



**Pentecostal spirituality in dialogue with early Fathers of the Eastern Orthodox tradition: A question of continuity**

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Keywords:	Spirituality, Eastern church, classical pentecostal movement, church fathers, Gregory of Nazianzus or the Theologian, Isaac the Syrian (of Nineveh), Symeon the New Theologian
Abstract:	<p>The pentecostal movement originated as a primitivist-restorationist movement that perceived itself in continuity with the spirituality practices of the early Church, as an attempt to re-establish basic features of New Testament Christianity. The claim to stand in continuity with the early Church necessitates an investigation into the spirituality presupposed by early Fathers of the church. The investigation is defined by the writings of three Fathers from the Eastern (Orthodox) tradition, Gregory of Nazianzus or the Theologian (329-389 CE), Isaac the Syrian (of Nineveh; 613-c. 700 CE) and Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022 CE) because their writings are characterised by their interest in developing the outlines of mystical spirituality and lending itself to a comparison with contemporary pentecostal spirituality. To effectively compare contemporary pentecostal spiritual experiences with the Eastern mystical tradition would require that the mystical experiences described by the Eastern Fathers be replicated which is not possible. However, when one is exposed to the writings of the Fathers until the means of expression and the spiritual experiences are understood, it seems that the experiences show enough similarities that one may speak of continuity between the different experiences. Pentecostal and mystical hermeneutics seem to build its foundation upon the experiential aspect of theology; it is impossible to talk about God without the experience of fellowship with him. Worship provides the vehicle for theology, and theology serves basically as a commentary on the worship which has always been the central reality. The Spirit is taken as the starting point and prayer is at the heart of mystical and pentecostal spirituality; it is impossible to know God and the things of God without prayer.</p>

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3 **Pentecostal spirituality in dialogue with early Fathers of the Eastern Orthodox tradition: A**  
4 **question of continuity**  
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7 **Significance of work**  
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9 The classical pentecostal movement has, from its founding at the beginning of the twentieth century,  
10 often been characterised as a primitivist movement with an explicit restorative dimension. The article  
11 investigates the relation between contemporary pentecostal spirituality and the spirituality of three of  
12 the early Fathers of the Eastern Orthodox Church, and concludes that apart from differences in  
13 doctrine and praxis there are fundamental areas of agreement, permitting pentecostals to a continuity  
14 with the early Church.  
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19 **Authors' contribution**  
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21 was the sole author.  
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23 **Abstract**  
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42 prayer is at the heart of mystical and pentecostal spirituality; it is impossible to know God and the  
43 things of God without prayer.  
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54 **Key words**  
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56 Spirituality, Eastern church, classical pentecostal movement, church fathers.  
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### Introduction

The pentecostal movement originated and has been functioning from the self-perception that it existed in continuity with the spirituality practices of the early Church. In historical terms, the movement is to be evaluated as a reaction against the institutional church's perceived formalism, spiritual deadness, slackness and lifeless worship, as a restorationist and primitivistic urge to regain (something of) the enthusiasm and life of the earliest Church and as an attempt to re-establish basic features of New Testament Christianity (McClung 2012:4; Castelo 2017:57).<sup>1</sup> The claim to stand in continuity with the early Church necessitates an investigation into the spirituality presupposed by early Fathers of the Church (pentecostals who in recent works associate pentecostal and mystical theology are Albrecht 1999:238-240; Chan 2000; Coulter 2001:38-64; Poloma 2003; Smith 2010:77; a non-pentecostal of Baptist and Quaker background who extensively discusses a possible connection is Cox 1995:10, 14). In this article, such an investigation is mainly limited to the writings of three Fathers from the Eastern (Orthodox) tradition, Gregory of Nazianzus (the exact location of which is not known; Hardy 2017) or the Theologian (329-389), Isaac the Syrian (of Nineveh; 613-c. 700) and Symeon the New Theologian (949-1022), nicknamed the 'Enthusiastic Zealot' (Egan 1991:144). The motivation for choosing these three authors is that their writings are characterised by their interest in developing the outlines of mystical spirituality.<sup>2</sup>

First it is necessary to provide a working definition of spirituality. Spirituality can be described in a religious context as lived and experienced faith (De Villiers 2015:642), and the spiritual practices necessary to lead a life of dedication to God (McGinn 1992:xv-xvi; 2008). Spirituality functions in a space wider than the intellectual, to include 'the whole of one's spiritual or religious experience, one's beliefs, convictions, and patterns of thought, one's emotions and behaviour in respect to what is ultimate, or God' (Carr 1988:202-202; cf. Alexander 1980:247-257). Classical pentecostalism represents a diverse movement with various forms but it shares the outline of a spirituality consisting of specific religious practices and social behaviours, an emphasis on individual religious experiences and certain perceptions of the world (Anderson 1987:229-235; Spittler 1988:800-809; Wacker 1987:16-21).<sup>3</sup> Pentecostal spirituality consists of a belief system that accentuates an understanding that 'gifts of the Spirit', including the subjective religious experience of 'Spirit baptism', appear and

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<sup>1</sup> This does not imply that the early pentecostal movement did not recognise charismatic signs in other Christian movements. They ground their experiences and beliefs within the continuous story of the Christian church and not simply within first-century happenings (Burgess 1991:8).

<sup>2</sup> Mystical figures and movements have largely been on the edges of the theological mainstream as it has typically been understood, especially since the modern era. The question to be asked is, are these figures and movements just tangential and highly insignificant in a religion that is concerned with something else or should Christianity at its core be understood as a mystical faith? (Castelo 2017:52). In the post-Constantinian church a mystical approach to Christianity represents a minority view. However, much of the language, happenings and practices of the first Christians (as e.g. in the farewell discourses in John's Gospel, the events on the Day of Pentecost in Acts, early practices of baptism and eucharist, and the formulation of the trinity and the incarnation) are pervaded with mystical motifs. The reason why these three Fathers are chosen is because of the clarity of their thought and its immediate relevance for pentecostal practice.

<sup>3</sup> Cox (1995:14) typifies pentecostalism as 'the most experiential branch of Christianity'.

operate as normative in the life of the pentecostal churches, a conviction that informs all of pentecostal religious experiences and expressions (Albrecht 2014:1).<sup>4</sup>

#### Pentecostal spirituality as an encounter with God

Pentecostal spirituality has been defined as the lived experience of a particular configuration of beliefs, practices and sensibilities that orient the spirituality's beliefs and that allows the believer to grow in a personal relationship with the Spirit of God. Land (1993:18) emphasises that pentecostalism cannot, and should not, be simply identified with a rationalist or scholastic type of evangelicalism. It exists in continuity but differentiating discontinuity with other Christian spiritualities.<sup>5</sup> Distinctive implicit values govern pentecostal spirituality and Spittler (1988:804-806) describes it as individual experience, orality, spontaneity, otherworldliness and a commitment to biblical authority.<sup>6</sup> What follows is a summary of the qualities that characterise pentecostal spirituality based on these values.

#### Encountering God supernaturally

Pentecostal churches are characterised by highly expressive forms of worship and liturgy that express a spirituality that is nourished by its rituals, implying that the experiential is essential in understanding its spirituality. Albrecht (1992:108) argues that this emphasis requires pentecostal spirituality to be situated within the Christian mystical tradition.<sup>7</sup> He asserts that though they might seem largely unaware, pentecostals share in a rich heritage of Christian mysticism that can be defined as the direct intuition or experience of God; and the mystic as a person who has, to a greater or lesser degree, such a direct experience - one whose religion and life are centred, not merely on an accepted belief or practice, but on what they regard as first-hand personal knowledge (Underhill 1925:10).<sup>8</sup> The mystic

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<sup>4</sup> Burns (1998:117) describes it as an experiential necessity, of the journey of the soul within the Christian life, and the reception of divine communication in the form of dreams and visions. Cox (1995:70-71) observes that among pentecostals, Spirit baptism does not only change their religious affiliation or their way of worship but it changes the way they see the world. 'Spirit baptism was not just an initiation rite, it was a mystical encounter. That is why they sometimes sounded like Saint Theresa of Avila or Saint John of the Cross, although they had probably never heard of either one'. He (1995:204) also later mentions Catherine of Sienna and the connection with the experience of contemporary pentecostals.

<sup>5</sup> In terms of human agency and perseverance, it is more Arminian than Calvinist; in its appreciation of the 'third use of the Law' to guide Christian growth and conduct it is more Calvinist than Lutheran; in its understanding of spirituality as perfection and participation in the divine life it is more Eastern than Western; it is more Catholic than Protestant in emphasising sanctification-transformation more than forensic justification; but more Protestant than Catholic in the conviction that the Word is the authority over the church; and in its origins and its concern for peace it is more Anabaptist than magisterial Reformation churches (Land 1993:18).

<sup>6</sup> These characteristics are at times combined with the unpredictable, sometimes uncontrolled urges of the Spirit that can pose challenges to the good order of a worship service and may lead unbelievers to think that the Christians are out of their mind (1 Cor 14:23).

<sup>7</sup> Castelo (2017:53), however, is correct in assuming that many, if not most, pentecostals would hesitate to identify themselves as modern-day mystics. However, when they reject the division between spirituality and theology and seek instead a genuine interface between the two, with each conditioning the other in a mutually authenticating way, it indicates how they think about God-knowledge. God-knowledge for them is not so much cultivated through actions of the intellect as it is through holistic engagement. These features of the language of mysticism that they utilise contribute toward a richer understanding of the pentecostal ethos of God-knowledge.

<sup>8</sup> 'Mysticism' is defined as 'a search for and experience of immediacy with God. The mystic is not content to know *about* God, he longs for union with God... Yet the search for God, or the ultimate, for His sake, and an

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3 is the person for whom God and Christ are not merely objects of belief, but living facts  
4 experimentally known at first-hand, leading to a life based on this conscious communion with God.  
5 Underhill's definition characterises the dimensions of pentecostal spirituality (Albrecht 2014:3)  
6 although it must be admitted that if the term 'mystical' is to be of any use to pentecostals, it will have  
7 to be conceived, appropriated and applied largely in emic (insider) ways (Castelo 2017:59).<sup>9</sup>  
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11 The pentecostal worship service is designed to provide a context for the mystical experience of an  
12 encounter with the divine, an encounter that is mediated by the sense of the immediate divine  
13 presence.<sup>10</sup> Its purpose is to sensitise the congregants to the presence of the divine as a framing  
14 context for mystical experiences of God. The worship leader invites congregants to enter into the  
15 presence of the Lord, and the congregation expects to have an awareness of the distinct divine  
16 presence. Music and ritual actions like lifting their hands, bowing, dancing and to flip flags function  
17 as icons or windows into the reality of the divine. The exuberance of praises often melts into the mode  
18 of contemplation, where another dimension of the divine is encountered.<sup>11</sup>  
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24 Nearly every spiritual tradition in history teaches that the reality religious symbols strive to express  
25 ultimately defy even the most exalted human language, a deficiency corrected by the inspired speech  
26 that results from Spirit baptism (Cox 1995:92). 'It seems ironic that pentecostalism, the religion of the  
27 poor and the unlettered, should in this respect be closer to the most sublime of mysticism than are the  
28 more respectable denominations that sometimes look down on it...It is precisely this ragtag religion  
29 from across the tracks that is now bearing the mystical torch with most vigor' (Cox 1995:92-93).  
30 Pentecostal congregants respond to the sense and symbols of divine presence that signify the presence  
31 of the Spirit. The liturgy is based on the notion of a dialogic relationship between God and humans  
32 that is interpreted as necessary and normative for the Christian life.<sup>12</sup> They respond 'in their hearts'  
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40 unwillingness to be satisfied with anything less than Him; the search for immediacy with this object of the  
41 soul's longing: this would seem to be the heart of mysticism' (Louth 1981:xv). Louth is a respected Orthodox  
42 scholar. Cox (1995:95-96) locates pentecostalism within the larger framework of religious phenomenology and  
43 links it to similar traditions not in terms of theological explanations but in the searing realisation that the reality  
44 of God utterly transcends our puny capacity to describe it. The roots of mysticism lie in the fundamental  
45 conviction that human beings are *homo religiosus*, that humans are religious at their core and develop a primal  
46 spirituality to meet that need.

47 <sup>9</sup> 'For widely employed language to be useful for specific ends, it must be deliberately and determinedly  
48 limited' (Castelo 2017:59).

49 <sup>10</sup> Castelo (2017:65) argues that 'encounter' is an important motif found regularly in pentecostal descriptions of  
50 the essence of their spirituality. One must encounter and be encountered by the mystery of the triune God so as  
51 to be captivated, moved and struck by the Trinity's beauty and glory, a dynamic where 'I-Thou' is at work  
52 (Buber 1970).

53 <sup>11</sup> 'Contemplation' is used deliberately because of its utilisation in Eastern theology. It shares with the orthodox  
54 church a term that refers to 'the affective, loving impulse' as well as the 'intellectual or knowing impulse'  
55 (McIntosh 1998:11) where contemplation is a free and clear vision of the mind fixed upon the manifestation of  
56 wisdom in suspended wonder (Richard of St. Victor's definition; Sherman 2014:209). Contemplation has an  
57 intensity and focus that is outwardly directed, it recalls the infinite and superabundant riches of the divine  
58 mystery and it leads to an expansive and richly textured understanding (wisdom) (Ford & Stanton 2003:2-3).

59 <sup>12</sup> In the same way, Symeon the New Theologian appeals to his own mystical experience as normative for all.  
60 He is sure of his experience because he ascribes it to the work of the Spirit as he also maintains that his writings

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3 and with their bodies, by way of agreement when they reply with ‘hallelujah’ and ‘amen’, and in their  
4 actions. Pentecostal spirituality does not allow participants to remain passive. Their spirituality is  
5 characterised by a responsiveness to their God and illustrated by their way of talking and they  
6 (perceive that they) hear from God and speak to him. They are touched by God and they meet with  
7 God in a life-changing transformational way. At the same time, they experience God as a mystery  
8 whose immanence hides his transcendence that can be described only in noncontrastive and  
9 noncomparative terms (Tanner 1988:45-48). The God who reveals himself cannot be contained in  
10 human language and he has to make himself known in order to be known; the initiative must come  
11 from his side as a truly self-subsistent Other and not a projection of one’s desires or a form of wish  
12 fulfilment (Louth 1978:2). Knowing God is not a human achievement but a kind of participation in  
13 grace (Castelo 2017:64).  
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15 Wacker (1984:356) speaks of a thoroughly supernaturalistic conceptual horizon that characterised  
16 early pentecostalism.<sup>13</sup> The supernatural intervention of the Spirit can be experienced when, for  
17 instance, somebody brings a word of knowledge that reveals something that is perceived as  
18 unknowable apart from divine insight. A person may ask for prayer and the one ministering the prayer  
19 may receive insight about the circumstances of the person as well as the possible solution to the  
20 problem it poses, symbolising in-breaking of the supernatural. In a service, excited believers may  
21 deliver testimonies of healings and other miracles, creating a heightened sense of the presence of the  
22 Spirit and the expectation in congregants that they are going to see God at work in the course of the  
23 service. Cox (1995:71) notes that a ‘magical realism’ imbues many pentecostal testimonies, shattering  
24 the cognitive packaging in many cases. Pentecostal spirituality emphasises the supernatural (Albrecht  
25 2014:29). The boundary between natural and supernatural becomes permeable, and mundane elements  
26 of life are envisioned as the territory for supernatural exploits with signs, wonders, and miracles  
27 becoming a part of daily life, as Albrecht (2014:30) argues. He refers to Spittler (1988:807) who uses  
28 the term ‘an overwhelming by the Holy Spirit’ to describe the most fundamentally agreed upon  
29 theological experience among pentecostals; the overwhelming experience of God in the Spirit is  
30 something that pentecostals believe they share in common (McDonnell & Montague 1991:9, 27-28).  
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48 were inspired by the Spirit. His archenemy, Archbishop Stephen of Nicomedia, branded these claims as ignorant  
49 and obscurantist enthusiasm that denied ecclesiastical authority and jurisdiction. Eventually Symeon was  
50 banished in 1009 to the small town of Paloukiton. When both the Emperor and Patriarch exonerated him and  
51 offered him an archbishopric, he declined and continued in his life of asceticism, contemplation and writing (Egan  
52 1991:146).

53 <sup>13</sup> ‘Supernatural’ is understood by Albrecht (2014:30) as any perceived action or grace that goes beyond natural  
54 understanding or is perceived to have a divine or supernatural cause or source. The believer perceives that God  
55 has intervened in some way; the perceived intervention reveals the supernatural. It can be in the form of a  
56 healing, intervention in a financial crisis, acquiring a job, accomplishing a task that is believed to be beyond  
57 natural capabilities, etc. These and similar examples reveal the subjective interpretation of pentecostal believers;  
58 for them the ‘supernatural’ has penetrated their daily world and divine involvement, and describes the  
59 parameters of their experience as human beings.  
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### Encounter with God in a faith community

The communal experience of God in Pentecostal circles is typified by democratic-participatory forms where anyone can participate forms the basis of Pentecostal spirituality (Robins 1986:1), and includes participation of members in oral exchange (like greeting each other or giving testimonies) and the kinaesthetic/music ministry (Albrecht 2014:12). At the same time however, pentecostals are individualists in the sense that the essential quality of their experience with God requires a personal experience of spirituality. The communal characteristic of their spirituality is however an elemental and determinative component of their spirituality. The ecclesial dimension is crucial because it involves a dynamic wider than individuals and their subjective experiences. It denotes a context in which 'I' in relation to 'Thou' can be identified, understood, shaped and potentially transformed as a result (Castelo 2017:67). This describes the notion of spirituality as not something that a believer has, but a new pattern of personal growth taking place in the community of believers (McIntosh 1998:6-7).<sup>14</sup>

Social historian Martin Marty (1976:106, 203) characterises pentecostal worship as demonstrating distinctly dramatic social behaviour; its boundaries shape pentecostal ethos and spirituality and function to define the movement and leading to a sense of community (*communitas*). Their shared participation in worship attracts and retains pentecostal worship and forms an integral element in the worship service. The worship experience to an important extent also forms each individual's personal spirituality.

Their participatory, democratic and communal experience of God is served by biblical symbols that determine the liturgy, language and life-styles of pentecostals. They consider themselves 'people of the book'; the challenge that their emphases on the gifts and revelation of the Spirit brings challenges the way they read the Bible, with a fundamentalist literalism. In the interplay at times some pentecostals border on bibliolatry while others over-emphasise the move and voice of the Spirit. Their spirituality exists in oral form (Hollenweger 1986:551) with ad hoc liturgies and narratives of testimonies and praise. In part, this explains its success in the South where literacy is a luxury (Smith 2012:134). Pentecostals use also the kinaesthetic/musical medium as a fundamental form of transmission (Hawthorne 1988:3-20; cf. Cox 1995) and their bodies as instruments of worship (Hollenweger 1975:77).

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<sup>14</sup> McIntosh (1998:7) asserts that spirituality is inherently mutual, communal, practical and oriented towards the God who makes himself known precisely in the new pattern of life called church. Spirituality presents a culture that promotes the honing of particular capacities and skills in which discernment and the formulation of the meaning of mystical encounters can occur over time.



Cox (1995:81)<sup>15</sup> ascribes the success of the classical pentecostal movement to its ability to speak to the spiritual emptiness of our time by reaching beyond the level of creed and ceremony into the core of human religiousness, into what Cox terms ‘primal spirituality’, that largely unprocessed nucleus of the psyche in which the unending struggle for a sense of purpose and significance goes on. In the process, pentecostalism has helped people recover an ‘elemental spirituality’ that consists of inspired or ‘primal speech’ (speaking in tongues,<sup>16</sup> ecstatic utterance of prophecy, language of the heart), ‘primal piety’ (mystical experiences, dreams, visions, trances and other ‘archetypal’ religious expressions) and ‘primal hope’ (consisting of an apocalyptic expectation of a new world) (Cox 1995:82-83). Cox concludes that the implication is that pentecostalism’s focus on primality demonstrates that it is part of the larger and longer history of human religiousness that works from the universal, deep sense of human beings as *homo religiosus*.

#### Encounter with God as inspiring Spirit of power and the Bible

Pentecostals also experience God as a powerful and empowering Spirit who manifests divine power by way of healings, deliverances and other signs and wonders. The manifestation of the Spirit’s power serves to prove that God is involved in the affairs of humankind, although it is primarily experienced in a personal way, as the involvement of a personal God. Pentecostals love to testify of their initial and ongoing experience of Spirit baptism and guidance which is often presented as profoundly personal and intimate. The Spirit empowers them to a life of service but also makes Jesus more real, allowing them to sense his presence in them, guiding them and empowering them in opportunities for service. Empowering experiences are found in their participation in the worship and liturgy of the worship service with its celebrative singing and times of prayer where everybody participates with many praying in tongues and during the altar response where some request prayer and others provide assistance. Congregants are encouraged to pray with those in need, and charismatic phenomena frequently accompany such prayers, empowering believers. They are also involved in missionary,

<sup>15</sup> Harvey Cox is the Hollis Research Professor of Divinity at Harvard Divinity School. In an earlier book, *The secular city*, Cox (1965) was sceptical about the future of Christianity. In his *Fire from heaven* (1995), Cox admits that he paid too much attention to social prognosticators, given the upsurge of religiosity across the globe since the 1960s, particularly of the pentecostal and charismatic variety. As an established theologian outside the pentecostal fold, Cox’s critical yet sympathetic reading of pentecostalism led to its recognition by the establishment in a way that affirmed that the pentecostal voice mattered, that pentecostals have something to say and should be considered seriously. Given their persistent marginalisation, pentecostals showed their appreciation for Cox’s amicability, curiosity and humility (Castelo 2017:54). *Fire from heaven* helped pentecostalism to gain a foothold within the theological academy, perhaps more than any other factor.

<sup>16</sup> Cf. Cox’s (1995:100-101) comment that glossolalia relates to what he calls the ‘ecstasy deficit’ that contemporary Western societies cultivate because they have both shielded themselves from their deeper registers and resisted lowering their perceptual barriers. These barriers were erected between the cognitive and emotional sides of life, between rationality and symbol, between the conscious and unconscious states of the mind (Cox 1995:87). Through glossolalia, pentecostalism taps into a deep substratum of human religiosity and signifies another radical departure from evangelical or fundamentalist protestantism in which neither glossolalia nor links to other religions are condoned. By using the biblical framework, pentecostals allow for a familiarity to include this broader, numinous element because the Spirit of God needs no mediators but is available to anyone in an intense, immediate and internal way (Cox 1995:91).

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3 evangelistic and other service ventures as part of their empowerment by the Spirit who in their  
4 perception has commissioned them because empowerment seeks more than self-edification. They  
5 understand the commission of Jesus to serve the world as their personal commission and they expect  
6 the Spirit to empower them to accomplish that mission 'in the power of the Holy Spirit'.<sup>17</sup>  
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10 The powerful work of the Spirit is interpreted in terms of the Biblical precedent. 'A clear mark of a  
11 classical Pentecostal is the ubiquitous presence of a Bible in hand, well-marked' (Spittler 1988:806).  
12 Their regard for biblical authority, coupled with an inclination to take the words of Scripture at face  
13 value and literally, illuminates their practices and beliefs.<sup>18</sup>  
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### 16 Eastern Orthodox spirituality at the hand of early Church Fathers

17 While Western theology to some extent neglected pneumatology at the cost of Christocentrism,<sup>19</sup> it  
18 has always formed an integral part of Eastern theological thinking, not only as a doctrine but forming  
19 an expected experiential aspect of Christian living. For the Eastern Fathers, pneumatology is  
20 inseparable from Christology and ecclesiology in all spheres of Christian living and teaching  
21 (Zizioulas 2006:12).<sup>20</sup> The East did not accept the doctrine of the total depravity of human beings who  
22 are unable to help themselves and who are therefore totally dependent on the intervention of Christ, as  
23 formulated by Tertullian and Augustine. God created human beings in his image and his goal is to  
24 restore humanity to its original perfection; the Holy Spirit serves to restore natural relationships  
25 between God, humanity and the rest of creation (Zaprometova 2009:7).<sup>21</sup> This process is referred to as  
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34 <sup>17</sup> Barrett 1993, Synan 1986, Wagner 1969 and Wilson 1993 are a few of the pentecostal theologians who  
35 discuss the innovation, adaptability and action to produce new patterns of religious life.

36 <sup>18</sup> As Spittler (1988:806-807) illustrates, many of the marginal eccentricities found in pentecostalism can be  
37 understood as contemporised forms of biblical precedents, such as visits by angels, 'Jesus Only', visionary tours  
38 of heaven and hell, miraculous Spirit transport, raising of hands, proxy prayer, dancing in the Spirit and falling  
39 under the power.

40 <sup>19</sup> Moltmann (1994:1) calls pneumatology the Cinderella of Western theology.

41 <sup>20</sup> The Christian East's emphasis on the Spirit has at times led to the charge that it is pneumocentric while the  
42 East blames the West of an extreme Christocentrism. Burgess (1989:1) distinguishes between Eastern and  
43 Western theological approaches in the area of the doctrine of the Trinity (the Cappadocian Fathers underlined  
44 the uniqueness of the functions of the three divine hypostases while the West insisted upon the *filioque*),  
45 anthropology and, subsequently, soteriology. It must be kept in mind that the cenobitical and eremitical life  
46 originated in the East. Its influence reached the Western church through Bishop Athanasius's biography of  
47 Antony the Hermit. Athanasius, the bishop of Alexandria, was exiled by Arian Christians and visited Treves in  
48 335 and Rome in 340 before turning south and hiding in the Thebiad (Meisel & Del Mastro 1975:17. There he  
49 wrote the *Life of Antony* and Evagrius translated it into Latin by 360. In time the appeal of desert asceticism and  
50 the cenobitic life caught hold in Italy and by the start of the fifth century several monasteries were already  
51 flourishing. Especially (the legendary) Martin of Tours, Augustine of Hippo and John Cassian propagated the  
52 monastic life. The word *desert* has its origins in Latin: *desertum*, 'something left waste', from *deserere*, to  
53 'leave, forsake'. The Greeks have a word for desert, *eremos*, which means 'abandonment'. The word *hermit* is a  
54 derivation (Chumley 2014:13). Bishop Youannes, General Bishop and General Secretary to Pope Shenouda III,  
55 former patriarch of the Coptic Church in Cairo, said in 2007 that every person in the world needs the calmness  
56 of the desert, not only the monks or the nuns because in the crowdedness of the world we don't see ourselves,  
57 and we don't see God. But when we are in the holy places, we begin to look at ourselves, at our shortages,  
58 defaults and the deepness of our relation with God and we feel and hear God (Chumely 2014:15).

59 <sup>21</sup> For instance, Gregory of Nazianzus writes, 'The soul grows by its constant participation in that which  
60 transcends it; and yet the perfection in which the soul shares remains the same, and is always discovered by the

re-creation, sanctification, transfiguration, unification with God or deification (Φέοσις). The last term might be misleading; in Eastern theology, it does not refer to human beings ever sharing the divine nature, but rather to the constant process, extending through eternity, of unifying with God and his will, as Zaprometova (2009:7) argues. She interprets deification as the result of receiving the Holy Spirit and experiencing his power in the life of the church that enables Christians to develop the spiritual fruit (καρπὸς τοῦ Πνεύματός) and participate in the sacraments which gives rise to participation in the divine nature (Zaprometova 2009:7).<sup>22</sup> Eastern Christian thought emphasises that theology is not limited to cognitive action but requires the experience of encountering the Spirit. For the Eastern Christian tradition there is no gap between spirituality and theology (Lossky 1991:9).<sup>23</sup> The fourth and fifth centuries witnessed the great debates in the Christian church and the doctrine of the Spirit also received attention. However, in the East the experience of the Spirit was always interpreted as a personal manifestation of faith, making theology accessible to everyone (Maximov 2006:207). The obvious agreement with pentecostal spirituality as described in the first part of the article necessitates the question whether the spiritual experiences to which contemporary pentecostals are testifying might be found in the writings of (some of) the Eastern Church Fathers (Zaprometova 2009:8).

### Prayer

For Philo of Alexandria, Christians long to become like God, a goal that is accomplished by way of a religious ecstasy<sup>24</sup> that is accompanied by freedom from the sensory and temporal when one directly contemplates God.<sup>25</sup> In contrast to other church fathers, he associates ecstasy with an intellectual

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soul to be transcendent to the same degree' (Danielou 1995:198). Symeon the New Theologian presents the Spirit as Sanctifier, the One who effects Christian ascetism and holiness, through whom Christ speaks directly to the human heart. Christ is conceived spiritually and substantially in the mystic by way of the Holy Spirit (Egan 1991:147).

<sup>22</sup> Burns (1998:125) explains that Eastern Fathers view the Godhead through the Holy Spirit, the foremost accessible part of the Trinity. The activity of the Holy Spirit produces the 'air of the Godhead'. A similar understanding is shown by Ephrem who regards the Spirit as the 'air stream' or the 'Holy Wind' that provides uplift to the beating of the wings of the soul. The cleansing power of the Godhead is released through prayer, and the soul in such a state communes with God in the 'heavenly frame of thought' and in the power of the 'air of the Godhead', receiving visions and dreams.

<sup>23</sup> Palmer, Sherrard & Ware (1995:434, 436-437) is of the opinion that theology in the Eastern tradition denotes far more than the learning about God and religious doctrine acquired through academic study. It signifies active and conscious participation in, or perception of, the realities of the divine world, that is, the realisation of spiritual knowledge or knowledge inspired by God as the result of contemplation and immediate spiritual perception. To be a theologian presupposes the attainment of the state of stillness and dispassion as concomitant of pure and undistracted prayer. The true theologian is one who has been taught by God through mystical experience of the mystery of the Trinity's indwelling in the soul (Egan 1991:144).

<sup>24</sup> For Palmer, Sherrard & Ware (1995:429-430), 'ecstasy' refers to a 'going out' from oneself and from all created things towards God, under the influence of *eros* or intense longing. One cannot attain ecstasy by oneself or by own efforts; only when one is drawn out of oneself by the power of God's love can one experience it. It implies passing beyond all the conceptual thinking of the discursive reason. Although it may be accompanied in extraordinary cases by a state of trance or a loss of normal consciousness, such psychophysical accompaniments are in no way essential.

<sup>25</sup> For further discussion of Philo, cf. Ivanitzky (1911:588). Burns (1998:121) argues that the Platonic concept of the empowerment of the soul by contemplation of beauty was utilised by the early church to describe the

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3 effort rather than with activities like ascetic deeds and charity or other commandments that assist in  
4 reaching mystical illumination. Fellowship of a human being with God is a mystery between God and  
5 a person, hidden from others. Prayer is primarily a meeting with the living God.  
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8 Gregory the Theologian's prayers are filled with deep personal love for Christ.<sup>26</sup> The goal and final  
9 point of prayer is to realise God's image, a *Leitmotiv* in the Eastern tradition. To receive the vision of  
10 God is to know the incomprehensible God. A small group experiences the vision of God during their  
11 earthly lives but many more will experience it in the world to come. Only those who purify  
12 themselves and reach the state of deification and remain in constant prayer may experience the vision  
13 of God. Such a person sees God only from 'behind', referring to the experience of his mystical  
14 presence. However, all believers may feel the presence of God. Unification with God is impossible  
15 without prayer, is Isaac of Nineveh's conclusion. Isaac withdrew to desert solitude only five months  
16 after his episcopal consecration where he devoted himself to the study of Scriptures. He went blind  
17 because of the austerity of his lifestyle and he had to dictate his five treatises to his disciples. These  
18 treatises made a great impact on the monastic movements (Egan 1991:136). He describes how one  
19 should pray, attentively and with deep feeling and tears, with fervour and faith (Alfeyev 2000a:145).<sup>27</sup>  
20 Zaprometova (2009:8) argues that believers start with petitionary prayers where they bring their fears  
21 and worries to God and progress to spiritual prayer that consists of a gradual ascension to God that is  
22 characterised by a searching for his presence and grows into pure prayer and silence of mind,<sup>28</sup> the  
23 crown of prayer when nothing diverts the will of a person from turning to God and becoming united  
24 with his will (Alfeyev 2000a:221-224).<sup>29</sup> This prayer is surrounded by feelings of wonder and  
25 amazement and may even result in rapture of mind under the influence of the Spirit, and the sight of  
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37 empowerment of the soul by the contemplation of divine love and grace that leads to the Christian  
38 understanding of the 'flight from the world,' which is dependent upon the grace of God, together with a  
39 disciplined life, and above all, as part of the journey of the soul that must be experienced through prayer, as well  
40 bodily as activated through a life of austerity and self-control. Gregory of Nazianzus's work best illustrates the  
41 assimilation of the Platonic concepts involved. He regards mankind as having lost the 'wings of immortality'  
42 which they possessed in their original nature, and regards the rising of the soul to beyond the present world as a  
43 stage along the journey back to God (Gregory, Commentary on the Canticles: Sermon 15; Danielou 1995:284).  
44 Flight, for Gregory, is an image of the participation in the Godhead which for the Christian is a 'continuous and  
45 everlasting process'. Gregory states that, 'Once it is released from its earthly attachment, the soul becomes light  
46 and swift for its movement upward, soaring from below up to the heights' (Balas 1966:165; Ferguson 1973:59).  
47 The soul rises ever higher and will always make its flight yet higher by its desire for the heavenly things,  
48 straining ahead for what is to come.

49 <sup>26</sup> Prayers in the early Church were addressed to God the Father. The earliest extant prayers addressed to Christ  
50 the Son dates from the fifth century, in the era of the Christological controversies (Zaprometova 2009:10).  
51 Gregory was bishop of the small town of Nazianzus and is known as one of the founders of mystical theology in  
52 the Eastern church (House 2006:viii).

53 <sup>27</sup> When one contemplates God through prayer and practice and begins to deeply appreciate the many  
54 interventions and compassions of grace offered, the eyes are sometimes filled with tears, both of joy and of  
55 melancholy (Chumley 2014:11).

56 <sup>28</sup> Spittler (1988:805) admits that long pauses are uncommon in Pentecostals spirituality because Pentecostals do  
57 not consider silence a virtue. However, when the Spirit moves among people one regularly finds that silence  
58 descends until one or more perceive the guidance of the Spirit to do or say something.

59 <sup>29</sup> 'The saints of the age to come do not pray with prayer when their intellects have been swallowed up by the  
60 Spirit, but rather with awestruck wonder they dwell in that gladdening glory' (Isaac the Syrian 1991:142).

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3 Divine Light in a state of silence of peace that is called ecstasy (Lossky 1991:156).<sup>30</sup> One goes out of  
4 oneself and can no longer distinguish whether one exists in present time or in eternity due to the  
5 control and supervision of the Spirit ruling over the mind (Alfeyev 2000a:230). Reality is experienced  
6 through the power of the Spirit that stretches beyond human understanding and the soul is lifted up to  
7 meditation that results in the gift of spiritual vision (Alfeyev 2000a:232-233).  
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11 Symeon the New Theologian<sup>31</sup> speaks of his search for spiritual knowledge through prayer and how  
12 he was rewarded with the gifts of the Spirit (πνευματικῶν). As time went by, he experienced the  
13 Divine Light more and more frequently and intensely.<sup>32</sup> He mentions how he is praying in other  
14 tongues for long periods of time and how it sensitises his soul and he cries incessantly because of the  
15 growing awareness of the need for repentance (Alfeyev 2000a:601). His tears leads to purification and  
16 deification (Alfeyev 2000a:431). He asserts that when a person turns to God in prayer with bitter tears  
17 of repentance and grief, the process of transfiguration begins. And consolation only follows on a heart  
18 cleaned by the continuous work of the Spirit, leading to a vision of the Divine. This is always  
19 accompanied by many sweet tears that eventually results in the person becoming a light, as Exodus  
20 34:29 testifies about Moses when he leaves the mountain. The basis of Simon's theology is based  
21 exclusively on personal experience and the very revelation of God to him (Zaprometova 2009:21).<sup>33</sup>  
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### 30 Deification

31 Gregory of Nazianzus calls unification of a human being with God or deification the pinnacle of  
32 Christian life.<sup>34</sup> The way leading to deification is by loving God above all, as expressed in prayer,  
33 mystical experience or the ascension of the intellect<sup>35</sup> to God in prayerful meditation, and the  
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38 <sup>30</sup> In the Eastern church, effective prayer is always directed by the Spirit, and so the soul is transformed by grace  
39 (Burns 1998:123). The grace of the Holy Spirit, which is provided by the sacrifice of Christ, is dependant not  
40 upon an ascetic lifestyle alone, but upon prayer within that lifestyle (Pseudo-Macarius, quoted by Burns  
41 1998:124). Isaac the Syrian defines the goal of ecstatic contemplation of God in terms of the experience of a  
42 foreshadowing of the glories of heaven (Egan 1991:136).

43 <sup>31</sup> Symeon the New Theologian is one of only three saints of the Orthodox church to have been granted the title  
44 'theologian' (Sweet & Viola 2010:65) along with John the Evangelist and Gregory of Nazianzus. The term  
45 'theologian' is not to be understood in academic sense but rather signifies a person of prayer, who speaks about  
46 the vision of God on the basis of his own immediate experience (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware 1995:12-13). His  
47 disciple Nikitas wrote his biography; in modern times Archbishop Basil's (Krivosheyn 1996) biography  
48 provides the necessary information.

49 <sup>32</sup> For instance, Symeon recounts how one evening during his prayers he experienced a powerful vision of two  
50 radiant lights, one absorbed into the other. He interpreted the moment as a spiritual vision of how his spiritual  
51 father was interceding for him before Christ at the very moment he was making his own prayers. Another vision  
52 happened where he experienced Christ directly in a profoundly radiant light (Chumley 2014:41).

53 <sup>33</sup> In the words of Isaac the Syrian (1991:139), '...the intellect advances to other revelations which surpass the  
54 nature of man. In a word...all divine *theoria* and all the revelations of the Spirit which the saints receive in this  
55 world, and whatever gifts and revelations human nature can come to know in this life pass over to man'.

56 <sup>34</sup> The other term that Gregory uses consistently is adoption by God, contributing to the two terms becoming  
57 central concepts in Orthodox mysticism.

58 <sup>35</sup> With 'intellect' (*nous*) the Eastern mystical tradition refers to the highest faculty in human beings, through  
59 which – provided it is purified – they know God or the inner essences or principles of created things by direct  
60 apprehension or spiritual perception. It is to be distinguished from reason (*dianoia*). The intellect does not

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3 fulfilment of the commandments in the New Testament (Alfeyev 2000b:390).<sup>36</sup> Gregory asserts that a  
4 believer can become 'god' standing luminiferously in the presence of God, rejoicing with angels. This  
5 does not refer just to an intellectual ascension to God because it involves the whole of life. Deification  
6 is salvation of the entire person, a transfiguration and recreation of body, spirit and soul (Alfeyev  
7 2000b:386).<sup>37</sup> Deification is the pinnacle of knowledge of God, when such a person becomes a  
8 revelation of the Word of God to others, and it occurs when the incomprehensible God becomes as  
9 comprehensible as is possible for limited human nature to digest (Alfeyev 2000b:381).<sup>38</sup>  
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14 Symeon the New Theologian experienced ecstasy<sup>39</sup> throughout his whole life, leading to the  
15 experience of the revelation of divine light, the sensing of joy and sweetness, being free from self-  
16 consciousness and removal from the world's cares, relaxation of the body, and trembling  
17 (Zaprometova 2009:9).<sup>40</sup> This is however only the beginnings of a spiritual pilgrimage where the soul  
18 advances and eventually puts aside these temporary experiences in order to constantly experience the  
19 divine reality (Alfeyev 2000b:400-402). The encounter consists of the experience of the fire of love  
20 that stays within the person, eventually becoming the natural state of the person. Symeon sets this  
21 conscious mystical experience as the norm for every Christian; he even asks whether it is possible to  
22 call believers who did not have this experience Christians. The experience includes that one learns  
23 what is goodness and realising it through sobbing and tears in order to pursue purification, and on  
24 reaching the presence of God, to unite with him in fellowship (Krivosheyn 1996:181). As the mind  
25 progresses it approaches more and more to contemplation and sees more clearly what of the divine  
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33 function by formulating abstract concepts and then arguing on this basis to a conclusion reached through  
34 deductive reasoning, but it understands divine truth by means of immediate experience, intuition or 'simple  
35 cognition' (the term Isaac the Syrian prefers). The intellect dwells in the depths of the soul and constitutes the  
36 innermost aspect of the heart. The intellect is the organ of contemplation (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware 1995:432).  
37 Reason or mind refers in Eastern jargon to the discursive, conceptualising and logical faculty in human beings,  
38 the function of which is to draw conclusions or formulate concepts deriving from data provided either by  
39 revelation or spiritual knowledge and does not imply any direct apprehension or perception of the inner essences  
40 or principles of created beings, still less of divine truth itself. Such apprehension is beyond the scope of reason  
41 (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware 1995:434). The peculiar use of this term demonstrates what will be described later,  
42 that the Eastern mystical tradition utilises concepts in a specific way that can easily be misunderstood, causing a  
43 lack of understanding when Western people read the theology.

44 <sup>36</sup> It is a gift from God for the human being who prays in silence in order to begin a process of purity, which  
45 generates illumination, and which leads to deification (Chumley 2014:103).

46 <sup>37</sup> The importance of the body is emphasised by Symeon the New Theologian who writes, 'We awaken in  
47 Christ's body as Christ awakens our bodies...and everything that is hurt, everything that seemed to us dark,  
48 harsh, shameful, maimed, ugly, irreparably damaged, is in him transformed, recognized as whole, as lovely, and  
49 radiant in his light' (Symeon the New Theologian in Mitchell 1989:38-39).

50 <sup>38</sup> The importance of Gregory's concept of deification should be seen against his influence; for ten centuries he  
51 was the best-known theologian and the one most quoted in the Eastern church, and his writings were second  
52 only to the Bible itself. He directly influenced the other great mystic of Byzantium, Symeon the New  
53 Theologian (Zaprometova 2009:12).

54 <sup>39</sup> Gregory of Sinai writes, 'stillness is initiated by attentive waiting upon God, its intermediate stage is  
55 characterized by illuminative power and contemplation, and its final goal is ecstasy and the enraptured flight of  
56 the intellect towards God' (Chumley 2014:48).

57 <sup>40</sup> An insistence on the need for direct personal experience with the Holy Spirit in the life of each believer is one  
58 of the *leitmotifs* in Symeon's teaching. The heights of contemplation are accessible to anyone with genuine  
59 faith, whatever their outward circumstances, and not limited to professional contemplatives, he emphasises  
60 (Palmer, Sherrard & Ware 1995:13-14).

nature is un contemplated, the Being that is inaccessible to knowledge (Gregory of Nazianzus 2006:80, 105). True sight of God consists in this that the one who looks up to God never ceases in that desire (Gregory of Nazianzus 2006:104-105).

The goal of Christian life is first to experience ecstasy and as a result to be deified<sup>41</sup> as the final goal, consisting of a total transformation, also referred to by Symeon as a spiritual birth, a mystical resurrection or Spirit baptism (Zaprometova 2009:9).<sup>42</sup> When one experiences the Spirit's deification process it leads to one's perfection in love for the divine and love for the neighbour (Lossky 1991:160-161).<sup>43</sup> The followers of Symeon, Sergyi from Radonezh, Nilus of Sor and Seraphym of Sarov, describe the true goal of the Christian life as the acquisition of the Holy Spirit, forming the cornerstone of the Orthodox tradition, consisting of a personal mystical experience of a direct personal fellowship with God (Alfeyev 2000b:443).<sup>44</sup>

### Spiritual 'drunkenness'

Zaprometova (2009:9) reasons that Peter's (Acts 10:10) and Paul's (2 Cor 12:2-4) experiences with the Spirit can be called mystical ecstasy, amazement, wonder, rapture in God or being in the Spirit by the mystical tradition, an experience frequently associated with glossolalia and sometimes compared to drunkenness in the Bible (1 Sam 1:13-16; Acts 2:12-15; Eph 5:18). Isaac's Syriac word to describe the experience has been translated as 'amazement' by Alfeyev (2000a:396). This is accompanied by an overpowering joy, involuntary tears of peace and happiness, at times being left speechless and filled with amazing vision, the inability to pray that is a state above prayer, amazement when one perceives other creatures and being like one who has lost their senses because of wine (Alfeyev 2000a:259).

The image of drunkenness caused by wine is utilised by Isaac to describe the experience of the encounter with God and reflects the introduction to heavenly joy and pleasure in the kingdom

<sup>41</sup> Krivosheyn (1996:429) defines 'deification' in Symeon's parlance as the state of total transformation of a person by the Holy Spirit, when a person is following God's commandments, acquiring Christian virtues and becoming a participant of Christ's suffering.

<sup>42</sup> Symeon defines 'Spirit baptism' as the deepened awareness of sins committed after baptism, a deeper consciousness of Jesus as Lord and Saviour and the source of the habitual presence of Christ in the heart, often ecstatically (Egan 1991:147).

<sup>43</sup> In his lifetime Symeon already experienced opposition from institutional quarters, consisting of a controversy with Bishop Stephen of Nicomedia and resulting in Symeon's exile in 1009 CE. Their conflict was essentially a conflict between two approaches to theology, the abstract and philosophical theology of Stephen and the experiential and spiritual approach of Symeon, a clash between institutional and charismatic approaches. Symeon confronted nominal Christianity (civil religion), insisting that water baptism has no value without the baptised bearing the fruit of the Spirit. Official theology mostly ignored Symeon's writings; the monks of Mount Athos preserved his works (Zaprometova 2009:23-24).

<sup>44</sup> From this experience flows knowledge that goes far beyond our understanding, writes Gregory of Nyssa (2006:62). The Holy Spirit who reaches 'the depths of God' can answer questions such as 'What is the essence of God?', 'What was there before the creation?', 'What is there outside the visible world?' and "Why do things which happen happen?"

(Zaprometova 2009:9).<sup>45</sup> The body does not feel sorrows and the soul enters into the joy of the Spirit (Alfeyev 2000a:262). The experience is frequently associated with the Eucharist, in which the true love of God is revealed to man (Zaprometova 2009:9).

#### Comparison between the spirituality of the Eastern mystical tradition and classical pentecostalism

The Eastern mystical tradition utilises terminology in a unique fashion that requires proper knowledge of its theology to appreciate the use of those concepts. One such concept is 'deification', a term that sounds like 'New Age' philosophy to pentecostals. However, the term is qualified in Christian Eastern mysticism to refer to fellowship with God and the way towards this encounter with God through his Spirit and is described in terms of obedience to Christ's command to love God above all else and to love the neighbour as oneself, by prayerfully meditating on the Word, prayer and fasting. For the Christian East, *theosis* or deification is inseparable from a personal encounter with the Holy Spirit.<sup>46</sup> A person receives the new birth through water baptism, while deification is reached through liturgy and sacraments (Zaprometova 2009:9).

To effectively compare contemporary pentecostal spiritual experiences with the Eastern mystical tradition would require that the mystical experiences described by the Eastern Fathers be replicated which is not possible. The other option is to compare the descriptions of these experiences of ecstasy with those of contemporary pentecostals. As stated, the jargon or terms used to describe notions used by the Fathers form a barrier that needs further interpretation before such a comparison can be made. What is necessary is that one is exposed to the writings of the Fathers until one understands the means of expression and the spiritual experiences.<sup>47</sup> Then it seems that the experiences show enough similarities that one may speak of continuity between the different experiences,<sup>48</sup> a conclusion

<sup>45</sup> '...through such zealous and divine diligence and through his good conscience a man begins to be stirred to divine love and straightway he is made drunk by it as by wine; his limbs become limp, his mind stands still in awestruck wonder, and his heart is captivated by God. He becomes, as I said, like a man drunk with wine' (Isaac the Syrian 1991:139).

<sup>46</sup> In the West more attention was paid to the legal aspect of the doctrine of grace, with the development of terms such as justification, adoption, restoration, redemption and sanctification. *Theosis* refers to divinisation, or deification, or making divine by participation in the life of God. According to this conception, the life of God, given in Jesus Christ to the believer through the Holy Spirit increases in the experience of the believer through the knowledge of God and is later consummated in the resurrection of the believer when the power of sin and death, having been fully overcome by God's life, will lose hold over the believer forever (Chumley 2014:137).

<sup>47</sup> Another important factor is that Eastern experience is placed in the context of the monastery with customs that are strange to pentecostals, such as absolute obedience to the spiritual father, voluntary poverty and renunciation of the world, celibacy in many instances and denying one's earthly family (Symeon the New Theologian 1995:26-27). Cf., e.g., his remark, 'Be fully persuaded that after your entry into the monastery your parents and all your friends are dead; and regard solely God and the abbot as your father and mother' (Symeon the New Theologian 1995:54).

<sup>48</sup> The same is true of the experiences of the earliest church as described, e.g., in the Book of Acts. The description of the experiences of Spirit baptism needs to be interpreted before it can be understood; pentecostals necessarily interpret it from their experience of 'Spirit baptism' and 'read their own experience into' the Acts' description. In the end, it is not possible to prove or disprove whether there is continuity between the Acts'



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3 endorsed by Land (1993:30). The American Jesuit, G. Maloney, even states that Symeon the New  
4 Theologian should be considered a sort of predecessor of contemporary pentecostalism (Krivosheyn  
5 1996:10-11).  
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9 Many pentecostals testify that they have also experienced the divine light that has changed their very  
10 lives, providing them with power to depart from a life of slavery to sin and vice (Cheryl 1991:9-10).  
11 This refers to an experience of a 'personal Pentecost', an encounter with God that transforms the  
12 participant's life and worldview, an experience that is inseparable from a pentecostal spirituality  
13 (Land 1993:132). The experience is permeated by love for and the love of God, with prayer forming  
14 the centre of the encounter between a human being and the living God. However, for pentecostals a  
15 personal conversion leading to rebirth as a function of the Spirit is conditional to becoming a child of  
16 God, and the next step is to receive the baptism of the Spirit as a 'second blessing'.<sup>49</sup>  
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22 Contrary to faith as spiritual affirmation in civil religion, the mystical tradition as well as  
23 pentecostalism emphasise that without the spiritual experience of an encounter with God the goal of  
24 Christian life is not achieved. Everyone has to make his/her own way to salvation through repentance.  
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28 Pentecostals emphasise the importance of the Holy Spirit experience; they see the experience in their  
29 spirituality as the cornerstone of their theology.<sup>50</sup> Like the Eastern mystical tradition, pentecostal  
30 spirituality does not start with theology but with experience, with theology formulated at the hand of  
31 the Bible and one's personal encounter with God through the Spirit.<sup>51</sup> The Eastern tradition states that  
32 human beings are able to know God and to join themselves with God only through the Son in the  
33 Spirit (Zizioulas 2006:13), an experience also referred to as intercourse with God (Nesteruk 2000:45).  
34 Theology as the knowledge of God as God is in himself is achieved in the mysterious justification  
35 with God as the last stage of deification or unification with him, as experienced by Moses on Mount  
36 Sinai (Ex 24:12-18) and the three apostles on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matt 17:1-13). The final  
37 goal and desired outcome of one's knowledge of the Word is deification, defining salvation as a  
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45 experiences and contemporary pentecostals' encounter with the Spirit for the same reason, that the early  
46 experience cannot be replicated (Nel 2017).

47 <sup>49</sup> Historically, the relation between the doctrine of grace and the doctrine of the means of grace has been  
48 ambiguous. While the doctrine of grace as justification and forgiveness developed slowly and unsteadily, the  
49 doctrine of the means of grace developed very rapidly (Pelikan 1975:155). For pentecostals, the communion  
50 table plays an important role to serve as a commemoration of Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

51 <sup>50</sup> Green (2011:11) argues that pentecostals fit in better with a premodern worldview; they are out of step with  
52 several currents in Western theology in terms of several issues and debates. This kind of eccentricity has made  
53 them relevant to many, especially in a postmodern context. Pentecostals in their speech, commitments,  
54 convictions, activities and practices fall squarely within those forms of Christian existence that are sometimes  
55 marginalised by antsupernaturalist theological tendencies; by believing in exorcisms, miracles and the active  
56 and present work of the Spirit they form part of the mystical tradition of the church catholic (Castelo 2017:83).

57 <sup>51</sup> Cf. the remark of Chumley's (2014:3) at the start of his book, *Be still and know: God's presence in silence*,  
58 'The question of whether it is truly possible to have a direct experience of God or a union with God or to see  
59 God is a central question of theology'.  
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3 dynamic process characterised by love, holiness and sanctification as the result (Zaprometova  
4 2009:9).<sup>52</sup>  
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7 Pentecostal hermeneutics build its foundation upon the experiential aspect of theology since  
8 pentecostals regard it as impossible to talk about God without the experience of fellowship with him,  
9 and without accepting the importance of the faith community led by the Spirit (Archer 2009:213).<sup>53</sup>  
10 Worship provides the vehicle for theology and theology serves basically as a commentary on the  
11 worship which has always been the central reality (Land 1993:23). Eastern mystical theology operates  
12 in similar fashion. Pentecostal theology deliberately distances itself from an objective, rationalistic,  
13 formalistic approach to religious life that it characterises as arid, unemotional, non-experiential and  
14 non-charismatic (Wheelock 2983:334).<sup>54</sup>  
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20 If the Spirit is taken as the starting point and the centrality of worship is given due place of primacy, it  
21 must be acknowledged that prayer – individual, corporate, with sighs and groans, and by way of  
22 human and angelic languages – is at the heart of pentecostal spirituality, an emphasis that it shares  
23 with the Eastern tradition. Prayer also figures centrally in the understanding of the theological task; it  
24 is impossible to know God and the things of God without prayer (Land 1993:24). It always leads to  
25 transition to an alternative reality, from one way of seeing to another, of having one's eyes opened so  
26 as to view the world as a God-drenched reality (Castelo 2017:85). Land (1993:36) argues that  
27 pentecostals come to embody their way of seeing and engaging the world through the sustaining of  
28 their collective spirituality. The spirituality consists of miracles, glossolalia, prayer, laying on of  
29 hands, speaking with anointing, prophecy, and other elements that function vitally but not  
30 individually. Pentecostals are shaped and transformed by a collective, worshipful ethos that facilitates  
31 a specific account and form of God-knowledge that is personal and enriching; and participation of  
32 every one is crucial for the deepest registers of self are engaged in this tradition.  
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41 Contemporary pentecostals emphasise that their own personal experiences are charismatic  
42 manifestations of the Spirit that serve to facilitate an encounter with Christ as the Saviour,  
43 empowering them to live as disciples of Christ. The encounter with Christ awakens the desire to know  
44 God, to love him and seek fellowship with him (John 4:23) (Zaprometova 1009:9). The ultimate goal  
45 is a sense of the divine that is transformative. 'One experience with God can be more life changing  
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51 <sup>52</sup> In the West, salvation is rather seen as permanent after it was granted, as a static, once-and-forever adoption  
52 and redemption.

53 <sup>53</sup> The three components, interpretation of the Bible, the activity of the Spirit and the faith community, exist in  
54 an interdependent dialogue, leading to the interaction between pneumatology and ecclesiology. Coulter  
55 (2001:39) draws direct connections between pentecostals and mystical thinkers in terms of medieval exegesis  
56 and hermeneutical practices, a point developed in detail by Chan (2000).

57 <sup>54</sup> For Protestantism, the main authority to determine life and teaching in the Christian church is the Bible; for  
58 Russian Orthodoxy as well as Roman Catholicism, it is the Bible as well as the tradition of the church; for  
59 pentecostals it is the experience of the Spirit that makes Scripture alive for them.  
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3 than an encyclopaedic knowledge of God... thus, pentecostals value experience-based encounters  
4 with God because they have the potential to transform believers. They believe that if God initiates an  
5 experience, it must be in order to positively transform the individual concerned' (Warrington  
6 2008:26). From these encounters, a worldview is formed that is characterised by the importance of  
7 communion with God (Johns 1995:90). What makes pentecostalism a mystical tradition of the church  
8 is its persistent, passionate emphasis on encounter, which at some level is relatable through the  
9 language of union. 'Encounter' circumscribes the language of mysticism, with pentecostals believing  
10 that they encounter deeply and transformatively the God of their adoration (Warrington 2008:20). The  
11 encounter with God, understood relationally, secures for pentecostals the availability and veracity of  
12 God-knowledge and serves as the epistemological grounding for pentecostal theological methodology  
13 – beholding, sensing and feeling God constitute the orienting epistemic framework for pentecostal  
14 theology characterised by an implicit theological realism.<sup>55</sup> The result is that pentecostals in their  
15 corporate worship settings strive to create the space for people to encounter and to be encountered by  
16 God. The assumption is that God is available and can act through a kind of 'event' in which one is  
17 overwhelmed by the glory of God's revelation. These encounters are then accompanied by signs of a  
18 body overwhelmed by the power of God (falling prostrate, being slain, shaking, screaming or crying;  
19 Spittler 1988:807), signs that are also known in mystical theology.

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30 The interest in secular societies in both the East and West in mysticism is part of the reason why  
31 pentecostalism and the charismatic movement experience growth and force themselves to rethink the  
32 inclusivism and ecumenism of the time when it originated against the exclusivism that characterises a  
33 part of contemporary pentecostalism (Richie 2006:21).

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58 <sup>55</sup> Boyer & Hall (2012:6) refer to it as 'facultative mystery' that views God as a revelational mystery *contra*  
59 investigative mystery that needs to be unravelled or explained away.

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