

PENTECOSTALIS APOLOGETICUS? THE QUEST FOR A DISTINCTIVELY PENTECOSTAL APOLOGETIC

Philosophy Interest Group

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INTRODUCTION

The resurgence of Christian apologetics has been, as far as I can tell, in no small part due to the increase of secularism and pluralism within American culture over the past handful of decades. When we consider the decrease of attendance in churches and an increase of animosity and resistance held toward formal, institutionalized religion, coupled with the emergence of the so-called “nones” and a breakdown in effective disciple-making, these have no doubt served to fuel a clarion call to craft a compelling philosophical, sociological, and practical case for embracing the Christian faith. As a Pentecostal who has studied apologetics for nearly twenty-five years, I've grappled for some time with the question as to whether there is such a thing we might justifiably call “Pentecostal apologetics.” For years I reflected on this question, and I have, admittedly, found myself vacillating on whether such a thing exists. In this paper, I will attempt to share with you part of my quest in search of a distinctively Pentecostal apologetic. It is divided into two parts: addressing the “definitional challenge,” and assessing the tenability of an authentic “Pentecostal” apologetic.

THE DEFINITIONAL CHALLENGE

Allow me to begin by acknowledging the daunting challenge in defining “Pentecostal” (and “Pentecostalism,” for that matter) and “Apologetics.” I shall address these definitional challenges in said order and then provide a working definition for each.

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The Challenge of Defining “Pentecostal(ism)”

I’m not the first to admit the difficulty in defining “Pentecostal(ism).” I stand in the good company of exceptional Pentecostal scholars who have highlighted the challenge. Wonsuk Ma once argued that it is “‘simply impossible’ to clearly identify what is the best definition of a Pentecostal.”¹ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen has admitted the challenge as well: “The question of what makes Pentecostalism Pentecostalism — in other words, what is its identity? — is a notoriously difficult one.” Why is this the case? He explains,

Unlike, say, Lutheranism or Roman Catholicism, Pentecostal identity is not based on creeds or shared history. Nor can Pentecostal identity be based on ecclesiastical structures, since you cannot find the whole repertoire: from most local-church autonomous models (Scandinavia) to congregationalist (continental Europe and England) to Presbyterian (white Pentecostals in the USA) to Episcopal (black Pentecostals in the USA and elsewhere) to other types.²

To avoid redundancy, I’ll appeal to just more scholar. Keith Warrington emphasizes the definitional challenge. “Complicating the quest for core beliefs is that Pentecostalism is often defined differently in various cultures,” he writes.

[Additionally], it is much more difficult to identify Pentecostals now on the basis of their doctrines because of the various nuances of beliefs, some of which are significant. However, and as importantly, this difficulty has been compounded by the fact that many aspects of the apology once distinctive to Pentecostalism have now also been embraced by others; *Pentecostal perspectives are not as distinct as they once were*. An alternative emphasis needs to be discovered that best identifies the nucleus of Pentecostalism.³

¹ Wonsuk Ma, “Asian (Classical) Pentecostal Theology in Context,” in Anderson and Tang (eds.), *Asian and Pentecostal*, 73, cited in Keith Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology: A Theology of Encounter* (London: T&T Clark 2008), 17.

² Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, “Pentecostalism and Pentecostal Theology in the Third Millennium: Taking Stock of the Contemporary Global Situation,” in *The Spirit in the World: Emerging Pentecostal Theologies in Global Contexts*, Kärkkäinen (ed.), (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 2009), xvii. See also, “Free Church, Ecumenism, Pentecostalism,” in Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Toward a Pneumatological Theology: Pentecostal and Ecumenical Perspectives on Ecclesiology, Soteriology, and Theology of Mission*, Amos Yong (ed.), (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 2002), 53-64.

³ Keith Warrington, *Pentecostal Theology: A Theology of Encounter* (London: T&T Clark 2008), 18, 19-20. Emphasis mine.

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I would like to emphasize Warrington’s point: the longer Pentecostalism has progressed historically, the less its distinctiveness stands out, and the more other Christian traditions have been influenced by it. Think of evangelicals who embrace raising of hands in “contemporary” worship settings.

The Challenge of Defining “Apologetics”

As it is difficult in some ways to define what we mean by Pentecostal(ism), equally so, there is a challenge in defining what exactly apologetics is. To muddy the waters even more, the variety of titles for books on apologetics abounds. Do a quick Amazon search and you will find apologetics qualified in voluminous ways. Some of these are familiar and quite frankly to be expected, such as *Apologetics* (Frame),⁴ *Christian Apologetics* (Groothuis),⁵ and *Biblical Apologetics* (McManis).⁶ With respect to well-known apologetic approaches, we might naturally expect to see *Classical Apologetics* (Sproul, Gerstner, Lindsey),⁷ *Presuppositional Apologetics* (Bahnsen),⁸ and *Reformed Apologetics* (Fesko).⁹ But here is where things begin to widen a bit, such as *Cultural Apologetics* (Gould),¹⁰ *Covenantal Apologetics* (Oliphint),¹¹ *Expository*

⁴ John Frame, *Apologetics: A Justification of Christian Belief* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian & Reformed, 2015).

⁵ Douglas Groothuis, *Christian Apologetics* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2011).

⁶ Clifford B. McManis, *Biblical Apologetics: Advancing and Defending the Gospel of Christ* (Location Unknown: Xlibris, 2013).

⁷ R.C. Sproul, John Gerstner, and Art Lindsey, *Classical Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Academic, 1986).

⁸ Greg L. Bahnsen, *Presuppositional Apologetics: Stated and Defended*, Joel McDurmon (ed.), (Nacogdoches, TX: Covenant Media Press, 2011).

⁹ J.V. Fesko, *Reformed Apologetics: Retrieving the Classic Reformed Approach to Defending the Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2019).

¹⁰ Paul J. Gould, *Cultural Apologetics: Renewing the Christian Voice, Conscience, and Imagination in a Disenchanted World* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2019).

¹¹ K. Scott Oliphint, *Covenantal Apologetics: Principles & Practice in Defense of Our Faith* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

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Apologetics (Baucham),¹² and *Urban Apologetics* (Mason).¹³ From here we encounter titles ranging from the obscure to the catchy, and from cheeky to downright quizzical. These include the likes of *Mere Apologetics* (McGrath),¹⁴ *Persuasive Apologetics* (Robinson and Rainer),¹⁵ *Humble Apologetics* (Stackhouse),¹⁶ *Dialogical Apologetics* (Clark),¹⁷ *Unapologetic Apologetics* (Dembski and Richards),¹⁸ and *Mama Bear Apologetics* (Ferrer and Percy).¹⁹ In addition, Hindson and Caner’s *The Popular Encyclopedia of Apologetics* divides apologetics into fifteen different subtypes: biblical apologetics, biomedical apologetics, creation apologetics, cult apologetics, cultural apologetics, dispensational apologetics, ethical apologetics, global apologetics, historical apologetics, incarnational apologetics, philosophical apologetics, prophetic apologetics, reformed apologetics, and scientific apologetics.²⁰ Now, to be fair, I’m sure each of these works has something wonderful to contribute to the field of apologetics, and I actually own a number of the resources I just mentioned, but I am still left to wonder if an ever-increasing number of adjectives/adverbs to apologetics will, on the practical level, cause

¹² Voddie Baucham, Jr., *Expository Apologetics: Answering Objections with the Power of the Word* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2015).

¹³ Eric Mason, *Urban Apologetics: Restoring Black Dignity with the Gospel* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2021).

¹⁴ Alister McGrath, *Mere Apologetics: How to Help Seekers and Skeptics Find Faith* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012).

¹⁵ Jeffrey Robinson and Thom S. Rainer, *Persuasive Apologetics: The Art of Answering Tough Questions without Pushing People Away* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Academic, 2023).

¹⁶ John G. Stackhouse, Jr., *Humble Apologetics: Defending the Faith Today* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

¹⁷ David K. Clark, *Dialogical Apologetics: A Person-Centered Approach to Christian Defense* (Grand Rapids: Baker books, 1993).

¹⁸ William A. Dembski and Jay Wesley Richards, *Unapologetic Apologetics: Meeting the Challenges of Theological Studies* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001).

¹⁹ Hillary Morgan Ferrer and Nancy Percy, *Mama Bear Apologetics: Empowering Your Kids to Challenge Cultural Lies* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2019). See also Hillary Morgan Ferrer and Amy Davidson, *Mama Bear Apologetics Guide to Sexuality: Empowering Your Kids to Understand and Live out God’s Design* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2021).

²⁰ Ed Hindson and Ergun Caner, *The Popular Encyclopedia of Apologetics* (Eugene, OR: Harvest House, 2008), 28-64.

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apologetics to, as the saying goes, “die the death of a thousand qualifications.” I’m not convinced it will, but I must confess that I am honestly reticent to simply “slap” the term Pentecostal in front of apologetics . . . unless we have very good (biblically and theologically informed) reasons for doing so. Now to the challenge of defining apologetics. I have previously written about this in greater length, so I will only try to address this briefly here.²¹ When we survey how scholars have defined apologetics in their publications, we find definitions like the following:

- ◇ Christian apologetics is “that branch of Christian theology which seeks to provide a rational justification for the truth claims of the Christian faith.”²² (William Lane Craig)
- ◇ “Apologetics is the discipline that deals with a rational defense of Christian faith.”²³ (Norman Geisler)
- ◇ “Apologetics [is] the philosophical defense of the Christian faith.”²⁴ (Ronald Nash)
- ◇ “Christian apologetics is the rational defense of the Christian worldview as objectively true, rationally compelling and existentially or subjectively engaging.”²⁵ (Douglas Groothuis)
- ◇ “Apologetics is the vindication of the Christian philosophy of life against the various forms of the non-Christian philosophy of life.”²⁶ (Cornelius Van Til)
- ◇ “Christian apologetics is the application of biblical truth to unbelief.”²⁷ (K. Scott Oliphint)
- ◇ “Christian apologetics involves making a case for the truth of the Christian faith.”²⁸ (William Lane Craig)

²¹ Jeremy Wallace, “The Ministry of Defense: Reframing Apologetics through the Lens of Ministry” *Quadrum* vol. 5 (December 2022), 47-61. <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/646fb2e88345424bf4ed337b/t/64701c532c4055448283f89f/1685068885241/Quadrum8.pdf>

²² William Lane Craig, *Reasonable Faith: Christian Truth and Apologetics* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008), 15.

²³ Norman Geisler, *Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1998), 37.

²⁴ Ronald Nash, *Faith and Reason: Searching for a Rational Faith* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1988), 14.

²⁵ Groothuis, 24.

²⁶ Cornelius Van Til, *Christian Apologetics* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing), 1.

²⁷ Oliphint, 14.

²⁸ William Lane Craig, *On Guard: Defending Your Faith with Reason and Precision* (Colorado Springs call Lynn David cook, 2010), 13.

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- ◇ “Christian apologetics seeks to serve God and the church *by helping believers* to carry out the mandate of 1 Peter 3:15-16. We may define it as the discipline that *teaches Christians how to give a reason for their hope.*”²⁹ (John Frame)

We can glean a number of insights from this array of definitions we’ve just heard. According to these scholars, we may think of apologetics as entailing, at least in part, the epistemic content of the Christian faith; that is, the sum of propositional truths which arise from sacred Scripture. We want to affirm whatever God affirms. In my previously mentioned article, I refer to this simply as the “material” within an *apologia*. Secondly, as we can see in John Frame's definition (and in Craig's alternative definition), apologetics may be properly (and appropriately) understood not only in terms of being a noun (*apologia*), but also as a verb (*apologeomai*); that is, an *apologia* proceeds from an agent who is engaged in the praxis of *apologeontos* (“giving a defense;” participle of *apologeomai*). This act of defense-making, I have argued, may be thought of as a kind of practical theology, and it will, in terms of communicating one’s faith, naturally shift alternately from evangelism to apologetics and vice-versa. Evangelism and apologetics are, in this respect, two sides of the Gospel-Communication coin. Minimally, then, apologetics is both content-laden, but also an act of defense-making (or *apologia-giving*). Finally, we should turn to the matter of what is frequently called “meta-apologetics” and how it relates to this discussion.

James K. Beilby has defined it in the following way:

Meta-apologetics is a second-ordered discipline. In other words, it is a discipline that analyzes another discipline. One engaged in meta-apologetics is interested in asking what apologetics is, how it should be done and what makes it effective . . . The value of meta-apologetics should be obvious. It is difficult to do apologetics well if you don't understand the task itself or if you have not thought through the various questions embedded within the task. Consequently, even though *meta-apologetics does not directly defend and commend the Christian faith*, it supports apologists who do so.³⁰

²⁹ John Frame, *Apologetics to the Glory of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1994), 1. Emphasis here is mine.

³⁰ James K. Beilby, *Thinking About Christian Apologetics: What It Is and Why We Do It* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity press, 2011), 31. Emphasis added.

Kenneth D. Boa and Robert M. Bowman, Jr., define meta-apologetics as “the study of the nature and methods of apologetics.” They elaborate, observing that “While apologetics studies the defense of the faith, metapologetic [sic.] studies the theoretical issues underlying the defense of the faith. It is evident, then, that metapologetics is a branch of apologetics; it focuses on the principal, fundamental questions that must be answered properly if the practice of apologetics is to be securely grounded in truth.”³¹ The present constraints of this paper do not allow me to address the matter of various taxonomies and systems of the apologetics proffered by scholars over the past sixty years. Regardless, one might want to contend at this point that we have grounds for a kind of tri-perspectivalism (perhaps better put, a “multi-perspectivalism”) with respect to what is involved in apologetics. After all, “God has created us as people who learn [and act] through multi-perspectival experience.”³² For now, let us grant that three key “perspectives” inform the apologetical enterprise: (1) **Content** (contained within the *apologia*); (2) **Praxis** (i.e., the act of defense-making itself); and (3) **Method** (related to meta-apologetics). The consideration of this three-fold dynamic will be important in the attempt to craft a “Pentecostal Apologetic.” Clearly there is a multivalence to apologetics that should not be dismissed and ignored.

³¹ Kenneth D. Boa and Robert M. Bowman, Jr., *Faith Has Its Reasons: Integrative Approaches to Defending the Christian Faith* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2005), 4. Later in their work they contend that six meta-apologetical questions need to be addressed: (1) On what basis do we argue that Christianity is the truth?; (2) What is the relationship between apologetics and theology?; (3) Should apologetics engage in a philosophical defense of the Christian faith?; (4) Can science be used to defend the Christian faith?; (5) Can the Christian faith be supported by historical inquiry?; and (6) How is our knowledge of Christian truth related to our experience? (39-42).

³² John M. Frame, “A Primer on Perspectivalism,” May 14, 2008, <https://frame-poythress.org/a-primer-on-perspectivalism/>. Accessed March 13, 2024. See also, John M. Frame, *The Doctrine of the Knowledge of God* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987), 45-6, 73-75, 89-90, 162-163, 2:15, 2:35, 250-51; Vern S. Poythress, *Symphonic Theology: The Validity of Multiple Perspectives in Theology* (Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1987); Vern S. Poythress, *Redeeming Philosophy: A God-Centered Approach to the Big Questions* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2014), 62-104. Poythress stresses that “the diversity of human beings leads to a diversity in perspectives.” *Redeeming Philosophy*, 63.

Tentative Definitions

Before I explore the tenability of a Pentecostal apologetic, I would like to temper, if not resolve, the definitional challenge and at least provide some working definitions for “Pentecostal” and “apologetics.” I agree with Craig Keener when he says that “all Christian experience in this era must be properly “Pentecostal”—that is, shaped by the experience of Pentecost, the outpouring of the Spirit on the church.”³³ Whatever it means to be “Pentecostal,” it must be linked to this watershed moment. I also affirm what John Thomas Nichol says: “The manifestations of speaking in tongues together with other charismatic gifts, and the practice of divine healing are . . . distinctive characteristics of Pentecostalism.” I also find James K.A. Smith’s depiction of a Pentecostal worldview to be both intriguing and judicious. In *Thinking in Tongues*, he writes, “I suggest we can identify five key elements of a distinctively Pentecostal worldview: (1) a position of radical openness to God, and in particular, God doing something differently or new; (2) an “enchanted” theology of creation and culture; (3) a non-dualistic affirmation of embodiment and materiality; (4) an affective, narrative epistemology; and (5) an eschatological orientation to mission and justice.”³⁴ Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen is right to ground Pentecostalism’s *spirituality* to its *identity*: “Let me operate with the concept that I think most theological observers of Pentecostalism would endorse, namely its distinctive, Christ-centered charismatic spirituality going back to the classical full gospel template in which Jesus is perceived as savior, sanctifier, healer, baptizer with the spirit, and the soon-returning king. Spirituality, thus, is the key to ‘defining’ Pentecostal identity.”³⁵ Finally, I think what Nimi

³³ Timothy Laurito, *Pentecostal Perspectives: A Guide for Faith and Practice* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2023), 1.

³⁴ James K.A. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2010), 32-33.

³⁵ Kärkkäinen, xvii.

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Wariboko has argued is also vital: “. . . Pentecostalism is driven by the search for truth.

Pentecostal spirituality (and its practices and reflections) is the fabric into which their knowledges [sic.], experiences, fears, and hopes are woven, and it is, at least in relation to their being-in-the-world, the condition and context of philosophizing or theologizing.”³⁶

Considering these helpful descriptions and insights, for the sake of this paper I shall use the word “Pentecostal” to refer to “that phenomenological reality in the present which is rooted in the Spirit’s outpouring at Pentecost for the purpose of Spirit-empowered witness and worship received in Spirit-baptism and manifested, at least in part, through the *charismata*.” Regarding apologetics, I will simply define it as “the act of providing an *apologia* (reply, answer, defense, or line of reasoning) within a particular methodology.” Now to the task of piecing together a tentative “Pentecostal apologetic.”

THE TENABILITY OF A PENTECOSTAL APOLOGETIC

Now that I’ve provided some working definitions, it seems to me that there are in fact some good reasons to think that a certain kind of Pentecostal apologetic is tenable. I should, at least for the sake of clarity, point out what I do *not* consider to be a *bona fide* Pentecostal apologetic. A distinctively Pentecostal apologetic is not (1) an apologetic for Pentecostalism, and (2) referring to a Pentecostal simply doing apologetics. Whatever a Pentecostal apologetic is, at least as I’m qualifying it here, it must be a kind of Spirit-empowered defense-making that is unique in that we can differentiate it from ordinary or natural apologetics, and justifiably so. All Christians are called to give reasons for their faith (1 Peter 3:15-16). The critical factor which must differentiate general apologetics from Pentecostal apologetics must be that which is

³⁶ Nimi Wariboko, *Pentecostal Hypothesis: Christ Talks, They Decide* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2020), 13.

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uniquely attributable to a Pentecostal spirituality and praxis. For the sake of time, I will focus on three situations where Pentecostal distinctives could reasonably occur in the act of defense-making: (1) Discerning of Spirits, (2) Words of Knowledge, and (3) Healing. These are, of course, three of the spiritual gifts (*charismata*) listed in 1 Cor. 12:4-11. Howard M. Ervin once pointed out that “these charisms are supernatural manifestations of the Holy Spirit. They are not natural talents. They are supernatural inasmuch as the operation of any and all of them is contingent on the divine initiative.”³⁷ It is not difficult to imagine, for me at least, that in the act of giving an apologetic, certain “manifestations of the Spirit” (such as the three I highlighted) could empower the Spirit-filled apologist in a distinctively Pentecostal manner. Let’s consider each of these in turn.

Discernment (“Discerning of Spirits”)

Andrew Corbett argues that “Pentecostal Apologists place a high degree of currency in spiritual discernment.”³⁸ Growing up, I heard more than once the expression, “don’t dance with the devil.” This expression has come to mind several times in personal engagements in evangelism and occasionally in apologetic discussions. It is true that some people simply like to argue, but it’s also true that some people can be “on assignment” from the enemy, either willingly or unknowingly. There are plenty of circumstances when demonic forces and evil spirits may be present, even in an apologetical context. On “discerning of spirits,” L. Thomas Holdcroft writes,

The Holy Spirit manifests the gift of discernment of spirits to enable the believer to form judgments and recognize identities in the realm of spirits. The term *discerning* (lit., discernings) in the original connotes a judgment made possible by an insight that sees

³⁷ Howard M. Ervin, *Spirit Baptism: A Biblical Investigation* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), 101.

³⁸ Andre Corbett, “Pentecostal Apologetics: Defending the Gospel with Power,” November 3, 2010. <https://www.findingtruthmatters.org/articles/apologetics/pentecostal-apologetics-defending-the-gospel-with-power/> Accessed March 12, 2024.

through externals and perceives basic underlying reality . . . By means of this gift, human natural senses are supplemented by appropriate divine powers, so that humans are able to relate in understanding in the spirit world. The gift of discerning of spirits does not enable one to discern people; it is not “discernment” in the abstract, but simply what it purports to be: the discerning or analytic classification and judgment of spirits.³⁹

I’d like us to notice what Holdcroft pointed out when he said, “natural senses are supplemented by appropriate divine powers, so that humans are able to relate in understanding in the spirit world.” This situation appears to be fully relevant to an apologetic context. J. Rodman Williams points out that the word often translated as “discerning” is in the plural and may alternatively be translated “distinguishings.” He elaborates on the potential significance of this,

The word “distinguishings” may also be translated as “discernings” and refers to a “judging through,” a piercing through what is outward to the inner reality. Since “distinguishings” is in the plural, more than one discerning in a given situation is implied. The individual to whom the gift is imparted will be enabled to accomplish more than one distinguishing or discerning. This discerning is not just discerning in general but relates to “spirits.” “Spirits,” in turn, may refer to a wide range of the human, the demonic, even the angelic . . . Hence, discerning of spirits can well relate to a whole range of spirits possibly operating in a given situation.⁴⁰

The implications of this multiple-discernings is illuminative. In the act of giving an apologetic one-on-one with someone, the Holy Spirit can give the Pentecostal apologist immediate knowledge of the status of reality in that situation, perhaps discernment concerning the condition of that person’s spirit, the presence of evil spirits, and perhaps more. According to Dennis and Rita Bennett, “By the gift of discerning of spirits the believer is enabled to know immediately what is motivating a person or situation . . . The gift of discerning of spirits immediately reveals what is taking place.”⁴¹ If this is true, what a gift this would be in the act of defense-making!

³⁹ L. Thomas Holdcroft, *The Holy Spirit: A Pentecostal Interpretation* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1992), 150.

⁴⁰ J. Rodman Williams, *Renewal Theology: Systematic Theology from the Charismatic Perspective*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 388-389.

⁴¹ Dennis and Rita Bennett, *The Holy Spirit and You: A Study-Guide to the Spirit-Filled Life* (Plainfield, NJ: Logos International, 1971), 143.

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Imagine how this might redirect the course of the presentation or dialogue. It seems quite reasonable to conclude that this dynamic occurrence within an apologetic is *extraordinary*, yet one which makes perfect sense within a Pentecostal ethos. Why wouldn’t we expect the Holy Spirit to manifest in such a profound way?

Word of Knowledge

Let us now turn to the charism called “word of knowledge.” To begin, “a word of knowledge is distinctly different than just mere knowledge.”⁴² Apart from natural knowledge, it “involves receiving information from God about a person or a situation that could not have been known by any natural means.”⁴³ According to Donald Gee, when someone receives a word of knowledge he/she receives “flashes of insight into truth that penetrated beyond the operation of . . . unaided intellect.”⁴⁴ The way Stanley Horton defines it, a “word of knowledge is the supernatural revelation by the Holy Spirit of certain facts in the mind of God.”⁴⁵ In David Lim’s assessment, “[t]he gift may include such things as God’s sharing of his secrets, as when he revealed to the Old Testament prophets a time of rain, an enemy’s plans, or secret sins of kings and servants. It may also include Peter’s knowledge of Ananias and Sapphira’s deception and Paul’s declaration of a judgement of blindness upon Elymus.”⁴⁶ If these descriptions of a word of knowledge are accurate, we can understand it generally as a dynamic action of the Holy Spirit

⁴² Jeremy Wallace, *Serving God and Man: An Introduction to Christian Ministry* (Canby, OR: Canby Bible College, 2007), 121.

⁴³ Al Carpenter, *Belonging to Christ* (Portland, OR: Premier Press, 2005), 54. In Holdcroft’s words, “The gift of the word of knowledge is concerned with the immediate awareness of facts without the aid of the senses. It constitutes a sharing of a fragment of God’s omniscience, so the God makes known to humans something he knows but they do not.” Holdcroft, 148.

⁴⁴ Donald Gee, *Spiritual Gifts in the Work of the Ministry Today* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1963), 29, Cited in Stanley M. Horton, *Systematic Theology* (Springfield, MO: Logion Press, 2013), 466.

⁴⁵ Stanley M. Horton, *What the Bible Says about the Holy Spirit* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1976), 209, as cited in Holdcroft, 148.

⁴⁶ David Lim, “Spiritual Gifts,” in Horton, *Systematic Theology*, 466.

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revealing to a person directly a knowledge of a certain sort for a certain reason. I can think of a number of ways in which this charism could not only occur within apologetic discourse but greatly enhance it. Perhaps you can relate, for there are many times when we find ourselves in a conversation when we come to find out later that the conversation wasn't *entirely* about what we was discussed, but only partially about it. Underlying motives and concerns may have been lurking amidst the conversation but only subversively and in obscurity. Imagine having an apologetic dialogue with someone and the Holy Spirit immediately reveals to you the tragedy that happened in the life of this unbeliever which is the primary source of rejection of Christ and Christianity. It doesn't take much imagination to see how empowering this could be in redirecting the conversation toward the cause (i.e., the root) of opposition to Christ instead of fruitlessly quibbling about the symptoms of the problem. I've seen a word of knowledge in action on a number of occasions and some sort of healing following immediately afterwards.

Healing

Divine healing has been a normative part of the Pentecostal experience. Some of the earliest apologies for Pentecostalism in the early twentieth century placed great stress on divine healing as a type of evidence for God's existence and his love for humanity. As Alan Anderson has put it, “[prayer for divine healing] is perhaps the most universal characteristic of the many varieties of Pentecostalism and perhaps the main reason for its growth in the developing world.”⁴⁷ Although it is possible to argue against healing (curiously, many do), many people are directly impacted by it on a personal (pre-theoretical) level. Margaret Poloma sheds light on the important connection with healing in the Pentecostal world pointing out that, “although

⁴⁷ Alan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 30, quoted in by Margaret M. Poloma, “Divine Healing, Religious Revivals, and Contemporary Pentecostalism: A North American Perspective,” in Kärkkäinen, 27.

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doctrinally speaking, some Pentecostals have made speaking in tongues (*glossolalia*) its main distinctive, it is *healing* that increasingly has assumed a central role in the Pentecostal alternative worldview.”⁴⁸ Paloma rightly emphasizes that healing is more than merely physical: “Although the vertical relationship with the divine remains pivotal, relationships with others as well as self-acceptance are also seen to impact health and wellness. Thus, perhaps the most significant form of healing to enter the Pentecostal model of healing is what has been called ‘inner’ or ‘emotional healing,’ a practice that reflects the influence of twentieth-century psychology reflected in popular culture.”⁴⁹ In light of all of this, I can envision a scenario in which the Holy Spirit manifests in power by bringing healing — physical healing or “inner” healing — to an unbeliever (or a struggling believer) in an apologetic context (either via a public presentation or in a private conversation). I have, in fact, experienced something like this after a public debate hosted at our church. One of the audience members came up after the presentation and described a kind of release or a “lifting of bondage” that she sensed was now gone. It is not uncommon to describe spiritual healing as not only valid but an ultimate form of healing. Since apologetics can be used evangelistically, and evangelism apologetically, we should not be surprised if the regenerating work of the Spirit occurs uniquely through a Pentecostal apologetic. We would do well to remember, in the words of Geisler and Zukeran, that “No one is ever convinced of the truth of Christianity apart from the ministry of the Holy Spirit.”⁵⁰

⁴⁸ Paloma, “Divine Healing,” 27.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁵⁰ Norman Geisler and Patrick Zukeran, *The Apologetics of Jesus: A Caring Approach to Dealing with Doubters* (Grand Rapids: Baker books, 2009), 168. Geisler and Zukeran provide a helpful overview of the role of the Holy Spirit’s work in apologetics according to Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin and Jonathan Edwards: (1) The Holy Spirit plays a necessary role in the origin of a revelation that is superior to general revelation in nature, namely, a special revelation in Scripture; (2) The Holy Spirit is needed for understanding the spiritual implications of revealed; (3) The Holy Spirit is necessary for full assurance of the truths of Christianity; (4) The Holy Spirit alone prompts individuals to believe in God’s saving truth; (5) The Holy Spirit works in and through evidence but not separate from it; (6) As the spirit of a rational God, he never bypasses the head (reason) in order to reach the heart; (7) The Spirit of God provides supernatural evidence (miracles) in confirmation of Christianity.” Geisler and Zukeran, 183.

Conclusion

In this paper I’ve attempted to make a *tentative* case for the plausibility of a truly Pentecostal apologetic, after addressing the substantial definitional challenge associated with the terms Pentecostal and apologetic. After providing some working definitions of each, I made the case that the *charismata* provide a Pentecostal access to manifestations of the Holy Spirit (as the Spirit so chooses) in which a normative, natural apologetic, has great potential to become a Spirit-empowered Pentecostal apologetic. When a person is baptized in the Spirit, he/she is given an added dimension of relationship with the Spirit, and as such, has the access and capability of providing an apologetic in which the dynamisms of the Spirit may emerge. Although I only singled out three spiritual gifts as potentially able to enhance the act of defense-making, there is much to be explored with respect to the other spiritual gifts and additional practices via pneumatic phenomena such as exorcism, miracles, the “word of wisdom,” and power encounters within an apologetic context. I certainly have not set forth a robust and comprehensive case for Pentecostal apologetics. I would never claim to have done so. What I have set forth is a very modest, humble, preliminary sketch related to my quest for a distinctively Pentecostal apologetic. I resonate with the words of Timothy Laurito, that, “Driven by the Spirit, Pentecostals have always been a missionary-focused group of people. From their intense focus on the Spirit came an unquenchable passion for evangelizing the lost.”⁵¹ There is great promise for more fruitful study on the potential for a distinctively Pentecostal apologetic. In conclusion, I shall end with the words of Andre Corbett. He contends that,

[The Pentecostal apologist has] learned to incorporate a divinely supernatural dimension to their presentation. This begins in their own soul where [we] experience an empowering from the Holy Spirit subsequent to [our] conversion. It continues as [we] learn to discern the Holy Spirit’s leading. It is developed as [we] walk in faith by praying for the sick and

⁵¹ Laurito, 53.

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speaking words of knowledge. And it is undergirded as [we] pray in the Spirit for the God of Miracles to reveal Himself in supernatural ways to those who do not yet know Christ.⁵²

⁵² Corbett, “Pentecostal Apologetics.”

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