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Counselling in the Spirit: The Outworking of a Pneumatological Hermeneutic in the Praxis of Pentecostal Therapists

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This article explores pentecostal spirituality and its formative influence upon the therapeutic praxis of pentecostal therapists. Central to pentecostal spirituality is a posture of openness and receptivity to the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in creation. For the pentecostal therapist, this posture informs the therapeutic encounter. In dialogue with selected pentecostal interlocutors, the author explores the phenomenological accounts of a number of self-identified Pentecostal and charismatic licensed mental health professionals concerning their experiences of the Holy Spirit in their provision of therapy. These accounts speak to the ways in which the clinicians' pentecostal spirituality has formed in them a particular manner of interpreting and being-in-the-world; a pneumatological hermeneutic that becomes outworked in their clinical praxis. In reflection upon these accounts, practical and theological implications are offered for pentecostal counsellors, and others concerned with practical theologies of care and counselling.

KEYWORDS pentecostal, Holy Spirit, counselling, pneumatology, phenomenology

Introduction

As I pursued my graduate work in clinical mental health counselling at a seminary in the United States, I was invited by my professors to consider the ways in which my faith and theology might impact my approach to, and provision of, psychotherapy. It was an introduction to exploring the relationship between psychology and theology, and I had not yet realized the bearing that my spiritual formation would have on

my clinical practice, as one who had been distinctly formed (and was perpetually being re-formed) through pentecostal worship and its practices. Through this continued formation, I had come to assume a posture of openness and receptivity to the Holy Spirit, understanding the Spirit to be immanently present and at work in the world; not only in designated places of worship, but in all creation, to include the therapy session. As such, my pentecostal spirituality and formation have shaped the very way that I *do* therapy and understand myself as a counsellor, my clients and the process and goals of therapy. Central to this have been my own experiences of the Holy Spirit that continue to be a defining locus around which my pentecostal spirituality and identity revolve. Understanding the significance of this and its practical outworking is where my doctoral research interests now lie, for myself and for fellow therapists who share a pentecostal worldview and spirituality.

There have been a number of studies written on the relationship of the Holy Spirit to the counselling process, psychological development, psychotherapy as a discipline, etc. (e.g. see Coe, 1999; Coe and Hall, 2010; Decker, 2002; Dodds, 1999; Ingram, 1996; Kim-van Daalen, 2012; Kunst and Tan, 1996; Olthuis, 1999; Parker, 1999, 2008; Tan, 1999a, 1999b, 2011). Additionally, contributions have been made from clinicians exploring distinctly pentecostal perspectives on the Holy Spirit and psychotherapy, theological–psychological integration, and other aspects of psychological research (e.g. see Decker, 2009; Gilbert and Brock, 1985, 1988; Parker, 2014, 2016; Serrano, 2003; Sutton, 2010; Sutton and Middelstadt, 2012; Sutton *et al.*, 2014; Vining, 1995a, 1995b, 1997; Vining and Decker, 1996). Despite this literature, the precise role of the Holy Spirit in the counselling process is an aspect of Christian counselling that requires further development, *particularly as understood from lived experience*. While in many areas of the field it has become customary to facilitate a dialogue between psychology and Christian doctrine or scripture concerning the Holy Spirit, the literature lacks thorough attention on the lived accounts of clinicians who experience the Spirit in their provision of therapy. As such, I have undertaken my current research in an effort to help fill this existing lacuna. Operating from a distinctly pentecostal perspective, and drawing upon the phenomenological accounts of ten pentecostal mental health professionals whom I have interviewed as part of my ongoing research, I am seeking to understand the particular ways in which these clinicians experience the Holy Spirit in therapy, and how those experiences shape them and their provision of mental health care.

In this article, I will engage with the works of selected pentecostal scholars who have written in the areas of pentecostal theology, formation, and caregiving and place them in dialogue with the lived accounts of several of my participants. I will then discuss the ways in which pentecostal therapists might be understood to take up and engage in their clinical work through a distinct pneumatological hermeneutic that is embodied and largely practised before it is articulated (see Smith, 2010). Finally, I will suggest that these clinicians' experiences of the Spirit in counselling, phenomenologically described, offer insights that both enhance and expound upon the current literature on the Holy Spirit in the counselling process; serving as an impetus for further research in this important area.

Pentecostal spirituality and a pneumatological hermeneutic

For the purposes of this article, I will continue to refer to Pentecostals and charismatics collectively as *pentecostals*, to include those within historical Pentecostal denominations, as well as charismatics and neopentecostals who are in non-Pentecostal church contexts (Lee *et al.*, 2013). I am therefore using the term ‘pentecostal’ not in a denominational sense, but rather to speak of ‘an understanding of Christian faith that is radically open to the continued operations of the Spirit’ (Smith, 2010: xvii). Drawing upon the work of Land (1993), Smith (2010) states that ‘what defines pentecostalism—and what is shared across the range of Pentecostal and charismatic traditions—is a spirituality’ (26). Land (1993) defines this spirituality as ‘the integration of beliefs and practices in the affections which are themselves evoked and expressed by those beliefs and practices’ (13). Pentecostal spirituality is, thus understood, as a passionate, affective, and particularly embodied practice of Christianity that is marked by a ‘radical openness’ to the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. The practices that constitute this spirituality hold within them a ‘latent knowledge’ and a ‘tacit understanding’ that yield an affective interpretation of the world. This emotional knowing certainly provides a basis for intellectual knowledge, but it is not reducible to such. It is a social imagination that not only takes practice, but *is* itself practice, and as such, the practices of a pentecostal spirituality are the grounds from which pentecostal beliefs arise. Hence, the faith is largely performed before it is articulated (Smith, 2010).

Unified in story and charismatic experiences

According to Archer (2009) ‘The Pentecostal community or a collection of communities is bound together by their “shared charismatic experiences” and “shared story”’ (133). They are part of the larger Christian community but yet distinct as a restorationist, narrative tradition. They envisage themselves as being a continuation of New Testament Christianity, and they desire to faithfully represent that Christianity within the contemporary contexts in which they exist. Therefore, as Lee *et al.* (2013) suggest, pentecostalism is less about an organized religion with particular doctrines, specified practices and denominational loyalties, and is more so a distinct worldview that supersedes the sensate world of the five senses, accessing the ‘world of the spirit where conversations with God, experiencing miracles, and seeing angels are normative’ (34). Pentecostals live therefore out of an ‘as if’ subjunctive mood, in contrast to an ‘as is’ indicative mood of everyday reality, and pentecostalism is perhaps the approach of Christianity best suited to create and maintain this ‘world of possibilities’ being that it is:

... a curious blend of pre-modern miracles, modern technology, and postmodern mysticism in which the natural world is mixed with the supernatural. Signs and wonders analogous to those described in premodern biblical accounts of dreams and visions; prophetic proclamations; miraculous, divine provisions; and other ways of knowing beyond the five senses are expected as normal events in the lives of believers. (Lee *et al.*, 2013: 45)

Spirit baptism and a transformed consciousness

A central aspect of pentecostal spirituality, and one that is particularly pertinent for our purposes here, is the realization of a transformed consciousness and ‘vision’ that results from Spirit baptism. Bridges Johns (1998) states, ‘For Pentecostals, Spirit baptism is the unveiling of a new reality and the realization of an altered consciousness’ (95). And as Cox (1995) wrote of the early Pentecostals’ accounts of Spirit baptism: ‘... the baptism of the Spirit did not just change their religious affiliation or their way of worship. It changed everything. They literally saw the whole world in a new light’ (70). This altered ‘vision’ or way of perceiving the world is what Smith (2010) refers to as ‘*thinking in tongues*’ (25), speaking to the reality that pentecostal spirituality not only involves a distinct form of worship (to include, of course, *speaking* in tongues), but it yields a distinct way of perceiving the world that is embodied and enacted in practices. In the words of Lee *et al.* (2013),

The heartbeat of the pentecostal worldview is *relational encounters* with God through which pentecostals often feel they are being empowered through the Holy Spirit. These experiences are regarded as normative, and they shift the way in which individuals (with support from their pentecostal communities) interpret their transrational world. (emphasis added: 46–47)

The Spirit’s role in pentecostal hermeneutics

In a pentecostal perspective, the Holy Spirit is seen to create and sustain the dialectical dynamics and ongoing iterations between contemporary experience and the biblical record, as it is the ‘presence of the Holy Spirit who actualizes the written word into life and who makes real the presence of the living word’ (Bridges Johns, 1998: 85). *The Holy Spirit then is the One in whom the pentecostal Christian and his/her community engage in the hermeneutical task.* This is a significant point, particularly for those (like myself) who seek to reflect on specific situations in pentecostal praxis within a practical theological framework. The Holy Spirit is understood to guide and direct the hermeneutical process, as it is the Spirit who helps the community to understand the gifts they have been given by God; gifts that are not understood through human wisdom but are taught by the Spirit who interprets spiritual things for those who are spiritual (1 Cor. 2:12–13). Such a perspective contrasts starkly with hermeneutical approaches that understand the Holy Spirit as being only doctrinally relevant to practical and theological reflection. To conceive of the Holy Spirit as creating and sustaining the hermeneutical process, being immanently present in it, and actively interpreting the scriptures in our contemporary moments is another matter altogether.

In personal reflection, Poloma (2010) articulates such a hermeneutic, writing of the ‘dialectical dance’ that has characterized her experience of being a pentecostal working in the discipline of sociology. Her words poignantly capture the role of the Holy Spirit as the One who marshalls (or in her description, choreographs) her dialectical movements between her profession and identity as a sociologist and her experience and identity as a pentecostal Christian. She describes it as:

[T]he ongoing dance between the ‘me’ that is a trained professional sociologist of religion and the ‘me’ that is a pentecostal (Charismatic/Spirit-filled) Christian who continues to

experience the power of the Spirit to shape and guide her life. The creative dance is not simply an exchange that sometimes occurs between Christian doctrine and sociological theories framed within the context of modernism but between the human spirit and the experiences of the divine. For me it has been a creative postmodern dance choreographed by the Holy Spirit, who has led and guided my personal life as well as my sociological career. (182)

Her continued encounters with the person of the Spirit have formed the heartbeat of her hermeneutic. Such an account aligns well with Cartledge's (2003) model of 'dialectics in the Spirit' in which the charismatic practitioner engages in practical and theological reflection as informed by his/her charismatic spirituality and the following questions: 'What is the Holy Spirit doing in this context? How does this activity relate to the work of the Holy Spirit as revealed in Scripture? [and] What is the Spirit saying to the church? (Revelation 2:11)' (30).

These conceptualizations speak to a pneumatological hermeneutic that proceeds out of a relationship with God, whom we corporately and individually encounter through the Spirit and live in response to in our contemporary moments (see also Bridges Johns, 1998). Hence, the Spirit is understood to be present, active, and involved in the situations we reflect upon, speaking to us, and empowering us to interpret rightly and to act faithfully. This bears similarity to the works of evangelical theologian Anderson (2001) and reformed theologian Root (2014), who affirm the continuing ministry of Christ in the power and presence of the Holy Spirit — *Christopraxis* — as the starting point for all practical-theological reflection. As Anderson (2001) explains:

Theological reflection does not ask the question 'What would Jesus do in this situation?' because this question would imply his absence. Rather, it asks the question 'Where is Jesus in this situation and what am I to do as a minister?' [...] we must remember that Jesus is not only the 'author' of Scripture through the power of the Spirit, but he himself is a 'reader' and interpreter of Scripture in every contemporary moment. (56)

Root (2014) likewise emphasizes that the presence that is encountered and experienced 'is personal, is a person, and therefore is experienced in *action*, in *praxis*' (92).

A pneumatological hermeneutic and the lived experience of pentecostal counsellors

I turn now to consider how a pentecostal worldview, as discussed up to this point, might be outworked in the therapeutic work of pentecostal counsellors. It must first be noted that because the pentecostal's transformed consciousness (pneumatological hermeneutic) proceeds out of continued encounters and relationship with the Holy Spirit, it cannot be realized by merely affixing a pneumatology to an existing methodology (e.g. flatly applying a pneumatology to a psychotherapeutic approach/methodology). Rather, I suggest that the counselling methodology is taken up and utilized within a tacit, yet dynamic pneumatological construal. Or, perhaps more appropriately stated, within one's dynamic relationship with the Holy Spirit in whom the methodology is then informed and directed. Let us consider the lived

accounts of some of my research participants in order that this might be more fully articulated.

Two suggested outworkings of a pneumatological hermeneutic

From my in-depth phenomenological interviews with ten self-identified pentecostal mental health professionals in the United States (including Licensed Professional Counsellors, Licensed Clinical Social Workers, and a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist), I would like to suggest that their shared pneumatological hermeneutic is outworked in at least two specific ways in lived experience, as pertains to their work as counsellors: (1) In how they envisage the Holy Spirit in relation to their therapeutic work (in a broader, worldview sense); (2) In how they experience the Holy Spirit in sessions as the One who collaborates in the provision of therapy (in a specified, practical sense); particularly through Spirit ‘promptings’ that enable the counsellor to perceive, interpret, and respond to the counsellee’s needs in ways that the clinician feels enhance or exceed his/her natural capabilities (also referred to as empowerment; see Decker, 1996).

Articulating a pentecostal worldview

When I asked one of my research participants to share about what interested him in participating in the study, he replied: ‘... To me it sounded like what you’re looking into is trying to figure out how the Holy Spirit informs our practice, how he assists us in bringing healing to hurting people, and that’s something that I try to do in my work every day. So, your study of that is interesting for sure’. Even in this brief statement, this participant (whom I will call Brandon) articulated his pneumatological hermeneutic, in which he understands the Holy Spirit as informing and assisting his praxis as a therapist. Additionally, he expressed a belief that the Spirit does so in order to bring healing to hurting people. His statement resonates with several assumptions of a pentecostal spirituality, as presented by Smith (2010): *a radical openness to God; an enchanted theology of creation and culture; and an eschatological orientation to mission and justice* (12). The assumption of an enchanted world is particularly pertinent when reflecting on Brandon’s statement, as it speaks to the physical layer of creation (nature) and the made layer of creation (culture) as being ‘charged’ or ‘enchanted’ with the presence of the Spirit of God (Smith, 2010). In such a perspective, there is no sense of limitations or boundaries to where, when, and to whom the Holy Spirit may minister; hence the reason Brandon appears to tacitly assume that the Holy Spirit would, in fact, be quite present and actively involved in what he is doing therapeutically. Smith’s (2010) point is helpful here:

[W]e might say that nature is always already suspended in and inhabited by the Spirit such that it is always already primed for the Spirit’s manifestations. Pentecostal spirituality and practice don’t merely expect that God could ‘interrupt’ the so-called ‘order’ of nature; rather, they assume that the Spirit is always already at work in creation, animating (and reanimating) bodies, grabbing hold of vocal cords, taking up aspects of creation to manifest the glory of God. (101)

Another participant, whom I will call Clark, also provided a rich description to this effect, as he articulated his worldview that is steeped in an awareness of, and looking to, the Holy Spirit for guidance and assistance in all areas of his life:

I was born again at an early age when I received what I would consider the infilling of the Spirit. It wasn't then that the Spirit was a *compartment*, if you will, and I had my life, I had my work, I had my family, I had this, and I had that, and then I had a church life and I was filled with the Spirit. [Rather,] I saw that as really a thread that ran through *everything*, and in that regard, then, if you think in terms of the Holy Spirit as a leader, as a guide, as a help, as a comforter, as a director, and look to the Holy Spirit to *guide* you, then that guidance, based on how it's been for me, has not been relegated to a specific area of my life; rather, how that becomes intertwined in *every* area of my life, and in *every* area of my life would include my vocational life [...] If I view the Holy Spirit in my life from that perspective, then I'm looking *to* the Holy Spirit, specifically, as relates to every area of my life, but particularly, my work life [...] so I'm looking to not just what my education would lend itself to helping me to be effective as a clinician slash pastoral counsellor, if you will. It lends itself to that and my education, certainly does my experience lend itself because I've had experience with that education, but the Holy Spirit, that's an integral part of my life then I look to that to help me ... know how to ... when, how, how much, how little, how often, where to pull from my education and the experience in order to meet the needs of the client or the parishioner.

Clark's response is not dissimilar to Poloma's (2010) earlier account of her experience of the Holy Spirit, as his language also emphasizes a deep reliance on and *looking to* the Holy Spirit to direct or 'choreograph' the dialectical movements and dynamics in his work as a clinician. And like Brandon, Clark's response indicates an inextricable intertwining between his pentecostal worldview and praxis, in which the Holy Spirit is understood to be 'the thread' that runs through everything as the Spirit is the 'leader, guide, help, comforter, director' in all areas of his life, to include of course the clinical-professional. Such a statement urges us to consider how this worldview is outworked practically in the lives of pentecostal clinicians as they *do* therapy.

Articulating lived experiences of the Spirit's collaboration

As Lee *et al.* (2013) explain, pentecostals not only believe in the Holy Spirit doctrinally, but experience the Spirit 'as an active collaborator in daily life' (35). Many participants articulated this from personal experience, describing the Holy Spirit as actively assisting them in the provision of therapy. I asked Grace to share with me about how she has perceived the work of the Holy Spirit in her clinical work, and she described her experience of being in sessions with clients actively engaging in therapy, yet internally looking to the Holy Spirit for specific insight and guidance:

I think that most commonly what happens is that as the client is talking, first I get a sense of 'I wonder if this thing is going on?' And then as they're talking, it's kind of like formulating that question, but before asking that question, honestly, I will ask the Holy Spirit, 'Okay, do I ask that question now? Or do I wait a little bit?' Cause timing is important too, and it's interesting because sometimes it will be like I'll have this question and

I'll have this, 'Okay, we need to explore this' but especially with newer clients, I'll get a sense of, 'But first we need to ... let's continue down this line of thinking first, and then bring that up later in session.' Sometimes, honestly, it will even be like, 'This isn't for today. This is for another session' which is kind of cool too. [...] I don't remember exactly when it was, but at some point, I remember thinking in a session, 'Okay, is this for now, or for later?' you know? And really relying on the Holy Spirit to kind of reveal to me in that split second, to hold on to it, or to share that, or to ask, you know ... explore that area.

In Grace's words, there is a distinctly felt sense in which she perceives herself to be collaborating with the Holy Spirit in her sessions with clients, and it is accomplished through attuning to the Spirit and moving on the promptings that she perceives herself to have received from the Spirit. Parker (2015) defines such promptings or 'leading of the Spirit' as 'inclinations to act in one way or another that are believed to arise from the Holy Spirit' (6). In discussing this dynamic with Grace and my other participants, they did not describe it as an experience of getting 'lost' in the process, in that they no longer function in their professional roles and deviate from ethical practice as clinicians; nor did they describe a sense in which they get distracted from the client and the therapeutic encounter. Rather, they have accounted for the ways in which the Holy Spirit actively assists them to see and act in the situation (to perceive, to interpret, and to respond) more accurately, and therefore to be more effective counsellors within their professional frameworks and contexts for the sake of their clients' growth and healing.

Reflecting upon this in greater depth, participants articulated a sense of assurance and trust in the Holy Spirit, and a feeling of confidence in moving on the Spirit's promptings because they believe the Spirit to be the One who perfectly knows their counselees and their needs, beyond what the clinician feels he/she is able to know by natural capabilities alone. Catherine spoke to this, stating:

Countless times in counselling, you know, I was sitting there and I would just say, 'God, I don't know what I'm supposed to see or hear right now' and I can't *tell* you how many times just this discernment, this word of wisdom would just come in. [...] I'm so glad that I don't have to be the smartest person in the room, because we've got backup. We've got reinforcements! And not only does he know me, but you know, he knows them, he knows what they need.

Participants reflected on the way in which moving on the Spirit's promptings has led them to a point of 'breakthrough' with clients, or to reaching the 'source' or 'root' of a client's difficulties; again, reiterating the sense in which these pentecostal counsellors experience the Holy Spirit as directing what is a hermeneutical process in counselling sessions, by which they attempt to perceive, interpret, and respond appropriately to their clients in order to facilitate further growth or healing. Henry described this in his experience:

I've had a prompting to go a certain direction, or to look into something deeper, that was kind of a gold mine, and that really opened up doors, or a breakthrough for a person. [...] times when the Holy Spirit's led me down a path, or led me in a certain direction that was able to really bring closure to a person, or healing to a person, or what they

needed in that moment. Sometimes it comes as an emotional reaction in clients. Sometimes they'll experience it deeply. And those kinds of situations I attribute to the Holy Spirit at work.

Pentecostal experience and cognitive appraisal processes

In pentecostal theology, these encounters with the Spirit are understood as both a personal experience and a participation in the inbreaking of the kingdom of God (Serrano, 2003). Consequently, the clinician experiences the Spirit's ministry in counselling sessions as personally meaningful *and* missional, as the clinician's experiences of the Spirit are felt to occur as participation in and collaboration with the Spirit's ministry to the counsellee.

Decker (2009) has helpfully explored the process of meaning-making and appraisal specifically from a pentecostal perspective, explaining that every individual who perceives the Spirit to be prompting or empowering him/her knowingly, and more likely unknowingly, engages in an automatic process of cognitive appraisal: 'a series of nonconscious decisions as to whether or not the experience is personally meaningful' (193), to include decisions regarding whom it is the experience is perceived to have originated from (attribution). This process is influenced by a number of factors (i.e. personal, situational and circumstantial factors), as well as the individual's religious orientation, concept of God, and previous perceived experiences of the Divine. As Decker suggests, '... [Persons] who are convinced of God's reality and presence ascribe causation to God as a central component of the appraisal process' (194–195). For pentecostals in particular, it is pertinent to note that religious experiences, such as those accounted for by my participants, 'stimulate an appraisal process' which occurs 'within the religious framework of the person while taking into account the context of the occurrence or event' (208).

In the case of my participants, their experiences of the Spirit were cognitively appraised and found to be personally meaningful in their clinical contexts. Yet, the meaning they drew from their experiences was felt to have a significance and impact that extended beyond the clinicians themselves, as they perceived the Spirit to be ministering through them for the sake of their clients. As Lydia stated:

I think it's God just constantly revealing himself to all of us, including the clients, and that his ultimate desire is healing for us all ... to show himself and for his name to be glorified really, in the end ... That is what it means to me. It brings glory to him [...] He desires for us to have a good well-being, and peace, and joy, and happiness, and so ... those experiences to me mean that he loves us ...

As can be seen in these phenomenological accounts, pentecostal counsellors perceive themselves as relying upon the Spirit for guidance and empowerment that enhances and even exceeds their natural capabilities (Decker, 1996), in order that they can actively participate in the redemptive work of the Spirit. So, while the counsellor draws upon his/her natural abilities, foundational counselling skills, and clinical 'know-how' to perceive and read the therapeutic situation as accurately as possible, the pentecostal counsellor also relies on the Spirit who is understood to have greater insight and wisdom concerning the counsellee; being the 'real healer' that the Spirit is, as one participant stated.

Reflecting on the outworking of a pneumatological hermeneutic in pentecostal praxis

Speaking of therapy that is informed by a pentecostal pneumatology, Parker (2016) explains that the Spirit is understood to be present and active in the therapeutic encounter with the counsellor and counsellee, *for the purpose of bringing life and growth*:

[A] therapy informed by a Pentecostal pneumatology concerns the belief that God is deeply involved in the helping process [...] Neither the helper nor the one being helped are the only forces involved in this process of growth. The Holy Spirit is also deeply involved in the outcome. As the life-giver, the Spirit is in the process of replacing deadness with new life. (Parker, 2016: 62)

This resonates with Decker's (1996) presentation of three assumptions from which he suggests pentecostal counsellors operate: (1) The belief in Spirit-empowerment for service; (2) A belief in Spirit-empowerment for today, not just historically — an orientation that 'prepares the heart and the mind of the caregiver to foster intentional sensitivity to the Spirit, and an openness which seeks to respond to the intervention of the Holy Spirit in present circumstances' (62); and (3) An active pursuit of the Spirit's empowerment and direction by the caregiver. As Decker explains, putting these assumptions into practice results in a particular orientation in the caregiving encounter, and it is what could be characterized as an outworking of a pneumatological hermeneutic in the counselling process.

Like all counsellors, the pentecostal therapist learns the skills needed to astutely perceive, interpret, and respond to the messages received from the counsellee (Nesbit Sbanotto *et al.*, 2016), but through continued formation in pentecostal spirituality, he/she also learns to perceive, interpret, and respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit. The counselling process is a hermeneutical, meaning-making process (Strong, 2003; Strong *et al.*, 2008), and in pentecostal experience, the Holy Spirit is perceived to be actively involved in and guiding that hermeneutical process, as was noted in the works of Cartledge (2003), Bridges Johns (1998), and Poloma (2010), to name a few. I suggest that my participants' accounts have shed light on this from lived experience, helping to articulate the outworking of a pneumatological hermeneutic in the praxis of the pentecostal counsellor in explicit ways.

Theological implications for the pentecostal counsellor

The *person* of the counsellor is understood to be an instrument in the provision of care, and her development contributes to who she is as an instrument and to the art of her counselling practice. As such, the counsellor's own development is understood to have an important influence upon the therapeutic process, and as such, clinicians both novice and experienced are encouraged to reflect thoroughly on themselves and to foster self-awareness around their own formation and experiences that will impact the manner in which they can effectively care for others. Important to this is the counsellor's understanding of how her spiritual formation informs what she does clinically (Nesbit Sbanotto *et al.*, 2016). As Tan (2011) states, 'The

spirituality or spiritual growth of the Christian counselor is [...] a unique and distinctive aspect of the person of the Christian counselor' (15).

If, however, from a theological-anthropological standpoint, we are to understand ourselves as 'liturgical animals' as Smith (2013) posits — those who are fundamentally formed by and through worship, shaping what we love and therefore making us into what we love — then perhaps it is apt to understand the spirituality of the Christian counsellor as being more than an aspect of the individual, and rather as the distinctive way in which the person is fundamentally primed, through worship and its practices, to exist and act in the world. Such an understanding of persons bears important implications for an account of Christian action (Smith, 2013). For, as we are taught in the practices of the faith and experience them in broader and deeper ways, with our own engagement in them becoming more extensive, we find that we have increasingly grown into the practices: '*... we come to live into them until they live in us*' (emphasis added, Dykstra, 2005: 44–45). By God's grace and the power of the Spirit, our worship and its practices (embodied and enacted), work their way into our very bones as we participate and re-participate in them, until they yield in us a distinct way of being-in-the-world; one which we hope is a faithful witness to Christ as we take up the 'creational mandate to be God's image bearers and culture-makers' (Smith, 2013: 3).

Being those who are fundamentally shaped through worship and liturgies, sacred and secular (Smith, 2013), the intentional 'reading' of our practices is a crucial task, for 'actions are themselves theology, because praxis reveals theology', as theology 'is something that is lived and experienced by a particular community' (Swinton, 2000: 11). In such a view, the implicit and the explicit practices of the pentecostal clinician, the tacit and the articulated, are indeed confessional. As such, it behoves pentecostal clinicians to reflect deeply on the ways in which their spiritual formation constitutes their therapeutic approach, and with this, the manner in which their clinical practices speak (perhaps even unknowingly) of their spirituality and theological commitments.

Conclusion

I have aimed to demonstrate that it is not sufficient to assume that pentecostal counsellors are merely informed by a pneumatology, nor that they mechanically apply a set of pentecostal presuppositions to their therapeutic praxis. Rather, as indicated in my qualitative interviews, these pentecostal clinicians function in the world, and in their work as therapists, as 'under a Spirit-charged construal' (Smith, 2010: 30). They engage in their counselling methods as directed by the Holy Spirit, who is felt to be deeply involved in the therapeutic process, empowering them in specific ways for the growth and healing of their counselees (e.g. guiding the direction of therapy, prompting the clinician with the words to say and the questions to ask, and leading the counsellor in the timing of when he/she should implement particular therapeutic interventions, etc.).

The pneumatological hermeneutic of these clinicians therefore takes seriously the ministry and experience of the Holy Spirit *in* the caregiving process and the manner

in which the Spirit's praxis impacts that of the clinician. It is a dynamic hermeneutic, enlivened by its central and defining pneumatology, and marked by a relational participation with the Spirit in the interpretive process. As such, pentecostal spirituality offers a distinct lens through which to reflect upon situations in the caregiving process (e.g. see Brock, 1995; Decker, 1996, 1997; Parker, 2014, 2016; Serrano, 2003). I suggest that this holds important and unique implications for those concerned with practical theologies of care and counselling.

I have also sought to demonstrate that such observations have been brought to the fore by attending to the lived experiences of pentecostal therapists. Through their phenomenological accounts, these clinicians have articulated the work of the Spirit in the counselling process in explicit terms, and as such, I suggest that these original insights contribute significantly to the existing body of knowledge regarding the Holy Spirit's role in therapy. Additionally, these insights indicate the need for continued research on the topic in a manner that properly attends to lived experience, in order that it not become siloed to doctrinal, theoretical or psychological reflection only.

In the words of Bridges Johns (1998) 'Pentecostal theology is largely what a Pentecostal does' (83). Thus, further critical and theological reflection on the lived experiences of pentecostal counsellors is a necessary undertaking if we hope to articulate how a particularly embodied, practised, affective, pre-reflected spirituality (Smith, 2010) is outworked in the pentecostal counsellor's praxis. We affirm that the experiences of pentecostal counsellors are an 'important locus for the work of the Spirit' and 'a "place" where the gospel is grounded, embodied, interpreted and lived out [...] an interpretive context which raises new questions, offers fresh challenges and demands thoughtful answers as it interacts with the ethos and practices of the gospel' (Swinton and Mowat, 2016: 6). For this reason, there is a hope that by engaging in this interpretive task, we might be able to faithfully attest to the work of the Holy Spirit in the counselling process, and come therefore to a greater understanding of our participation in the Spirit's redemptive work in our midst, and in the lives of those we care for and counsel.

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