

OC & Me a second chance at a first impression story. 4-part series. Today, a re-introduction to HS. Emily/I have learned a lot from Pentecostal – Charismatic sector of Christianity. Some distorting aspects of Pentecostal theology & practice (especially in White Pentecostalism) that necessitate a re-introduction to Spirit.

First: what is the Pentecostal – Charismatic movement?

Book of Acts tells how 50 days after death of Jesus, Spirit came on 120 Jesus followers in Jerusalem ... felt **wind**, saw **tongues of fire** and **spoke in tongues**. Over time, vibrancy of Spirit waned in what became Christendom ... until early 1900s. At request of a **nun, Pope Leo** wrote a letter to RC parishes asking them to pray for a new Pentecost to greet new century. **On January 1st, 1901** a group of Protestants studying book of Acts and tongues in particular. **Charles Parham** prayed with **Agnes Ozman** to receive spirit—and she is reported to have spoken a Chinese dialect for 3 days straight. This spread to **Los Angeles**, where a black preacher, **Wm J. Seymour** felt this immersion in Spirit and started preaching: Black & White, men & women involved on equal footing. But in time, old walls came back: White Pentecostals (AG) and Black Pentecostals (COGIC) and men back in charge of everything.

That is called the Pentecostal movement, fastest growing religion in world today—mostly in Africa, Latin America, Asia.

Emily and I have been shaped by Pentecostal movement.

Me: Jesus Freak, 1971, launched by a gay man **Lonnie Frisbee** who had a vision of thousands of hippies baptized in Pacific Ocean

Joseph Arthungal, my first mentor, **Ceylon Pentecostal Mission**. I spent 15 years in an intense charismatic community part of CCR. Vineyard a renewal movement affecting Evangelicals

I don't mean to alarm anyone, but I've had lots of exotic Pentecostal experiences. Tongues, falling over. My openness to full inclusion prompted by mystical prayer experiences: "New nets! Go find..."

So why don't we shout and stomp and fall out here? Much White Pentecostalism is in a state of corruption. D. Beiber's caution despite speaking tongues. Recently called out white Pentecostals for getting in bed with Trumpism. Some members have experienced abusive forms of Pentecostal prayer to pray away gay.

Early problem: Pentecostal movement got tied to fundamentalist Christianity: anti-science, anti-women, anti LGBTQ; white Pentecostals often racist, ties to White Supremacy.

This version of Pentecostalism has obscured who the Spirit is – the Spirit who animated-informed-led Jesus. Re-introduction, based on how the Spirit is first presented in Genesis and Luke, stressing the Jewish understanding.

In Hebrew Scriptures we meet the Spirit as the most expansive, inclusive manifestation of the divine.

When God began to create heaven & earth, and the earth then was welter & waste and darkness over the deep and God's breath hovering over the waters, God said, 'Let there be light' (1:1)

"God's breath" = ruah; spirit, breath, wind. Hovering describes a **bird fluttering over its young; Robert Alter: connotations of giving birth and nurture. Thus begins **long tradition in Jewish thought of regarding the Spirit as Divine Feminine.****

This expansive picture is also very intimate. In Gen 2 have God fashioning a human by ***blowing into its nostrils, the breath of life***

In Gen 3: humans ***"heard the sound of the Lord walking about in the garden in the evening breeze"***—the breeze/wind [ruah] was the sound of God present...

Sum up: Genesis introduction to Spirit is **expansive** (btw we share "breath of life" with all living creatures in Gen. 1) ... also **intimate** ... as close as our breath ... and the **first gendered image** used is **hovering** with feminine connotations of childbirth-nurture.

We first meet the Spirit in the New Testament in Luke: Of 4 gospels (MT/MK/LK/JN) Luke/John focus on the Spirit.

The Jewish context of the Holy Spirit in Luke associates the Spirit with the **Divine Feminine**.

In Lk 1, we meet **Zechariah**, a **priest** who is husband of **Elizabeth**, who becomes mother of **John Baptist**, forerunner of Jesus. Zechariah has his turn offering incense in holy place of Temple. Temple has 3 spaces: Courtyard, Holy Place, Holy of Holies. Zechariah is in the Holy Place, where only priests are allowed.

While he's in there, **angels appear to him and tell him his wife will** bear a child to be named John, and John will be filled with Spirit.

Jewish background: **Zechariah** is in 2nd Temple; **built after** first temple was destroyed. 2nd Temple completed by Herod, a **corrupt King** who pretends to be Jewish, but really is a servant of Rome. Everyone knows 2nd Temple (in time of Jesus) is **missing key ingredients** present in the first temple, built by King Solomon, son of David, centuries earlier.

In first temple, the holy of holies (a cube-sized inner room beyond a veil) the presence of God is vividly and palpably present. As were angels—called Seraphim (fiery angelic beings.) Once a year the high priest enters holy of holies to see all this.

By contrast, in 2nd temple, the holy of holies is just an empty room. (Cicero barges in, comes out and says, “It’s just an empty room and dark in there!” But remember In first temple, angels are present in holy of holies as is the “you-can-feel-it- and-see-it” presence of God, called in Heb, **Shekinah**---**feminine presence** meaning “**to dwell/settle**” (like Spirit hovering/brooding)

Temple worship in first temple period much more mystical than it was later, during 2nd temple. Marked by an experience of the feminine side of God through “Wisdom/Sophia” called “Lady Wisdom” (also understood to be in Holy of Holies) and Shekinah (dwelling feminine presence of God.)

This is the background to Zechariah’s experience in the holy place when angel appears with a message about Elizabeth pregnancy, child John, who will be filled with Spirit. **Zechariah would have known:** *Oh, this is like how it used to be when Shekinah presence was around --- and the Feminine Spirit hovered/brooded over us.*

Later in Luke 1, while Elizabeth in 6th month of pregnancy an angel appears to Mary saying, “If you’re willing ... The Holy Spirit will come upon you and the Most High will overshadow you, and you will conceive a child”— language of a Holy Spirit overshadowing/ hovering harkens back to earlier experience of God as Shekinah.

Luke saying the coming of Jesus, brought about by Spirit, is a restoration of God as a feminine presence: Shekinah, Sophia. Jesus will mediate a new experience of the Shekinah. [ICON}

Why is this so important? 4 Implications

1. Pentecostalism, the sector of Christianity that has a special focus on the Spirit, is ripe for a major reformation.

In religious settings where men have to be in charge and power is not shared equally with women/non-binary people, **masculinity gets corrupted, toxic, infected with dominance-aggression.**

It’s religious power used to support male dominance. If those settings are Pentecostal, **it can get icky.** Dominant, narcissistic men prancing on stage bragging about their spiritual exploits, yelling, using spirit power to support their dominance.

In those kinds of settings our understanding of the divine presence gets distorted, layer of falsehood, idolatry over it.

I first had my Pentecostal experiences in these male-dominated settings. For some years, explicit teaching that men should be in charge; teaching that one of the worst things a man could be was feminized. I started to interrogate this in late 1980s. By mid 90s I’m teaching women can lead as well as men. By 2000s I’m starting to question traditional teaching on LGBTQ.

Looking back, a big part of my doing that was having praying experiences, where I felt God as a feminine presence.

2. If you have ever experienced God as a feminine presence, that’s normal, not weird, and it’s blessed by Jesus.

I'm referring to special/fleeting moments where you feel-sense-intuit some where you feel some wonderful presence beyond yourself---***Someone sees me, Someone is for me, Everything's gonna be all right*** It's possible that presence had a feminine feel That would be the Holy Spirit.

3. Good to include this in your list of "possible ways to experience God."

Knowing a thing is possible opens us up to it. In all our connections to others what we anticipate/expect shapes experience. Be open to possibility you could experience God like this

4. Imagine how we might feel differently about God if we thought God could come to us in this way.

Many of us would feel more eager, more open, more trusting toward the possibility of God.

MEDITATION PS 23 BOBBY MCFERRIN

Bobby: The 23rd Psalm is dedicated to my mother. She was the driving force in my religious and spiritual education, and I have so many memories of her singing in church. But I wrote it because I'd been reading the Bible one morning, and I was thinking about God's unconditional love, about how we crave it but have so much trouble believing we can trust it, and how we can't fully understand it. And then I left my reading and spent time with my wife and our children. Watching her with them, the way she loved them, I realized one of the ways we're shown a glimpse of how God loves us is through our mothers. They cherish our spirits, they demand that we become our best selves, and they take care of us.

That feminine presence in your life might not be your mother. Might be a friend. A spouse. A partner. We'll take a minute to remember, imagine, think of a person who represents that feminine presence in your life. Then on my cue, listen to PS. 23