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Many Tongues, Many Professions: Towards a Pentecost Theology of Vocation

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Abstract

Pentecostal theologians have begun work in theology of vocation even as developments beyond initial sketches remain to be taken up. Beginning with the explorations about how the many tongues of Pentecost foreground the plurality of witnessing activities invites, for us, articulation of a theology of testimony, and this opens up to, next, a theology of profession understood not only in terms of public declaration but also of occupational skilfulness. Elaboration of many tongues as many testifyings and many professings leads to the final section's theology of vocational pluralism. Rooting this trajectory of witness/testimony-profession-vocation in the Pentecost account foregrounds both its pneumatic substance and its trinitarian character.

Keywords: Acts 2, Pentecost, profession, testimony, theology of work, vocation

Pentecostal theologians have begun work in theology of vocation even as developments are still in the initial stages.¹ As my own endeavours over the last decade have returned repeatedly to the Pentecost narrative, in particular retrieving the multiplicity of tongues referred to in the Acts of the Apostles for their various (and many) theological implications and applications,² so also in this essay, we spring from the book's second chapter. Beginning with the explorations about how the many tongues of Pentecost foreground the plurality of witnessing activities invites, for us, articulation of a theology of testimony, and this opens up to, next, a theology of profession understood not only in terms of public declaration but also of occupational skilfulness, here also intersecting with contemporary discussions in theology of work. Elaboration of many tongues as many testifyings and many professings leads to the final section's

¹ The first major effort was that of Terry L. Cross, *Answering the Call in the Spirit: Pentecostal Reflections on a Theology of Vocation, Work and Life* (Lee University, 2007); I will comment more about Cross's considerations later.

² With many articles and book chapters beginning with or including within their title, "Many Tongues ...," including a number of these reprinted in my recent book, *The Heteroglossic Spirit: Unruly Tongues and Translations after Pentecost*, ed. Ekaputra Tupamahu (Cascade, 2026).

theology of vocational pluralism. Rooting this trajectory of witness/testimony-profession-vocation in the Pentecost account foregrounds both its pneumatic substance and its trinitarian character.

Pentecost and Testimony

St. Luke tells us, in one of the first scenes in the sequel to his first volume (the Gospel of Luke) that:

When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. 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 languages, as the Spirit gave them ability (Acts 2:1-4).³

Without minimising the collective character of this event – these were, after all, “all together in one place” (2:1) – our focus in what follows is on the individuality of the Spirit’s infilling. Yes, the result was a cumulative speaking all together, although that does not eliminate their differentiated experiences of the Spirit’s expression: “Divided tongues” (2:3a) not only manifested through but also allowed on each one, we are told.

There is little dispute (scholarly or otherwise) about the initially and immediately resulting phenomenon of those gathered together speaking in many languages. Our author reiterates, first, descriptively, the crowd’s own realisation that, “each one heard them [the disciples] speaking in the native language of each” (2:6b); second, the crowd’s own wondering, “how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language?” (2:7b); and, finally, again, the crowd’s own words, “in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power” (2:11b). More precisely, given that there are sixteen delineations of regional provenances or ethnic derivations from around the known (Mediterranean) world – five people groups, “Parthians, Medes, Elamites” mentioned at the beginning and “Cretans and Arabs” at the end, and a reference to “residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome” in the middle (2:9-11) – the point is that the Pentecost deluge not only preserves but even prioritises the multiplicity of known languages as the conduit for heralding the divine power.⁴

Such announcement of divine power begins to fulfil Jesus’s own promise to his followers, also recorded by Luke in the opening scene of the Book of Acts, that each of them would “receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon

³ Unless otherwise indicated, all scriptural quotations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.

⁴ For more on the geographic spread and renewal of multilingualism in the Pentecost outpouring, see the second section of my “Many Tongues, Many Biocultural Niches: A Pentecostal Missiological Response to Language Endangerment and Environmental Degradation,” in *Pentecostal Missiology and Environmental Degradation*, ed. Eugene Baron and Amos Yong (Langham Global, 2025), 81-105.

you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (1:8). This entire second Lukan volume is about the disciples witnessing to Jesus, starting (in Acts chapter 2) in Jerusalem and extending to the ends of the earth (Acts chapter 28). We will return variously to reflect on what this witness to Jesus entails, but for the moment, what is important is that such witness is given in many languages. More to the point, such witnesses are given, on the one hand, “in the native language of each,” and also heard, on the other hand, “in our own native [ἐγγενήθημεν] language,” here (in contrast to the Greek lingua franca of the first-century Mediterranean context) referring explicitly to the languages of birth, the mother tongues in which these listeners were most fluent.⁵

One way to comprehend linguistic fluency is in terms of individual articulative capacities to translate experiences into words. Luke’s two volumes can be read in ways that highlight this correlation as one element of what it means to bear witness effectively, to tell of what we have been affected by, what we have seen, heard, and felt. If in the Jesus narrative the reporting about experiential witness is descriptive of what Jesus tells John’s inquiring followers to report back to him about – to his question about Jesus’s messianic identity, they are urged, “Go and tell John what you have seen and heard” (Luke 7:22a) – in Acts, not only do the apostles say of their own witness, “We cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard” (Acts 4:20), but also the exemplary apostolic witness of the second half of this book is prophetically commissioned to fulfil his missional task in relationship to his personal experience: “You will be his witness to all the world of what you have seen and heard” (22:15).⁶ In other words, apostolic witness, as Luke recounts such, emerges from out of apostolic experience: Jesus’s followers bear witness to what they have seen, heard, and perceived, and do so in part via remembering and repeating – verbally or via other actions – these experiences.⁷

I would add that not only is apostolic witness no mere cerebral rhetoric but that such – then (in the first century) and now (in our twenty-first) – gushes forth from out of the depths of our lived experience, in that respect flowing most

⁵ See Craig Keener, *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary, Volume 1: Introduction and 1:1–2:47* (Baker Academic, 2012), 822.

⁶ See John W. Mauck, *Paul on Trial: The Book of Acts as a Defense of Christianity* (T. Nelson, 2001), ch. 9, for a discussion of the experiential authority undergirding the apostolic witness, initially specified (by Mauck) in what is identified as the first Sanhedrin trial (culminating in the testimonial claim in 4:20), albeit also as consistent with and authorising the Pauline witness later (which I have highlighted was exemplified in Luke’s first account of Paul’s apologetic in 22:15). This is reiterated otherwise also in the Johannine understanding of witness, e.g., “We declare to you what was from the beginning, what we have heard, what we have seen with our eyes, what we have looked at and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life—this life was revealed, and we have seen it and testify to it, and declare to you the eternal life that was with the Father and was revealed to us—we declare to you what we have seen and heard so that you also may have fellowship with us” (1 John 1:1–3a).

⁷ See Ervin Budiselić, *Uniqueness of the Concept of Witness in Lukan Writings within the Biblical Canon* (Langham Academic, 2024), esp. ch. 10.

naturally, even if not only, out of our mother tongues. No wonder that modern pentecostal Christians over the last century have often lifted up the *testimony* as the preferred form of bearing witness. Everyone (unless verbally or otherwise impaired to the point of impeding speech) can share out of his or her mother tongue about their encounter with and experience of God in their lives. Within pentecostal contexts, more often than not, the testimony is of the personal experience of salvation, of healing, of encounter of (or “baptism with,” as is common in pentecostal circles) the Holy Spirit, including as followed by speaking in tongues, prophesying, or other charismatic manifestations, and of divinely providential moments of life.⁸ These are the palpably, tactilely, and kinaesthetically experienced forms of divine intervention, equally as often in times of distress or crisis. The testimony is a recounting of such experiences and of their impactful and transformative nature.

Not surprisingly, pentecostal testimony thus flourishes especially, even if not only, in oral cultural contexts, where there is the possibility of a spontaneous articulation in any relational encounter with individuals speaking not out of theoretical abstraction but out of personal experience.⁹ Even if not personally experienced, the testimony is nevertheless born out of relationships with family members or close friends and thereby directly witnessed and effective. The testimony speaks not via hearsay but of what oneself sees and knows precisely because such occurred to, or in the presence of, the testifier. The testimony speaks not in the third person, maintaining objective distance, but in the first person, self-narrating the affective impact of the divine manifestation. In these respects, it is not that the pentecostal testimony cannot be given effectively in secondary acquired languages or, for those who are bilingual or multilingual, in these other tongues. The Lukan reference of the Spirit’s infilling generating speech “in the native language of each” and “in our own native language” surely elevates the role of the mother tongue in Christian witness but also, as importantly, highlights their testimonial character, emerging in a sense from that which is most intrinsic to the people group or their ethnic cultural reality on the one hand, and from what is most viscerally encountered, deeply felt, and interiorly accessed on the other.

To recapitulate at this juncture: the Pentecost outpouring of the Spirit enables speaking and hearing in other and many languages, including, especially, mother tongues. Such Spirit-inspired speech and hearing bears witness to the wondrous works of God, which in pentecostal spirituality is often, if not only, testimonial in character. The testimony is borne through the singularity of the individual voice, narrative, and language, authorised by no external power except the

⁸ Chs. 4-7 of Mark J. Cartledge, *Testimony in the Spirit: Rescripting Ordinary Pentecostal Theology* (Ashgate, 2010), each include a section on pentecostal testimonies on each of these experiences, respectively.

⁹ For more on the orally traditioned character of pentecostal testimony, see Tony Richie, *Speaking by the Spirit: A Pentecostal Model for Interreligious Dialogue*, *World Christian Revitalization Movements in Pentecostal/Charismatic Studies* 6 (Emeth, 2011), 137-38; see also, Akintúndé Akínyemí, *African Creative Expressions: Mother Tongue and Other Tongues* (Thielmann & Breiteringer, 2011), ch. 4.

potency of the experienced reality.¹⁰ And just as the promise of the Spirit is to all – male and female, young and old, slave and free (see Acts 2:17-18) – so also is the testimony bearable by all: no special education or training or preparation is needed, just the language of one’s birth and encounter with the Spirit of the living God’s wondrous deeds.

Pentecost and Profession/s

The preceding discussion of many tongues and many witnesses invites extension of many testimonies to many professions, particularly in light of how Christian witness is intimately intertwined with publicly delivered proclamations or otherwise-accessible declarations. Despite comprehending the many witnesses of and testimonies to the potency of divine deeds (Acts 2:11), perplexity and bewilderment about what was transpiring led the multitude to query, “What does this mean?” (v. 12b). Apostolic profession – the interpretation and translation of the many tongues and testimonies, so to speak – was further needed: “Peter, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them ...” (v. 14). Luke’s account of Peter’s profession extends to almost the rest of Acts 2 (vv. 14-40).

The Book of Acts includes numerous such professions given by leaders of the apostolic band, including Stephen (ch. 7) and Paul (multiple times in the second half of Acts). There are others, however, who profess not only with their words but also their actions. Barnabas, we are told, “sold a field that belonged to him, then brought the money, and laid it at the apostles’ feet” (4:37), and via this deed came to be known as “son of encouragement” (v. 36b) and added to the apostolic leadership ranks (11:22-25, 12:25, 13:1-2, *passim*). Luke also records that, “in Joppa there was a disciple whose name was Tabitha, which in Greek is Dorcas [who] was devoted to good works and acts of charity” (9:36). Further, there is Lydia, a Thyatira-to-Philippi immigrant businesswoman who opens up her home to Paul and his companions to host times of prayer and other apostolic gatherings (16:13-15).¹¹ In each of these cases, the profession of faith correlated with the professor’s (testifier’s) life (and vocational) narrative: as a (at least one-time) property-owner, as a seamstress (as Tabitha was described in 9:39b), or a “dealer in purple cloth” (said of Lydia in 16:14b).

In contemporary parlance, one’s profession is considered less in terms of one’s testimonial witness in the religious sense than referring to the competencies and skills one exhibits in one’s employment or in one’s efforts to “earn a living,” so to speak. Profession in today’s idiom, thus, opens up to

¹⁰ Note that in the present time, there is a much greater sensitivity to how imperially propped racial, ethnic, and gendered ideological agendas marginalise and also subordinate “mother tongues” in relationship to majority (usually European/colonial) languages—e.g., Thomas Paul Bonfiglio, *Mother Tongues and Nations: The Invention of the Native Speaker*, Trends in Linguistics: Studies and Monographs 226 (De Gruyter Mouton, 2010)—even as, we are here noting, Luke’s usage of such construct is subversive of the dominant Greek language in the *Pax Romana* of the first century.

¹¹ See my essay, “Lydia Amid the Jewish Diaspora: Apostolic Migration and Belonging—Then and Now,” in *Pathways to Belonging*, ed. Dustin D. Benac et al. (Wipf and Stock, 2025), 51-60.

theology of work, or how what we do for our jobs manifests our expertise, proficiencies, and even professionalism. Yet even from this perspective, we can

see that the Pentecost approach to witness and testimony we have been developing is able to account also for such professions. Tabitha, as we have seen, was not only well known for her “good works and acts of charity,” but was recognised and remembered specifically for her “tunics and other clothing that [she] had made while she was with them” (9:39b). In other words, Tabitha professed in word and also in the deeds of her daily undertaking. She did so perhaps in part bilingually and in part professionally through her dressmaking work: that she appears to have been known by both Aramaic and Greek names is suggestive, even if not conclusively so,¹² of at least the reception of her occupational activities in both linguistic communities if not also of her communicative fluency in both Aramaic (the local Judean language) and Greek.

Almost a generation ago (by the time of this writing), pentecostal (then) theologian Miroslav Volf developed a pneumatological theology of work, one grounded in the reception and outworking of the distribution of the Spirit’s charisms enabling edification of the recipients of our various professions in anticipation of the new creation.¹³ The many tongues of Pentecost in my account

here correlate with the many spiritual or charismatic gifts in Volf’s understanding of Spirit-ed work. I want to urge, however, an even deeper connectivity. Tongues as witness and profession, viewed after Pentecost, is not only one of the Spirit’s gifts but is also both spoken and performed. In other words, we are invited to consider tongues not only linguistically but also in terms of discursive practice. If language helps us name life experiences, so also life’s navigation generates language. Viewed professionally or in terms of professions, then, the many skills and competencies of work in life are also discursively catalytic.¹⁴ Tabitha may have picked up her dressmaking skills as an apprentice from a community mentor. As a skilled seamstress she would have been able to provide accounts (testimonies!) of dressmaking that us non-dressmakers would not have easily grasped, even as her capacities to witness from out of her life’s experiences as a renowned seamstress grew in part through the reception of her

¹² On this point, see Greg W. Forbes and Scott D. Harrower, *Raised from Obscurity: A Narrativial and Theological Study of the Characterization of Women in Luke-Acts* (James Clarke, 2015), 172-73; even if Luke is providing a translation of the Aramaic for Greek readers because, as Craig Keener in *Acts: An Exegetical Commentary, Volume 2: 3:1–14:28* (Baker Academic, 2013), 1715, urges, “the common Greek name ‘Dorcas’ was the Greek equivalent of the much rarer Aramaic name ‘Tabitha’,” he grants it is also “plausible that she might have used the Greek name in some settings,” which is not only quite normal in the bilingual and “mixed society of Joppa” (1715n106, here citing C. K. Barrett, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Acts of the Apostles, Volume 1: 1:1–14* [T&T Clark, 1994], 483), but also hints at her servicing these communities.

¹³ Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Oxford University Press, 1991; repr., Wipf and Stock, 2001), 111-17; Volf was raised in part in a pentecostal church but has become an Anglican in more recent years.

¹⁴ I appreciate Armand Larive’s discussion of what we may call the Spirit’s in-skilling (and providing rapport) in his *After Sunday: A Theology of Work* (Continuum, 2004), ch. 6.

dressess and the impression they made in the wider community. Regardless, witness is born out of the depths of her own lifelong experiences as a seamstress.

Similarly, as I have argued in other places, in the twenty-first century, our training, especially in tertiary programmes of study organised either professionally (e.g., doctors, lawyers, engineers) or disciplinarily (e.g., in the human, social, or natural sciences), involves formation in distinctive realms of discursive practices.¹⁵ We learn new concepts and vocabularies pertinent to different domains of study and enquiry, in each case in order to pursue knowledge and to contribute occupationally, socially, and in other ways. In these professions, we inevitably are translators of the specialised knowledge in our fields to wider audiences and recipients of such knowledge, even as we bring the questions and concerns of others back to our disciplines and guilds to further refine thinking and practice. Volf's charismatic theology of work invites consideration of how the many tongues of Pentecost converge with and map onto the many gifts that nurture and propel the many professions, both verbal and practical, both sacred and secular, both spiritual and mundane, vis-à-vis our daily jobs. On the one hand, we may have been led to our professions and employment because of Pentecost encounters; on the other hand, the former also invites Spirit-ed response, what pentecostal theologian Jean-Daniel Plüss calls "response-ability," which follows from and generates new forms of (occupational) testimony.¹⁶ Whether blue-collar (more service oriented) or white-collar (presuming higher educational achievements) professions today, witness cultivated from out of life experience and testimony is articulated in and through the distinctiveness of the linguistic and experiential resources of the professor (here, not just those in classrooms).

Even more recent efforts in pneumatological theology brought forth by Lutheran theologian Cheryl Peterson, from out of her extensive participation in the Pentecostal–Roman Catholic bilateral dialogues, resituates our consideration of work and its callings within the Pentecost rubric of Spirit-empowered mission.¹⁷ This perspective foregrounds the various callings of the Spirit that, following the reformer Martin Luther, sees each of our stations of life – whether by role, as in parents and spouses, or by our "day-jobs" as civil servants, service providers, etc. – as conduits for living out Christian faith and the priesthood of each baptised believer on behalf of others: "Each person should do the work dictated by his profession or station in life, not in order to obtain righteousness but to keep his body under control and to be an example to those who need to

¹⁵ I made this argument first in my *The Spirit of Creation: Modern Science and Divine Action in the Pentecostal-Charismatic Imagination*, Pentecostal Manifestos 4 (Eerdmans, 2011), ch. 2, and in various other locales since.

¹⁶ I get this from one of the earliest scholarly analyses of testimony among pentecostal theologians: Jean-Daniel Plüss, *Therapeutic and Prophetic Narratives in Worship: A Hermeneutic Study of Testimonies and Visions—Their Potential Significance for Christian Worship and Secular Society*, Studies in the Intercultural History of Christianity 54 (Peter Lang, 1988), 198–201.

¹⁷ See Cheryl M. Peterson, *The Holy Spirit in the Christian Life: The Spirit's Work for, in, and through Us* (Baker Academic, 2024), ch. 6, esp. 120–21.

exercise a similar discipline over themselves.”¹⁸ Peterson’s prompts urge our pivot back to the Pentecost narrative to reintroduce also what we might call the bi-vocational character of Christian mission and ministry operating alongside work amidst the various stations of life, to use Luther’s phraseology.

Paul, Priscilla, and Aquila were by trade tentmakers, Luke tells us (Acts 18:3),¹⁹ meaning, on our account, they bore witness by (verbal and occupational) profession. In their cases, the narrative emphasis is on tentmaking as a trade undergirding the apostolic mission and ministry, less on the trade itself as an expression of the gifts (and tongues) of the Spirit. Nevertheless, to the degree that the apostolic mission and ministry were sustained (materially and otherwise) by tentmaking activity, to that same degree one might argue there is a missional and ministerial aspect – even an indirect one – to the tentmaking profession, at least for these apostolic leaders.²⁰ Pentecostal biblical scholar Martin Mittelstadt’s insistence that a pentecostal theology of call “must address the significance of calling beyond the workplace”²¹ can hence be taken in two mutually interrelated directions. On the one hand, his most immediate reference is that the call needs to extend beyond the role of the trade, particularly as lived out professionally in specific jobs; on the other hand, to the degree that the employment itself is an expression of our faithful witness and then to the further degree that, in bi- or multi-vocational contexts, the job supports mission and ministry endeavours, to those extents our trades are initial professions (professionalisations) that make possible missional witness.

Where we have arrived is that the many tongues of Pentecost empower not only many testimonies but also many professions, with the latter involving both word and deed, both missional/ministerial verbalisation and occupational practice. Regardless, the witness born is given from out of the specificity of our mono-, bi-, or multi-linguality and, more importantly, out of the interiority of our experience, formation, apprenticeships, mentorships, courses of study, and even suffering.²² We live out and speak of the wondrous works of God in our daily lives, our occupational employment, and our cultural-linguistic context.

¹⁸ Martin Luther, *The Freedom of the Christian: Luther Study Edition*, trans. Mark D. Tranvik (Fortress, 2008), 86.

¹⁹ See Patrick Lai, “Tentmaking Uncovered,” in *Business as Mission: From Impoverished to Empowered*, ed. Tom Steffen and Mike Barnett, Evangelical Missiological Society Series 14 (William Carey, 2006), 79–100; cf. C. Neal Johnson, *Business as Mission: A Comprehensive Guide to Theory and Practice* (IVP Academic, 2009), ch. 6.

²⁰ Hartness M. Samushonga, “A European Theological Pentecostal Perspective to Bivocational Ministry,” *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association* 40, no. 2 (2020): 144–59.

²¹ Martin W. Mittelstadt, “Called: A Pentecostal Theology of Vocation,” *Spiritus* 9, no. 2 (2024): 293–315, at 297; <https://doi.org/10.31380/2573-6345.1373>.

²² Which is tightly connected in the Acts narrative where the Greek word for “witnesses”, *μάρτυρες*, also can be translated as “martyrs”; see also Martin William Mittelstadt, *The Spirit and Suffering in Luke-Acts: Implications for a Pentecostal Pneumatology*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series 26 (T&T Clark, 2004); cf. Graham Tomlin, “Life in the Spirit: Identity, Vocation and the Cross of

Pentecost and Vocation/s

Theological discussions of work often are accompanied by or set within considerations of vocation. Terry Cross's "pentecostal reflection" is situated within his university, which is affiliated with the Church of God, Cleveland, Tennessee, a classical pentecostal denomination, and which serves students from pentecostal churches but also from evangelical constituencies that may be a tad less interested in the pentecostal specificity of what such an institution of higher education might offer than in its more broadly, if also robustly, Christian commitments and formational efforts.²³ In that light, Cross's pentecostal approach foregrounds the notion of vocation as related to and derived from the Spirit's calling, which applies to all Jesus followers and disciples, then and today. Vocation is thus pneumatologically rooted in our calling in the Spirit, and in that respect, so is our work and also our overall life trajectory. As Cross puts it, "Calling is a gift from God that primarily offers humans salvation and a relationship with God and secondarily offers humans a way of life that responds to the grace and gifts received."²⁴ And while the section (however brief) on the call in the Spirit in pentecostal contexts provides some connection for the specifically pentecostal student readers of the book,²⁵ the rest of his volume operates in the more general evangelical terms pervasive across the network of Christian higher educational institutions of which Lee University is a part.

Our own many tongues-testimonies-and-professions approach invites consideration of vocation also in similarly multidimensional terms. Theologically speaking, we might say that calling or vocation is *in* the Spirit (Cross) to bear witness to the living Christ (Acts 1:8) and resound the wondrous works of God (2:11b). Vocations and callings are hereby invitations to bear witness in our own languages to the resurrected Jesus in anticipation of the coming divine reign. Diverse contexts thus prompt both more Christocentric or theocentric forms of witness, whether Peter's specifying Jesus in the Pentecost homily (vv. 22-36) within the full message in vv. 14-40 or Paul's talking more generally about the divine in Lystra (14:15-17), or the combination of theocentric generality with moments of Christocentric particularity at the Areopagus in Athens (17:22-31). The vocational call to bear witness is in this sense triadic and trinitarian, on occasion in one or other direction, albeit overall tending towards the new creation, as Volf orients us to.

Volf's charismatic theology of work is also pneumatologically robust in its dynamic orientation, not only in heralding the coming reign of God but also in being open to a multiplicity of expressions on this side of the *eschaton*. This dynamicity is reflected variously in Volf's account but, for our purposes, his foregrounding both the *diachronic* and *synchronic* plurality of jobs or

Christ," in Jane Williams, ed., *The Holy Spirit in the World Today* (Alpha International, 2011), 72-85, esp. 82-95.

²³ Which I understand, and attempt, with my co-author, Dale Coulter, to address in our *The Holy Spirit and Higher Education: Renewing the Christian University* (Baylor University Press, 2023).

²⁴ Cross, *Answering the Call in the Spirit*, 55.

²⁵ Cross, *Answering the Call in the Spirit*, 45-47.

employment positions is relevant to our consideration of the diversity of vocation. The latter synchronicity refers for Volf to both how “every Christian can have more than one *charisma* at any given time” so that “there can be a plurality of employments or jobs without any one of them being regarded theologically as inferior, a mere ‘job on the side’.”²⁶ The bi-vocationality of Paul and his companions already referred to above is an apostolic example of such synchronic vocational pluralism: then and today, we can potentially have multiple and simultaneous jobs, or callings, each professing our testimonies according to the relevant charisms – e.g., experiences, skills, graces – manifest in those contexts.

Volf’s diachronic occupational pluralism, on the other hand, while also operating charismatically, unfolds over time. Here are sequential expressions of the Spirit’s giftings, most obviously experienced in modern industrial societies in the fluidity of jobs any one of us might transiently experience. If in the ancient and medieval worlds achieving competence in certain trades might have situated us in vocational stations for a lifetime,²⁷ with the industrial revolution earlier and the dawn of the contemporary information age now, peoples’ “occupational decisions need not be irrevocable commitments but can be repeatedly made in a continuous dialogue between their preferences and talents on the one hand, and the existing job opportunities on the other.”²⁸ Put in pneumatological terms, albeit contemporised, the Spirit is continually doing new things in ushering the divine reign, so why would that not apply also to our professions and occupations?²⁹

In the Pentecost account we are developing, however, the diachronic arc tracks along two parallel if not interwoven registers, that of the human individual and that of the Spirit’s call. The latter is, as already mapped, Christological, theological, and eschatological, anticipating the divine rule. The former, also already intimated, is forged over a lifetime, initially nested in the home, nurtured in the family, and brought to initial expression in the mother tongue, and then cultivated in training, apprenticeship, or mentorship relationships, expanded in courses of secondary, tertiary, or postgraduate study in successive seasons of life, and developed over decades of relationships, jobs, and even careers. My own example of multiple careers is that of having worked for almost a decade in the public service sector in two distinct employment positions (for the State of Washington as a financial services officer, providing material support to its population, and then as a child support enforcement/collections agent providing financial support to families) before transitioning to academia, where I have had three (so far) different higher educational institutional employers and multiple

²⁶ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 117.

²⁷ David W. Loy, “Luther, Vocation, and the Search for Significance,” *Lutheran Quarterly* 35 (2021): 50-72, esp. 37-71, situates Luther’s notion of calling vis-à-vis the breakdown of medieval social order.

²⁸ Volf, *Work in the Spirit*, 116.

²⁹ Cara F. Lovell, “Surprise, Hope and Gift: A Pneumatological Account of the Unexpected Nature of Vocation,” *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 26, no. 1 (2024): 91-110.

faculty and administrative roles and jobs.³⁰ Diachronicity might involve more than less distinctive work and vocational engagements, e.g., the vast differences between public service and higher educational sectors lift up the operational need of divergent charisms. And yet the Pentecost and trinitarian theology of vocations also invite working more theologically towards the common good in the public service context even as it allows for more Christocentrically evident expressions in the higher educational sphere, particularly when professed in explicitly Christian university contexts (as I have experienced).

If our theological vocation can be understood non-homogeneously and even as triadically diversified in the trinitarian sense sketched above, then our vocational careers can also be understood pluralistically in light of our participation in the call of the Spirit towards the new creation. Vocational pluralism, however, has to be neither chaotic nor dissociated or disordered, to resort to diagnostic tropes in the psychopathological or medical domains.³¹ Instead, the theological imagination formed by multi- and pluri-linguality helps us anticipate how the many tongues unleashed on the Day of Pentecost foreshadow now not only many jobs but also multiple careers which continually illuminate, paradoxically complicate, and marvellously enrich the witness that is professed in our individual lives. Trades, occupations, and vocations thus are fluid rather than static, less reified nouns and more dynamic verbs, even.³² Our own Pentecost account sees each transition as both continuous with and discontinuous from the preceding. Our life narratives manifest disjunctures, even fractures, albeit there is carryover, transformation, and also redemption, which now requires re-integration and re-narration (rather than sublimation) of that past Pentecost-ally! The testimony that is woven, then, neither avoids nor brackets those prior episodes (jobs, even careers) but reinterprets, renews, and revitalises such as part of the linguistic and contextual specificities of that biographical recounting. The call of some theologians of vocation to move us “beyond occupationalism” is right, not in the sense of leaving our prior jobs or trades behind, but in the sense that the vocational narrative is incomplete without giving testimonial honour to each career and its distinctive spectrum of contributions in the specificity of their own “tongues.”³³

All of this is in part a hermeneutical task, albeit one that both empowers each one to tell his or her own story and enables others to receive also from their own perspective. Herein is the ongoing (not only intellectual but also affective, moral, and vocational) conversion of speakers and listeners, mutually affecting one

³⁰ An earlier account written after the first decade of my work in the theological academy is found in my “The Spirit, Vocation, and the Life of the Mind: A Pentecostal Testimony,” in *Pentecostals in the Academy: Testimonies of Call*, ed. Steven M. Fettke and Robby Waddell (CPT Press, 2012), 203-20.

³¹ On a non-pathological but no less pneumatological and theological interpretation of multiple (sub)personalities, see also my essay with Aizaiah G. Yong, “Harmonising the Many Tongues Within: A Pentecost Exploration of Internal Family Systems,” in this volume, 29.

³² Mittelstadt, “Called: A Pentecostal Theology of Vocation,” 313.

³³ This is my after-Pentecost restatement of Marc Kolden, “Luther on Vocation,” *Word & World* 3, no. 4 (1983): 382-90, esp. 385-86.

another, in welcoming the translational work of the Pentecost Spirit.³⁴ Considered across the arcs of where our lives converge with that of redemptive history, we achieve glimpses of personal wholeness in relationship to professional integrity, where faith, work, and community are integrated for our vocational and common flourishing.³⁵

Transitions

Two interconnected thrusts have driven the preceding reflections. On the one hand, I have sketched a pneumatological theology of witness, testimony, profession, and vocation in close dialogue with the Pentecost account in the Book of Acts, and this has invited trinitarian consideration and framing: in the Spirit, of the living Christ, anticipating the coming reign of God.³⁶ Testimonies, professions, and vocations along this register are charismatically charged, enabling service of others, including those in the wider commons and the public spheres.³⁷

On the other hand, the Pentecost approach accentuates the particularity of the lived cultural and contextual milieu amidst and through which such testimonies, professions, and vocations are forged, and the many tongues of Pentecost thus insist on the specificity of linguistic, experiential, and interiorised dimensions of the witnesser being brought by the Spirit to articulation. My concerns here have been to think through the implications for the outpouring of the Spirit “upon all flesh” (Acts 2:17a) – men and women, boys and girls, those with and without means, whatever the class, status, role, or location in life – for our witness, testimonially, professionally, and vocationally. There remains other work to be done on pneumatological and Pentecost theologies of testimony, not to mention

³⁴ For thoughts moving us towards a theology of translation, see my article, “Translation as Social and Ecological Justice (A Review Essay): Notes toward a Theology of Interpretation of Tongues in the Age of the Anthropocene,” *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 47, no. 1 (2025): 109-28; I also discuss the various dimensions of conversion in my forthcoming book, *Witness: Converting Worlds* (Cascade).

³⁵ See Charlie Self, *Flourishing Churches and Communities: A Pentecostal Primer on Faith, Work, and Economics for Spirit-Empowered Discipleship* (Christian Library Classics, 2013), chs. 4-5; cf. also the ecclesial dimensions in Dale M. Coulter, “Christ, the Spirit, and Vocation: Initial Reflections on a Pentecostal Ecclesiology,” *Pro Ecclesia: A Journal of Catholic and Evangelical Theology* 19, no. 3 (2010): 318-39.

³⁶ Another robustly trinitarian theological consideration that links together creation, redemption, and eschaton is Gordon R. Preece, *The Viability of the Vocation Tradition in Trinitarian, Credal and Reformed Perspective* (Edwin Mellen, 1998).

³⁷ Luthercostal theologian (with credentials from both within both Lutheran and pentecostal churches) Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen talks about this as embodying a “charismatic diaconal” mindset of the believing community; see his “Transformed, Freed, Empowered: The Spirit’s Work in the Gifting and Vocation of All Believers,” in *“We Believe in the Holy Spirit”: Global Perspectives on Lutheran Identities*, ed. Chad M. Rimmer and Cheryl M. Peterson, Lutheran World Federation Documentation 63 (Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2021), 193-206, esp. 202-5.

of work and of vocation.³⁸ However, to the extent that the foregoing encourages such reflections within and beyond the pentecostal ecclesial (and academic) community, to that same extent we might all be ready to pray, “Come Holy Spirit, breathe upon us a fresh Pentecost!”³⁹

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³⁸ Kathryn Kleinans, for instance, names workaholism and divinisation of work as issues requiring vigilance; see her “The Work of a Christian: Vocation in Lutheran Perspective,” *Word & World* 25, no. 4 (2005): 394-402, at 297.

³⁹ Thanks to my PhD advisees’ group for their feedback.

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Response to Amos Yong: Pentecost, Testimony, Profession, and Vocation in Asian Contexts

Jun Kim

Introduction

Amos Yong's essay, "Many Tongues, Many Professions: Towards a Pentecost Theology of Vocation," offers a compelling Pentecostal reimagining of Christian witness by integrating testimony, profession, and vocation within a pneumatological framework. Yong persuasively argues that Pentecost is not merely an ecclesial or charismatic event limited to worship or spiritual experience but a paradigmatic moment in which the Holy Spirit reshapes the whole of human life – speech, labour, and calling – for participation in God's redemptive mission.

For Asian Pentecostals, Yong's vision is both deeply resonant and contextually demanding. It resonates because many Asian worldviews already assume the spiritual permeability of everyday life, resisting rigid sacred/secular distinctions. At the same time, it raises significant questions within contexts shaped by religious pluralism, economic inequality, vocational constraint, and strong communal expectations. This response engages Yong's framework appreciatively while offering constructive expansions from Asian Pentecostal realities, focusing on three interrelated dimensions of Pentecost: testimony, profession, and vocation.

Pentecost and Testimony

Yong rightly emphasises that Pentecost generates a plurality of testimonies. The disciples' speaking in many tongues is not an arbitrary manifestation of spiritual power but a theological declaration that divine witness is always mediated through particular cultural and linguistic forms. Testimony arises from lived experience – what believers have "seen and heard" – yet it is never merely private. At Pentecost, testimony becomes intelligible and transformative precisely because it is heard within the linguistic and cultural worlds of diverse audiences. In this way, Yong foregrounds experience as a primary locus of Pentecostal theology and witness.

Pentecostal testimony, therefore, is not abstract doctrine but narrated encounter. It is the Spirit-enabled capacity of ordinary believers to articulate experiences of salvation, healing, deliverance, and empowerment in the language most intimate to them, often their mother tongue. This renders testimony a

profoundly democratic form of witness, accessible regardless of formal education or social status. Especially within oral cultures, testimony functions as a natural and relational mode of theological expression, grounded in concrete encounters with God's saving acts rather than in systematic theological reflection alone.

From an Asian Pentecostal perspective, Yong's emphasis on testimony invites further contextual reflection. In many Asian societies, Christian claims are not entirely unfamiliar, yet faith is often evaluated through its embodied credibility rather than its propositional clarity. While evangelistic campaigns and public preaching have played significant historical roles, they do not always address the deeper existential, relational, and cultural concerns that shape daily life. Testimony, by contrast, communicates faith as lived reality rather than abstract assertion.

Moreover, testimony resonates deeply with Asia's narrative sensibilities. Buddhist stories of compassion, Hindu traditions of *bhakti* devotion, and Islamic narratives of disciplined piety all cultivate attentiveness to lived transformation. Within such contexts, Pentecostal testimony functions as a bridge – engaging shared experiential frameworks while bearing distinctive witness to the risen Christ. Testimony thus becomes dialogical rather than confrontational, inviting recognition before demanding assent.

At the same time, Asian Pentecostals are invited to broaden their understanding of testimony beyond individual conversion accounts. Communal and social testimonies – stories of families restored, communities reconciled, and villages renewed – are equally vital. Such narratives address Asia's evangelistic challenges not by multiplying messages but by deepening embodied witness. In this respect, Yong's emphasis resonates with Andrew Walls's translation principle, whereby the gospel inhabits diverse cultures without surrendering its transcendent claim.¹

Pentecost and Professions

Building on testimony, Yong argues that Pentecost also reconfigures the meaning of professions. Professions function both as public confessions of faith and as concrete practices through which believers serve society. The New Testament witness – from apostolic preaching to acts of generosity, hospitality, and charity – demonstrates that faith is professed not only verbally but through vocational practices. Professions thus become embodied testimonies that integrate belief and action within everyday life.

Drawing implicitly on Miroslav Volf's *Work in the Spirit*,² Yong situates professional life within a pneumatological horizon. The same Spirit who bestows tongues also distributes charisms that animate labour, creativity, and service. Pentecost therefore expands the scope of Christian witness, affirming that

¹ Andrew F. Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Orbis Books, 1996), 26-27.

² Miroslav Volf, *Work in the Spirit: Toward a Theology of Work* (Wipf and Stock, 2001), 9-37.

professional competence, ethical integrity, and social contribution are arenas in which faith becomes visible and transformative.

From an Asian perspective, however, this insight invites further nuance. Unlike Western contexts that historically struggled to reconcile sacred and secular domains, many Asian worldviews already assume that all of life is spiritually charged. Workplaces are rarely perceived as neutral spaces. Factories, markets, and fields may be animated by competing spiritual forces – greed, exploitation, fear, or alternatively, compassion and solidarity. Consequently, the theological task for Asian Pentecostals is not merely to affirm the Spirit’s presence in work but to cultivate discernment between the Spirit of God and rival spirits that deform economic and social life.

This discernment naturally leads to questions of Pentecostal vocational ethics. If the Spirit empowers work, how should Spirit-filled believers labour within systems marked by corruption, bribery, and exploitation? What does faithfulness look like in economies sustained by unjust labour practices? Here Pentecostal theology can engage constructively with liberationist perspectives in Asia that emphasise structural sin and systemic injustice. Spirit-empowerment, in such contexts, must generate alternative practices of justice, compassion, and resistance rather than merely personal success or career advancement.

Pentecost and Vocations

Yong further develops a Pentecost theology of vocation by framing calling as fundamentally Spirit-initiated and Spirit-sustained. Drawing on Terry Cross,³ he understands vocation as encompassing both salvation and a Spirit-shaped way of life. Engaging Volf,⁴ Yong highlights vocational pluralism – both synchronic, where believers hold multiple callings simultaneously, and diachronic, where callings shift across a lifetime. Pentecost thus affirms vocation as dynamic, relational, and open to continual renewal.

Asian realities both affirm and complicate this vision. On the one hand, vocational pluralism resonates strongly with widespread bi-vocational ministry. Many pastors and church leaders across Asia sustain their ministries through teaching, business, or manual labour. What Yong articulates theologically is, for many, already an economic and pastoral reality shaped by necessity rather than choice.

On the other hand, Asian Pentecostal cultures often esteem vocational singularity, particularly full-time pastoral ministry marked by sacrificial faithfulness. Leaders who persist in ministry despite poverty are honoured as exemplars of devotion and perseverance. A robust Asian Pentecostal theology of vocation must therefore hold together both plural callings and singular dedication as authentic expressions of the Spirit’s leading rather than privileging one at the expense of the other.

³ Terry L. Cross, *Serving the People of God’s Presence: A Theology of Ministry* (Zondervan, 2000), 45-63.

⁴ Miroslav Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Eerdmans, 1998), 239-44.

A further dimension is widespread joblessness. In contexts of chronic unemployment, vocational choice is often absent. For many, the Spirit's promised newness is experienced not as vocational diversity but as hope, endurance, and daily sustenance. Here Pentecostal theology may learn from ecumenical traditions that emphasise solidarity with the poor and the unemployed. Engaging insights from liberation theology, one may argue that the Spirit calls the church to a preferential solidarity with the marginalised, ensuring that vocation remains a theology of hope rather than exclusion.

Conclusion

Yong concludes with the prayer, "Come, Holy Spirit, breathe upon us a fresh Pentecost." From an Asian Pentecostal perspective, this is more than a plea for renewal; it is an invitation to discernment, justice, and hope. A fresh Pentecost in Asia will not be measured by numerical growth alone but by testimonies that resonate within cultural narratives, professions that embody ethical resistance, and vocations that honour both pluralism and singularity while speaking hope into joblessness.

In this way, Yong's proposals open not only a path for Pentecostal theology but also a conversation with broader currents in world Christianity. Asian Pentecostals, by engaging these dialogues, can contribute distinctive insights shaped by pluralism, poverty, and perseverance. The Spirit poured out at Pentecost still speaks in many tongues and works through many professions. Our calling is to listen with care, discern with faithfulness, and testify with courage in a continent longing for a new Pentecost.

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