembles lived immediacy and surrender” (Nel 2016:4). Essentially, “the believer and God experience a profound rapport in such intimacy that the believer becomes fully responsive to the Spirit” (Nel 2016:4). “Not all Pentecostal believers have experienced speaking in tongues; however, many Pentecostals witness to an ecstatic (emotional) element in their worship experiences” (Nel 2016: 4) which exhibits the rapture-like element as stated earlier. Especially when congregants are engaged with worship through the form of singing, they are often “oblivious to what happens around them, accounting for their beaming, shining countenances as they are enraptured in song (rapture)” (Nel 2016: 4). “Pentecostal singing is experiential and dynamic, with the worshiper and worshipping community being responsive to the Spirit’s movement into the glory of God, realised already in part but not yet in fullness” (Nel 2016:4). Pentecostals view Spirit baptism as the “primary paradigm for Pentecostal experience” (Nel 2016:5), and this is rooted in the biblical passage of Acts 2:1-4 where the disciples are overcome by the Spirit and start speaking in

tongues. Because of this, “people are filled with or baptised in the Spirit in the course of the liturgy, and the experience is repeated for individuals” (Nel 2016: 5).

The majority of Hillsong’s fame and success has come from how its “music is presented as conducive to religious experience” (McIntyre 2007:177). This kind of live musical worship that is “attuned to the Pentecostal emphasis upon emotion” forms a “genuine religious experience” (McIntyre 2007:178) for many people who attend their worship services. This is exhibited through Hillsong Boston. The interviewee says:

“A lot of what Hillsong is known for is really their worship. It’s really their ability to create a moment in, you know, the Spirit. [...] Having worship moments that can change someone's life and having worship moments that can alter just how people behave and how people do things in life...It’s a huge thing. [...] I think worship in the sense of being at Hillsong Boston... it plays a big role in why people want to come to Hillsong”.

At Hillsong Boston, there is especially an emphasis on the power of the Holy Spirit and its role in guiding and directing musical worship:

“I was actually just talking about this with one of the Creative Directors at Hillsong right now. Because when we first started off there - well, I think it has a lot to do with the pandemic and how things panned out, but prior to the pandemic and prior to when I first started there, worship was very much like kind of songs are being put out and “We’re going to play these songs in a certain way” whereas now it’s very much become more of a Holy Spirit led moment. Does that kind of make sense? So instead of being like “We’re going to play a five song set list and see how things turn out”, now it’s like “Okay, how

can we anticipate moments where things can be a little different. How can we make things a little bit different?". So now it's definitely a lot more spontaneous now than it was a couple of years ago. [...] I think there's a fine line between going off an emotion and going off what the Spirit feels like."

This can also be seen in a lyrical analysis of songs that were sung in Hillsong Church's Sunday Service. I found that there were many references to the Holy Spirit, a core theological concept within Pentecostalism, in their lyrics. The songs they sang during this opening set of worship for this service consisted of Fresh Wind by Hillsong Worship, Open Heaven (River Wild) by Hillsong Worship, and The Stand by Hillsong United.

In Fresh Wind, there are many references to the presence of the Holy Spirit and the power found when the Holy Spirit is poured upon the members of the congregation. Starting right off with the first verse, they sing "Spirit sound, rushing wind/Fire of God fall within/Holy Ghost". This yearning and calling for the Holy Spirit to overwhelm the worshipers is made explicit from the very beginning of the worship song. The song then progresses into the chorus where they sing, "We need a fresh wind, the fragrance of Heaven, pour Your Spirit out, pour Your Spirit out", "A holy anointing, the power of Your presence, pour Your Spirit out, pour Your Spirit out". The use of the plural pronoun "we" emphasizes the communal need of the church for the Holy Spirit. The repetition associated with the phrase "pour Your Spirit out" and explicit statement of the "power of Your presence" stresses the weight of the Holy Spirit's presence within the congregation during this time of worship. The song lyrics also refer to the return of God in the next verse which is something that is very prevalent within Pentecostal theology: "So we the church who bear Your light [...] King and kingdom come is what we pray'. This then goes into the bridge of the song where they sing "Let all the redeemed, Prophecy and

sing, We can hear the wind, Blowing, blowing, blowing”. This reference to prophecy also highlights the presence of spiritual gifts among Pentecostals, another central doctrine of Pentecostal theology. The use of “wind” can be understood as another reference to the Holy Spirit.

The language in *Open Heaven (River Wild)* is also rich in references to the Holy Spirit and calls for it to fall upon individuals within the community. The song begins by explicitly stating the visible effects of an outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the first verse: “Signs and wonders from above, When You poured out Your Spirit, on the old and the young, in the power of Your presence”. By stating that this Spirit has been poured on both old and young and that this act leads to “signs and wonders”, these lyrics re-emphasize how the power of the Spirit is simultaneously potent and transcendent of even generations. No one is outside of the reach of the Holy Spirit. The song then transitions into the chorus: “Holy Spirit rain, falling like a flood, break upon my praise, as I sing of Your love, Holy Spirit fire, burn within my soul, as I call on Your Name, as I call on Your Name”. Similarly to *Fresh Wind*, this section of the song cries out for the Holy Spirit to pour its presence onto the congregation members. The comparison of the Holy Spirit to a flood mirrors the overwhelming, unrestrained, uncontrollable, characteristic of experiencing the Holy Spirit when it comes upon individuals. There is a loss of control as it washes over them. Their action of calling on the Holy Spirit stems from a sort of surrender from the individual worshiper. Contrasted with *Fresh Wind*, *Open Heaven (River Wild)* uses personal pronouns like “I” and “me”. This emphasis on the individual is conducive to the high level of individual engagement with the experiential that is often found within Pentecostal worship: “people are filled with or baptised in the Spirit in the course of the liturgy, and the experience is repeated for individuals” (Nel 2016:5). The song then goes into the bridge where they sing “Oh

Holy Spirit, burn like a fire, all consuming, consume me”. By actively singing “consume me”, there is once again, a conscious surrender taking place within the individual. As a result, there is a welcome transfer of agency from the individual to the Holy Spirit. This surrender is restated in the second portion of the bridge: “Here in Your presence, Lord I surrender, to Your glory, for Your glory”.

The lyrics of *The Stand* differ from *Fresh Wind and Open Heaven (River Wild)* in that there is not so much an emphasis placed upon the Holy Spirit. There are only a few explicit references to the Spirit (“So I’ll walk upon salvation, Your Spirit alive in me, this life to declare Your promise, my soul now to stand”); however, most references are addressed to “God” and “Lord”: “So what could I say? What could I do? But offer this heart, oh God, completely to You”, “So I’ll stand with arms high and heart abandoned, in awe of the one who gave it all, so I’ll stand, my soul Lord to You surrendered, all I am is Yours”. This emphasis focuses more on Christology, as mentioned in a prior section. *The Stand* differs from *Fresh Wind and Open Heaven (River Wild)* also in how it references “historic events of redemption” (Nel 2016:4). This is especially seen in the beginning of the song: “You stood before creation, eternity in Your hand, and You spoke the earth into motion, my soul now to stand, You stood before my failure, and carried the cross for my shame, my sin weighed upon Your shoulders, my soul now to stand”. However, similarly to *Fresh Wind and Open Heaven (River Wild)*, the sentiment of surrender is echoed in multiple repetitions of the bridge: “So I’ll stand with arms high and heart abandoned, In awe of the one who gave it all, I’ll stand, my soul Lord to You surrendered”.

These worship songs are an essential component of Hillsong Church services and demonstrate how theological emphases can be crucial in inducing heightened experiential moments: “During these experiences, worshipers in their subjective perception remain fully

aware but lack full comprehension, accompanied by a heightened sense of the presence of the Spirit, and the perception of hearing the voice of God mediated by the Spirit” (Nel 2016:4). This sort of loss of control closely resembles the concept of lived immediacy and surrender. As a result of the experienced intimacy between the worshiper and God, the worshiper becomes completely responsive to the presence of the Spirit. In this action of singing, singers are often “oblivious to what happens around them, accounting for their beaming, shining countenances as they are enraptured in song (rapture)” (Nel 2016:4). This takes place because “Pentecostal singing is experiential and dynamic, with the worshiper and worshipping community being responsive to the Spirit’s movement into the glory of God, realised already in part but not yet in fullness” (Nel 2016:4). This demonstrates that in Pentecostal singing and worship “the ecstatic phenomenon (rapture) originates in the Spirit and produces harmony (rapport) among the participants and with God” (Nel 2016:4)

Musical worship - as seen through Hillsong Church - specifically the combination of rich instrumentation and lyrics in line with Pentecostal theology which is demonstrated through an emphasis on the power of the Holy Spirit and its ability to transform the individual, plays a key role in facilitating and enhancing the worship experience for an individual.

Chapter 2

In Chapter 1, I demonstrate through the worship of Hillsong Church and the importance of musical worship within the Pentecostal tradition that there has been an exaggerated downplaying of theological ideas from phenomenological anthropologists. Theological ideas are not only inseparable from religious experience, but they are so far as even conducive to enhancing these sorts of encounters. Despite the potency of theological ideas for magnifying the religious experience, theology is too often left out in the dialogue surrounding subjective experience. As seen through Hillsong's musical worship, the theological themes and language found within Hillsong's worship songs and sung within their services plays a vital role in fostering an environment where the atmosphere is rich in individual enrapture.

Similar to the underestimation of theological ideas, there is an underestimation of the institutional structures and history of traditions that work congruently to transmit these theologies which has led to an undervaluing of both institutional structures and historical traditions by phenomenological anthropologists in the dialogue surrounding subjective religious experience. The undermining of institutions, structures, and traditions stands as a variation of the same problem regarding theological ideas discussed in the previous chapter. However, there is much value to be found embedded within these institutional structures and traditions regarding their role as conduits for religious experience. In this chapter, I will present how institutional structures within Pentecostalism (e.g. teaching courses, prayer groups, routinized liturgical exercises, etc.) as well as the mysticism found within Pentecostalism that has arisen and can be derived from a long-standing, extensive history of tradition has further augmented the experiential moments that phenomenological anthropologists emphasize. As a result, I

demonstrate how these institutions and traditions are not only not antithetical to subjective experience, but can also act to heighten these experiences.

The problem with the phenomenological view of religion

When looking at the essence of religion, William James, an important scholar that many famous phenomenologists like Michael Jackson draw from as a source, consciously takes a methodological approach where he “ignore[s] the institutional branch entirely, [...] to confine [himself] as far as [he can] to personal religion pure and simple” (James 2002:32). Right from the start, James draws a clear distinction between institutions and what can and cannot be included within the realm of “pure” religion. This perspective ultimately informs what he declares his definition of religion to be: “Religion, therefore, as I now ask you arbitrarily to take it, shall mean for us the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude, so far as they apprehend themselves to stand in relation to whatever they may consider the divine” (James 2002:29-30). The problem with this stance is that James “has no time for institutional religion; he is interested in the experience of individual men (‘in their solitude’ he says) arguing that it is from those individuals that theologies, philosophies, and the ecclesiastical may secondarily grow” (Cunningham 2002:1). James’s perspective illustrates how those who value subjective religious experience risk downplaying the importance of institutions and their liturgical structures, including how they inform these experiences. This is partly because “he is so bound to a kind of Protestant individualism that he cannot do fair justice to the ineluctably social and communal nature of religion and its tradition” (Cunningham 2002:1). However, James is only one example of a wider, mainstream devaluation of institutions, structures, and other ‘outward’ expressions.

As Birgit Meyer, a professor of religious studies, points out, the general shift within religious studies is that “the pivot of these evolutionary models is the idea that the human mind can do increasingly better without the baggage of ‘outward’ forms” (Meyer 2012:9). Her sentiment is echoed by other scholars: “By making religion primarily a matter of the singular self, James leaves out the formative role of language and belief, of culture and history” (Premawardhana 2021: 151). This underestimation of ‘outward’ institutional forms has birthed “the rise of a mentalistic understanding of religion, according to which religions prioritizing ‘outward’ expressions and forms stand intellectually and morally lower than those valuing above all content, meaning, and inner feelings” (Meyer 2012:10). Resultantly, there has been an overemphasis on the distinction between institution and subjective religious experience. The issue with doing so is that “phenomenology tends to brush over the fact that perception itself is shaped by sociocultural expressions” (Meyer 2015:121). Instead, there needs to be not only recognition, but also appreciation for how “religious experience does not occur in an immediate and, as it were, raw manner, but is a product of religious framing and mediated forms” (Meyer 2012:11). The “sensations and sensibilities” that phenomenological anthropologist so often emphasize “do not emerge from an unmediated, direct encounter with the ‘world’ but arise and are sustained as part of particular sociocultural and sensorial regimes that underpin a particular ‘distribution of the sensible’” (Meyer 2015:122). Drawing from these “sociocultural and sensorial regimes”, “religions [...] offer authorized forms for having certain religious experiences, over and over again” (Meyer 2012:11).

What do these ‘outward’ forms and “sociocultural and sensorial regimes” look like? The answer to this can vary widely as they can take a multitude of forms. For example, “by mobilizing texts, sounds, pictures, or objects, and by engaging in practices of speaking, singing,

being possessed and so on”, one can access “a sense of the presence of something beyond” (Meyer 2012:22). These are only some examples of mediums for which fabrication takes place. Fabrication, a term coined by Birgit Meyer, is “an exploration of religious modes of ‘making belief’” (Meyer 2012:22). It essentially “allows a restoration of the balance between ‘inward’ belief and ‘outward’ forms, which was lost with the rise of the Protestant bias and semantic approaches at large” (Meyer 2012:22), thus alleviating the dramatic rift that has arisen between institutions and subjective religious experience. These “perceptions, in this understanding, are mediated by expressions that tune the senses of the perceivers, involving them in a socially constituted world that foregrounds certain sensibilities and sense impressions and discards others” (Meyer 2015:122). As a result, “direct’ or ‘immediate’ perception, then, does not precede mediation but is born of it” (Meyer 2015:122). Fabrication is deeply intertwined with “sensational forms”, another term coined by Meyer, and these forms are a “configuration of religious media, acts, imaginations and bodily sensations in the context of a religious tradition or group” (Meyer 2012:26). These forms naturally “[streamline] or [shape] religious mediation and of achieving certain effects by being performed” (Meyer 2012:26) and act as “formats” that “direct those taking part in them on how to proceed” (Meyer 2012:26). The element of these forms being things that are *taught* is inherent to the nature of institutions. One example of this is the liturgy of a church service: “It stipulates the appropriate steps and, in the course of being performed, induces in participants an experience of divine presence” (Meyer 2012:26). However, the value of sensational forms and fabrication can be especially seen within the prayer groups in Pentecostal churches.

The importance of institutional structures within Pentecostalism

The significance of institutions and practices can especially be seen within Pentecostal-Charismatic Churches as they “challenge scholars, including myself, to come to terms with the explicit emphasis on bodily sensations and lateral benefits that characterizes Pentecostal-Charismatic religious practice” (Meyer 2012:20). For Meyer’s research, “it was the early converts’ criticisms of the missionary project and the tangible presence of Pentecostal-Charismatic churches in the public domain that alerted me to the importance of placing materiality at the centre of my research” (Meyer 2012:20). Contrary to James’s definition that pure religion consists of “experiences of individual men in their solitude”, “sociality [is] not just evident but constitutive of the Christian self” (Premawardhana 2021:152). Especially within Pentecostalism, “after Pentecostal conversion, bonds are either maintained or made anew” (Premawardhana 2021:152). The focus on communal bonds contrasts James’s focus on solidarity and can be seen in the institutional structure of “small groups” (also known as “house groups”, “community groups”, etc.) within Pentecostal churches. The institutional emphasis on repeated structural practices within the context of community - and the enhanced religious experience that flows as a result - also illustrates how scholars like William James have too often overlooked the weight of institutions in mediating religious experience.

As mentioned previously, the ecclesial practice of learned prayer within these Pentecostal churches, especially in the environment of a small group, serves as a tangible example of Meyer’s concepts of sensational forms and fabrication, where prayer functions as the channel of mediation between ‘inward’ belief and ‘outward’ forms. Tanya Luhrmann, an anthropologist, conducted ethnographic research within Vineyard churches, a highly prominent Pentecostal megachurch. Even excluding prayer, there were several institutional, instructional structures already in place that transformed congregants’ religious encounters and what they experienced.

For example, one of the most popular ecclesial activities was the Alpha course. This course consisted of ten weekly evening sessions where participants shared a meal together, watched a half hour presentation, and broke out into small groups after for discussion. Participating in this course was so favored that “Every Vineyard church [Luhrmann] visited ran Alpha at least once a year” (Luhrmann 2012:136). One of the participants of the course, Sam, said “it wasn’t until he took the Alpha course and went on its retreat that he felt the power of God flood through him” (Luhrmann 2012:136). Evidently, these communal, teaching-based structures magnified the experiential religious experience for individuals. Another example of the potency of these structures is Experiencing God. Experiencing God refers to instructional manuals that are “used in one house group after another” (Luhrmann 2012:78), including Luhrmann’s own house group. The purpose of these manuals is to “teach the reader to create a real, practical, and personal relationship with God” (Luhrmann 2012:78). With over four million copies sold, Experiencing God serves as another outward form produced by an institution that has further enhanced the individual religious experience.

However, the main portion of Luhrmann’s research consisted of her joining and engaging in a Vineyard prayer group. Within these prayer groups, there was a strong presence of specific instruction from individuals that were heavily involved with the churches. She saw that when a new member at Vineyard joined a prayer group, the manuals “taught her how to pray” (Luhrmann 2012:52) through an “insistence that you should write down your prayer to help you to hear God talk back” that “runs throughout the manuals” (Luhrmann 2012:62). This was mirrored by her own experience within the prayer group: “When I started out in the prayer group, my spiritual adviser told me that it would be helpful for my prayer life if I wrote down my prayer as a dialogue: what I said to God, followed by what he said to me” (Luhrmann 2012:62).

The strong theme of institutional instruction and its effectiveness was no coincidence, as it was a repeated occurrence both in Luhrmann's experience within her prayer group - "Elaine, our leader, practically shook her finger at us when she made her main point. Listen. Watch. Pay attention. God will teach you how to hear him" (Luhrmann 2012:140), "Elaine would ask us to go into the minds of the characters in the Bible stories we read" - (Luhrmann 2012:91) as well as her general observation within Vineyard churches: "[Churches] coach congregants to practice feeling loved". As a result of these instructional exercises, "these faith practices change people. At least, after people have spent some time in the church, they begin to speak as if they recognize when God talks to them in their minds" (Luhrmann 2012:126). There is no doubt that within Vineyard churches "there is plenty of explicit teaching about prayer. There are hundreds of manuals about prayer, teachings on prayer, even classes on how to pray effectively" (Luhrmann 2012:148). Evidently, within these Pentecostal churches, "prayer clearly is a technique: a skilled practice that has to be learned" (Luhrmann 2012:129).

The impact of these learned, repeated institutional structures on individual religious experience was clear within the congregants of Vineyard churches: "They practiced the exercises and read the books and participated in the rituals, and then, out of the blue, they saw something - the Goddess, or a flash of divine light, or a shining vision of another world. They saw these as things in the world, not phantoms in the mind" (Luhrmann 2012:175). Repetition of these institutional exercises resulted in what individuals of the congregation experienced as genuinely "divine" encounters. For one member "the ability to hear God speak had become far more vivid for her as she had learned to imagine God as a person by her side. She admitted it had taken practice" (Luhrmann 2012:83). These encounters were not only common, they were universal: "All also reported that as they began to pray, over time, internal sensations became stronger [...]"

All talk about experiencing God with their senses - not in an abstract, distant way [...] but actually feeling God's presence, being aware of him through a feeling on their skin" (Luhrmann 2012:142). The act of repeating these prayer exercises on a consistent basis led to individuals feeling like they experienced God's presence. In Luhrmann's interview with a Vineyard member, the member notes that "she had never believed in God as strongly as she did after the exercises [...] She explicitly said that this had happened as a result of being instructed to create and to swell upon specific mental images" (Luhrmann 2012:168). This enhanced experience was not only a product of repetition and practice, but also a product of hierarchical guidance from a leader of the ecclesial institution: "Note the progression: The group leader suggested, and he experienced" (Luhrmann 2012:137). Contrary to James's belief that "the feelings, acts, and experiences of individual men in their solitude" constitute the true essence of religion, institutional exercises were necessary in order to achieve this level of divine experience: "But these exercises made possible something her previous prayer had not" (Luhrmann 2012:164). Luhrmann saw the magnification of religious experience within her own small group as well: "the actual process of doing the exercises was identical. The prayer techniques were the same. What astonished me was how intensely emotional the experience was. Every week when we gathered in our group, the women cried [...] They wept about how much more intimate their relationship with God had become, how they felt his presence, how he had become more alive. All of them said that they knew Christ better: that before the exercises, their belief had been abstract [...] All of them reported that the exercises made God real for them in new ways" (Luhrmann 2012:164). The practice of these prayer exercises undeniably transformed the way in which these women underwent religious experiences.

Luhrmann draws a conclusion on why this is so effective for enriching religious experience: “I believe that the central but often implicit technology of evangelical prayer is an intense focus on mental imagery and other inner sensory experience. The focus is structures in specific ways and directed toward specific goals but the techniques first and foremost heighten and depend internal sensation [...evangelicals] do not realize that what they do in prayer is rooted in older practices that go back to the early church and become explicit through centuries of systematic instruction in what are called the spiritual disciplines” (Luhrmann 2012:150). Additionally “the intensity and authenticity of one’s feeling for God is enabled through communal, ritualized prayer” (Hollywood, 2010). While scholars like William James undermine the importance of rituals, ““Many religious traditions, ancient texts, beliefs, and rituals do not replace experience as the vital center of spiritual life, but instead provide the means for engendering it” (Hollywood, 2010). The ability of institutional, instructional exercises to feed into religious experience also occurs because “In principle, anything, from language to the body, from book to computer, from sculpture to icon, can become a religious medium” (Meyer 2012:26). As a result, “using and taking part in the sensational forms that are characteristic for a particular religious group or religious tradition, a believer’s sensorium is tuned through distinct, gendered techniques of the body[...] they are always key to the genesis of presence” (Meyer 2012:27). As shown through the lens of Vineyard churches, Pentecostal churches exhibit the value in embeddedness in a set of repeated institutional structures. There is thickness in understanding institutions including pentecostal traditions and practices related to experience.

Pentecostalism as a Mystical Tradition

Not only is there an underestimation of institutional structures within Pentecostalism and the ability of these structures to amplify experience, but there is also an underestimation of how Pentecostalism's roots in historical tradition can serve as a mediator of subjective experience.

Although many scholars believe Pentecostalism emerged around the beginning of the twentieth century (Hollenweger 2004:162) in late modernity, "Pentecostalism appears to exhibit premodern characteristics" (Castelo 2017:50). This paradox of origin is grounded in the fact that "Pentecostals have a critical tradition that has marked their movement from the beginning" (Castelo 2017:17). Daniel Castelo, Professor of Theology and Methodist Studies at Duke Divinity School, argues that Pentecostalism "represents a particular resurgence of these mystical dimensions of Christianity within a largely Western context, and increasingly a global one as well" (Castelo 2017:33). This term of "resurgence" implies that Pentecostalism has not emerged from a vacuum, but rather has been revived from traditions that although may have been "on the edges of the theological mainstream" (Castelo 2017:33), have already existed throughout history. As a result, "Pentecostalism is rich in "long-standing features" that exhibit a mystical nature (Castelo 2017:33). These mystical features can be traced back to "archaic accounts", where it is clear that for "those early converts, the baptism of the Spirit did not just change their religious affiliations or their way of worship. It changed everything" (Castelo 2017:34), thus demonstrating that Pentecostalism is "part of the larger and longer history of human religiousness" (Castelo 2017:35). One prime example of Pentecostalism's essence as a mystical tradition is its roots in medieval history.

Medieval History of Mysticism

The perspective that Pentecostalism can be viewed as "a mystical tradition within the church catholic assumes that mystical traditions within Christianity have historically existed and

presumably can exist today. Such a claim is not difficult to sustain, at least historically” (Castelo 2017:33). For example, “For the first generation of Christians, there was no getting around mystical motifs” (Castelo 2017:33). This is because “much of the language, happenings, and practices of the first Christians and the early church can be understood as inherently and thoroughly mystical. Consider the farewell discourses of the Gospel of John, the Day of Pentecost happenings as recorded in the Book of Acts, the early practice of sacraments such as Eucharist and baptism, and even the formulation of such doctrines as the incarnation and the Trinity - these all can be said to have mystical dimensions and qualities” (Castelo 2017:33). Evidently, the mystical qualities of Pentecostalism that amplify subjective experience are deeply embedded within a strong, extensive historical tradition.

Pentecostalism’s roots in a long-standing mystical tradition can also be seen through early medieval figures: “Many people with some working sense of Christian history recognize the names of say, Pseudo-Dionysius” (Castelo 2017:33). Dionysius, also known as Pseudo-Dionysius, stands as one of the most well-known, revered, Christian mystics whose writings from the late fifth or early sixth century BC (Corrigan, 2019) challenge the same logocentrism that phenomenologist anthropologists critique. His work focuses on the “limits of language and sanctification” (Castelo 2017:104) and is most usually known for “a running sense of how God is beyond our cognitive and perceptual grasp” (Castelo 2017:104). This criticism of a linguistic approach to the divine can be seen through what he does in *The Divine Names*, where he critiques “logo-centricity in a very particular - and I would add, helpful - way. With a guiding vision of how God is both beyond our limits and available within them, he stresses in this work both the fittingness and the shortcomings of divine attribution” (Castelo 2017:105). By doing this, Dionysius “opens the door for apophatic considerations, but these are cast *within* the

Christian pilgrimage as it moves alongside the cataphatic” (Castelo 2017:105). These “apophatic considerations” can refer to a large number of things: “inadequacy of words, forms of silence, and different ways of engagement so as to form a collective response that signifies human limits and (more significantly) to give expression to a kind of God-directedness that is worshipful at its core” (Castelo 2017:81). However, at its core, the heart of “apophaticism can serve a crucial role in countering logo-centricity” (Castelo 2017:81). This is due to the fact that Christian mysticism has a “long history of cultivating an apophatic sensibility in the theological task, one that points precisely to expressing the limits of speech and thoughts so as to point to dimensions beyond them” (Castelo 2017:81). In this sense, both apophaticism and Pentecostalism challenge the perspective that “revelation needs to be rational, and that which is rational in this particular sense is inextricably bound to an understanding that words can adequately and fittingly account for the masters of the faith” (Castelo 2017:81). One of the best examples of this is glossolalia, also known as speaking in tongues.

Glossolalia

Glossolalia, also known as speaking in tongues, is commonly recognized as a foundational tenet of Pentecostalism: “Particular utterances or speech acts such as glossolalia, prophecies, and inspired teaching or witnessing are central in much of Pentecostal-charismatic ritual life” (Lindhart 2011:5). The importance of glossolalia within Pentecostalism is typically theologically rooted in several Biblical passages. The most famous passage occurs in the Book of Acts where on the Day of Pentecost, “Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested 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” (Acts 2:3-4, NRSV). However, there are several other accounts of glossolalia that are sprinkled throughout the rest of Acts: “When Paul had laid his

hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied” (Acts 19:6, NRSV), “For they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God” (Acts 10:46, NRSV). Additionally, writings from Paul the Apostle in 1 Corinthians and Romans exhibit accounts of glossolalia as well: “To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit [...] to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues” (1 Corinthians 12:8-11, NRSV). “Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words” (Romans 8:26, NRSV). Evidently, glossolalia’s prevalence in Pentecostal theology and its roots in medieval sources (Christian Bible, Paul the Apostle, Author of Acts, etc.) makes tongues an example of the deeply sedimented historical tradition that Pentecostalism is just the latest example of.

But what does glossolalia precisely entail? And why does it serve as a prime example of apophaticism? Glossolalia is often described as a form of “ecstatic utterance” (Cox 2001:91) whose sonic nature “takes the form of nonsense or gibberish” (Csordas 1997: 238) due to its “unfamiliar sounds and syllables” (Cox 2001:94). It has been deemed “a form of sacred utterance lacking any semantic component” (Csordas 1997:54). When observed in practice, it most often “takes the form of some sort of vocal expression. It can sound like crying, calling out, moaning, and weeping” (Cox 2001:85) or “repetition of a limited repertoire of phrases” (Csordas 1997:55). Although any semantic meaning is absent from speaking in tongues, many Pentecostals still believe “tongues are spiritually edifying, that they encourage the believer” (Castelo 2017:105). This is because “when Pentecostals speak in glossolalic tongues, they do not know what they are saying, and this is very much an appropriate epistemic space to occupy. In some sense, *they do not need to know* what they are saying because what is happening at such moments resists and

defies description beyond the surface, since the One at work is infinite, transcendent, and thus beyond words” (Castelo 2017:105). As a result, glossolalia is simultaneously “an ecstatic experience, one in which the cognitive grids and perpetual barriers that normally prevent people from opening themselves to deeper insights and exultant feelings, are temporarily suspended” (Cox 2001:86) as well as an experientially edifying one. These “cognitive grids and perpetual barriers” include those associated with the confines and boundaries of language that apophaticism and phenomenological anthropology critique. Because of this, glossolalia is “a deliverance from the iron cage of grammar and a graceful provision to those who did not have the strength or the fluency to pray with their own words” (Cox 2001:87). By challenging “taken for granted canons of vernacular expressivity and intelligibility, and in so doing calls into question conventions of truth, logic, and authority” (Csordas 1997:238) glossolalia is a tangible example of apophaticism and its critique against logocentrism.

Glossolalia serves as a prime example of the subjective religious experience that phenomenological anthropologists give weight to. However, it is evident that it is deeply intertwined with medieval history and Christian tradition as seen through historical sources such as Dionysius, Paul the Apostle, and Biblical texts, thus leading to the conclusion that there has been an understatement of tradition’s importance in the exploration of religious experience. As a core facet of Pentecostalism, its spiritual, nonrational nature plants Pentecostalism as a mystical tradition whose embeddedness in a deep past must not be overlooked.

While Pentecostalism and mystical Christianity share these similarities with one another, this does not necessarily mean that one is a product of the other. There are still many distinctions between Pentecostalism and mystical Christianity; there is just clear overlap in the areas discussed. As a result, there is value in these shared characteristics.

How Hillsong Church employs institutional, communal exercises

The practice, history, and tradition of similar institutional ‘outward’ forms in Hillsong Church has also informed how they can inform the religious experience of congregants.

Hillsong Church has had an extensive history of hierarchical instruction within its birth. Due to its roots in Pentecostal groups like Assemblies of God and Sydney CLC, values like “authority in the senior pastor and church board/eldership” (Austin 2017:24) and ecclesial practices like “home groups”, “programming”, and “practical workshops” (Austin 2017:30) have been continuously implemented to this date. However, beyond these institutional structures, Hillsong Church is also rooted in institutional traditions as demonstrated through its historical lineage that can be traced through Assemblies of God, Azusa Street Revival, Great Awakenings, and Latter Rain Movement: “The formation of Assemblies of God was inspired by the Azusa Street Revival and these Pentecostals looked to previous spiritual outpourings, such as the First Great Awakening (1730s-40s) and Second Great Awakening (1800s-30s), for inspiration and instruction” (*History*). From the Assemblies of God, leaders such as Andrew Evans were able to shape the emergence of Hillsong Church: “The origins and development of Hillsong Church occurred during the tenure of Andrew Evans as General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God in Australia (AGA)” (Austin 2017:21). Andrew Evans especially was “profoundly impacted” by a Latter Rain preacher Rob Wheeler of Auckland (Austin 2017:22) during his time in AGA’s Commonwealth Bible College in Brisbane, and as a result, “enthusiastic endorsement of contemporary worship practices, gleaned from New Zealand Latter Rain preachers led the AGA to embrace a freedom in worship that later encapsulated Hillsong Church” (Austin 2017:23). Due to the influence of the Latter Rain movement on AGA leaders such as Andrew Evans that played a powerful role in shaping the landscape of Hillsong Church’s worship, “the

historical foundations of Hillsong Church's freedom of expression in worship emerged out of the trans-Tasman charismatic renewal flowing between New Zealand and Australia [...] The charismatic Latter Rain movement in New Zealand was 'a renewer of renewal' distinguished by contemporary music and demonstrative worship practices" (Austin 2017: 22). As discussed in Chapter 1, this style of free worship has influenced many consumers of Hillsong's music by acting as a facilitator of religious experience for many. However, this experiential musical worship did not emerge spontaneously from Hillsong Church. It has been firmly planted within a long tradition of spiritual movements and their resultant organizations. As a result, Hillsong's history in Assemblies of God, Latter Rain Movement, the Great Awakenings, and the Azusa Street Revival provides an intellectual lineage to its story, thus demonstrating the importance of traditions in enabling religious experience.

Even from its start as Hills CLC, they "featured a wide variety of activities, largely aimed at young adults, including home groups, creative ministries, visitation teams, prayer groups, marriage counselling, youth, sports teams, and sign language—even a Star Trekkers club—as well as a thriving men's ministry led by Sydney CLC convert Michael Murphy (Austin 2017: 30). Similar to Vineyard churches, Hillsong Church has implemented structures like home groups and prayer groups from the start of its formation. Presently, they can still be seen in the presence of "connect groups". These groups are "small groups of people from the congregation who meet outside church weekly or fortnightly to study the Bible and support each other" (Rocha 2017: 138). These groups exemplify Hillsong's emphasis on both community as well as institutional instruction, thus characterizing Hillsong as a re-enchanting total institution, allowing the church to pervade life narratives" (Porter 2017:177). Hillsong's emphasis on teaching from institutional leadership is also clearly manifested in the institution of Hillsong International

Leadership College, also more commonly known as Hillsong College. Founded in 1983, “the educational philosophy of the College is to train men and women with a particular pentecostal doctrinal emphasis” (Soon 2017: 110). Within the College, students receive direction from the Senior Pastors and founders of Hillsong Church: Brian and Bobbie Houston (*Hillsong College*). As a result, they commit to “raising, training and equipping a leadership generation for global influence” (*Hillsong College*). The training received by present leaders within Hillsong’s institution goes toward raising up future leaders of Hillsong Church, thus influencing the landscape of religious experience for congregants. These students also form “an integral part of the ministry teams in our midweek programs, (eg. Sisterhood, Youth) as well as our large-scale church events (eg. live album recordings, Colour Conference, Hillsong Conference)” (*Hillsong College*). Not only are these students directly involved and trained within Hillsong’s range of structures, but they also engage specifically with “live album recordings, Colour Conference, Hillsong Conference. These Hillsong structures specifically relate to musical worship, one of the most impactful ministries of Hillsong Church (further discussed in the following chapter). As a result, engagement with these events and practices organized by the institution directly plays a role in enhancing the religious experience of individuals attending these events.

So, while institutions and traditions have traditionally been cast outside the realm of subjective experience, in reality they are both conducive to the enhancement of the experiences that phenomenological anthropologists privilege. Clearly, more attention needs to be directed toward institutional structures, historical traditions, and the ways in which they can serve regulatory functions for mediating religious experiences.

Conclusion

Traditionally, facets of religion such as theology, institutional structures, and historical traditions, have functioned as primary lenses through which scholars have studied the heart of religion. This was especially seen historically within the realm of academia, as many religious studies methodologies took mainly mentalistic approaches in order to understand religious life and experience. Shaped largely by the Protestant Reformation and its emphasis on inner belief, academia in this field reflected this mindset in its focus on logocentrism as the central source of knowledge. However, this catalyzed a response from phenomenological anthropologists such as Michael Jackson, Thomas Csordas, and Paul Stoller. Phenomenological anthropologists argue that there has been an overstatement in discursive matters such as theology, institutional structures, and historical traditions, and an understatement in emphasis placed upon bodily experiences, the senses, and phenomena. By using the body and its immediate experience as a point of departure in studying the heart of religion, phenomenological anthropologists argue that this approach to the study of religion counters the marginalization of important dimensions of religious life and makes space for the movement and development of popular religion that a logocentric approach may fail to do.

This thesis argues that while there is undeniable value to the approach taken by phenomenological anthropologists, an overcorrection has also taken place. Contrary to their belief that discursive approaches through theology, institutions, and traditions are antithetical to bodily experience, these extra-subjective factors can actually function as magnifiers of the subjective religious experience that phenomenological anthropologists value. This can especially be seen through the theology, musical worship, and institutional structures found within the mystical tradition of Pentecostalism. With a heavy emphasis on the power and importance of the Holy Spirit, many Pentecostals undergo a sort of rapturous, liberating experience during their

musical worship. In Chapter 1, I explored the musical worship of Hillsong Worship, a Pentecostal megachurch through one of their Sunday services. In my research, I saw how their songs' lyrical foundation in Pentecostal theology worked in tandem with instrumentation in order to induce overwhelming, bodily experiences that were religiously edifying for many members. This kind of experience is so common for people who experience Hillsong's worship, that it has been one of the largest contributors to Hillsong's global proliferation and fame. In Chapter 2, I look at the importance of institutional structures and historical tradition within Hillsong Church and Vineyard Church, another Pentecostal megachurch. As demonstrated through Luhrmann's ethnographic research in Vineyard Church, many institutional structures - such as prayer groups and house groups - result in participants experiencing religious visions, voices, etc. Similar experiences occur through institutional structures and programming organized by Hillsong Church (community groups, worship conferences, etc.) These structures help teach members how to access this bodily experience in ways that they would not be able to accomplish on their own. As a result, institutional structures have strong potential in facilitating the religious experience that phenomenological anthropologists stress. Additionally, Pentecostalism's mystical nature that is simultaneously rooted in medieval history, as demonstrated through spontaneous essence and historical prevalence of glossolalia, demonstrate the value in historical traditions when studying subjective religious experience.

Essentially through overlooking and rejecting the use of discursive approaches such as theology, institutions, and traditions, phenomenological anthropologists may be blinded to how these approaches can actually work as conduits of amplification for religious experience.

Pentecostalism exists as an example of how logocentric approaches to the study of religion and

bodily experience are not only unopposed to each other, but rather they form a sort of symbiotic relationship.

Broader Implications

This thesis has utilized research in order to analyze and critique current literature surrounding the debate between traditional modes of religious discourse and religious experience. In doing so, this work contributes to the existing literature as a piece that supplements the growing amount of literature arguing for the importance of bridging dimensions of religion that have traditionally been separated.

This thesis also works to inform the culture of not only religious studies, but also academia itself which has historically been extremely logocentric. As a response to this heavy reliance on mentalistic approaches, a shift toward phenomenology has functioned as an attempt to shed light on marginalized modes of understanding religion. Phenomenology does undeniably offer a useful, and needed, corrective in understanding the shaping of lived experience for many individuals and communities in ways that logocentric approaches fall short of. However, ideas, institutions, and traditions have been shown to have more value than given credit for, revealing that overcorrections in perspectives within academia can reintroduce problems just in different forms.

Additionally, as previously discussed, Pentecostalism has exploded in its popularity, and it is a rapidly expanding force around the globe that only continues to gather more congregants each day. Developing a better understanding of it as a tradition and experience is critical in informing these communities and their spread. Especially within the vein of Hillsong Church, the global influence Hillsong has over not only “Christian” communities, but “secular” communities as well, makes a deeper understanding and grasp of the church itself of the utmost importance.

Limitations

One of the limitations of this thesis is the absence of in-person ethnography due to the nature of the COVID-19 pandemic and its restrictions for in person gatherings.

Future Directions

Continuing with the strand of Hillsong Church, it is undeniable that in many ways, Hillsong functions as a business enterprise. Standing as a global multi billion industry, its ethical implications in potentially enhancing or deterring religious experience must be explored. Ethnography conducted in person, rather than virtually, could provide invaluable insight. Unfortunately, given the circumstances of the COVID-19 pandemic during the time of this thesis, only primary literature, secondary literature, and virtual ethnography were used to collect data for this thesis. However, if possible and with more time, in-person ethnography may prove as an excellent resource to further scholarship surrounding Hillsong Church, Vineyard Church, Pentecostal megachurches, and Pentecostal theology.

Additionally, as discussed in this thesis, scholars such as phenomenological anthropologists have typically undermined the importance of theology, institutions, and historical traditions in their definition of religion's essence. Further research should be conducted around other avenues that phenomenological anthropologists may be overlooking, as well as branches of Protestantism besides Pentecostalism that may serve to also bridge the gap between religious discourse and experience.

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