


THE PENTECOSTALISM PHENOMENON: A HISTORICAL-THEOLOGICAL ANALYSIS

 <https://doi.org/10.63330/aurumpub.023-004>**José Ronaldo de Freitas Machado¹****ABSTRACT**

The study entitled “The Phenomenon of Pentecostalism: A Historical-Theological Analysis” proposes a systematic investigation into manifestations of the sacred within the Pentecostal sphere. Based on bibliographic methodology and documentary analysis, the work seeks to understand the ways in which such manifestations are configured in the Pentecostal movement, establishing distinctions in relation to practices observed in other branches of evangelical Protestantism and in African-based religions. The historical-theological perspective adopted makes it possible to outline the trajectory of Pentecostalism, from its origins in the early 20th century to its consolidation as a religious expression of relevance in the Brazilian and international scene. The study also addresses the theological foundations that underpin Pentecostal spiritual experiences, such as glossolalia, prophecies, and healings, highlighting their implications for the constitution of community identity and the experience of faith. By promoting a comparative analysis with other religious traditions, the work aims to foster interreligious dialogue, valuing the plurality of forms of expression of the sacred and contributing to a more comprehensive and respectful understanding between different belief systems. In this sense, the study acts as a mediation between academic knowledge and religious practice, encouraging plural coexistence and mutual recognition among communities of faith.

Keywords: Pentecostalism; Religious Phenomenon; Interreligious Dialogue.

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INTRODUCTION

It is well known that the religious phenomenon has been a fertile field for academic investigation. This article proposes to investigate, from a historical-theological perspective, the manifestations of the phenomenon of *Pentecostalism*, since this segment has been the fastest-growing in Brazil from its origins in the 19th century to the present day (Picolloto, 2016; Alves, 2021; Soares, 2023).

Initially, it is important to emphasize that the complexity inherent to religious experience—especially observed in the variety of Pentecostal rites—requires a methodological approach capable of integrating quantitative and qualitative factors (Machado, 2023). For a full understanding of its historical roots and contemporary implications, this study draws on the research of theorists such as Alves (2021), Alves & Bobsin (2022), and Soares (2023).

Thus, the theoretical foundations are analyzed from the perspective of authors such as Williams (2011) and Horton (2022), within a Pentecostal framework. In this context, Grudem's theology (2022) and Rocha (2010), through dialogue with the Philosophy of Religion, are also considered, aiming to present a balance between history, theology, and religious manifestation.

Furthermore, divine revelations manifested in liturgical practices—while avoiding extremism and interpretative fragmentation—are reflected upon with the help of Alves (2021) and Alves & Bobsin (2022). Consequently, the need arises to promote interreligious dialogue and mutual understanding between Pentecostalism and other religious currents, which constitutes a central point of investigation for this work (Oro, 2001).

However, the purpose of this investigation is not only to uncover the origins and constitutive elements of the Pentecostal phenomenon but also to propose a critical reflection on Theology and the manifestation of God—the Divine—as expressed within the field of Religious Studies. Moreover, Pentecostalism, in its various expressions, can contribute to the harmonious construction of a pluralistic society, considering the sociocultural demands that manifest in the daily lives of believers and in recent academic production (Freston, 1993).

Through this analysis, it becomes evident that Pentecostalism, by incorporating a diversity of rites and mystical experiences, presents itself as a multifaceted and complex phenomenon, capable of challenging the traditional boundaries of institutionalized theology (Mello, 2022). Therefore, this study is based on a mixed methodology that seeks to unite the objective and subjective dimensions of the religious phenomenon, as the investigation addresses the hypothesis that manifestations of the Divine in Pentecostalism—often viewed through an extremist lens—contain elements that can be oriented toward a balanced and enriching religious practice for both believers and society (Mello, 2022).

Considering recent empirical research and theoretical analyses published between 2011 and 2024, it is important to reassess the impact of Pentecostal practices not only in the spiritual sphere but also in



identity formation and contemporary social dynamics (Everts; Lamp, 2023), since evangelicals have stood out in Brazil since 2010, as has Pentecostalism (Picolloto, 2016).

Thus, this article proposes a reflection on the relationship between mystical experience and liturgical practices as a means of fostering a critical and enriching debate among researchers, religious leaders, and members of the Christian community regarding the phenomenology of Pentecostalism (Alves, 2021; Alves & Bobsin, 2022; Alencar, 2022; Soares, 2023).

METHODOLOGY

Considering the complexity surrounding the religious phenomenon within the scope of Pentecostalism, the choice of a hybrid methodology is justified by the different dimensions that constitute the liturgical experience of believers. This study is based on both quantitative and qualitative tools (Machado, 2023), as well as documentary analysis (Lüdke; André, 2018), developed through a systematic review of theoretical publications spanning the years 1993, 2003, 2008, and 2010 to 2024.

In this sense, the combination of qualitative and quantitative methods offered the researcher the opportunity to explore the subjective subtleties of mystical experiences and the measurable aspects of ritual behaviors, supporting the hypothesis that the authentic manifestation of the Divine in Pentecostalism can be delineated through a balanced and comprehensive analysis of the Holy Spirit's activity.

Moreover, the methodology employed allows for the identification of internal and external factors that may exert influence, contributing to a true and complete portrayal of liturgical practices, in accordance with the guidelines of respected scholars such as Grudem (2022) in his work on systematic theology and Rocha (2010) on the philosophy of religion.

With this mixed methodological approach, emphasis was placed on the importance of maintaining scientific rigor, which is reflected primarily in the careful selection of data collection instruments, ensuring the validity and reliability of the results. In this regard, the study not only dedicated itself to building a solid theoretical foundation but also sought to empirically validate the concepts that underpin religious practices, underscoring the need to adopt a critical and reflective stance in the analysis of Pentecostal rites (Alves, 2021; Soares, 2023).

Consequently, it became clear that adopting a mixed methodology—both flexible and rigorous—is the most appropriate path for advancing research in the field of Religious Studies and for suggesting strategies that guide believers in seeking a balance between mystical expressions and the preservation of ethical and spiritual values that characterize Pentecostalism (Everts; Lamp, 2023).

Understanding that the mixed method chosen for this study involves integrating the quantitative and qualitative dimensions of the experience of Pentecostal practitioners, the analysis of collected data



enabled the identification of various elements that converge toward understanding the liturgical phenomena linked to mystical experience (Silva, 2005; Mello, 2022).

The methodological tools applied demonstrated that the combination of qualitative and quantitative approaches, according to Machado (2023), allowed not only for the collection of descriptive data but also for the detection of patterns and trends in religious or liturgical practices, which proved essential for developing conclusions aligned with the study's objectives.

It is relevant to emphasize that merging these methods facilitated the identification of contextual and intersubjective variables, which, in turn, enabled a critical analysis of liturgical practices, contributing to the discussion on the need for balance between tradition and innovation in the religious context.

From this perspective, it can be affirmed that the methodological rigor implemented in this study supports the validity of the results and establishes a solid foundation for developing strategies that guide both researchers in the field of Religious Studies and religious leaders in understanding the challenges and opportunities surrounding manifestations of the Divine in Pentecostalism.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Considering the extensive academic production on the religious phenomenon, the literature review on Pentecostalism reveals that recent studies emphasize the plurality of liturgical manifestations and the intensification of mystical experiences among believers, due to the religious richness present in Brazil (Silva, 2005; Macedo, 2007; Palhares, 2010; Mello, 2022).

Thus, it is understood that religious manifestations are diverse, each occurring within its own socio-religious context. For instance, manifestations within classical Pentecostalism—also known as the first wave (Freston, 1993)—occurred between 1910 and 1950, with two churches: the Christian Congregation in Brazil and the Assemblies of God. These emphasized the descent and manifestation of the Holy Spirit, “speaking in other tongues as biblical evidence of baptism with the Holy Spirit” (Soares, 2023, p. 32), deliverance from demonic possession, and the gifts of the Spirit (Alves, 2021; Horton, 2022).

In this context, Pentecostalism spread rapidly, radiating from its initial center in Los Angeles, with Chicago as its spiritual epicenter. Furthermore, through the ministry of William H. Durham in Chicago, Luigi Francescon—founder of the Christian Congregation in Brazil—and Daniel Berg and Gunnar Vingren—founders of the Assemblies of God in Brazil—were impacted during worship services, confirming the missionary movement that reached Brazil in 1910 (Soares, 2023, p. 42).

The second moment, called the middle wave or second-generation Pentecostalism, prioritized divine healing and mass evangelization during the 1950s and 1960s, according to Freston (1993), with churches such as the Foursquare Gospel Church (1951), Brazil for Christ, and God is Love. These also



emphasized God's power and the presence of the Holy Spirit in each believer's life.

However, Soares (2023) notes that before this occurred, a Canadian woman named Aimée Semple experienced divine healing through Durham's ministry. After returning to the United States from missionary work in China, she founded the Foursquare Gospel Church.

Finally, the third generation, or third wave of Pentecostalism—known as Neo-Pentecostalism—focused on prosperity theology and spiritual warfare. These churches are more media-oriented, often showcasing exorcisms (deliverance) through communication channels and emphasizing material prosperity. Thus, between 1970 and 1998, churches such as the Universal Church of the Kingdom of God, International Grace of God Church, Sara Nossa Terra Community, and World Church of God's Power gained prominence (Alves, 2021; Soares, 2023).

From this exposition, it is clear that divine manifestations within Pentecostalism should not be confused, as they differ by specific elements due to "[...] the diversity of rites, hermeneutics, methods, among others, which is a typically Christian problem reflecting its immense cultural plasticity" (Alves, 2021, p. 16).

In this regard, authoritative references such as Picolloto (2016), Alves (2021), Alves & Bobsin (2022), and Soares (2023) become relevant, offering a panorama that highlights the ongoing dynamism of this religious movement and the complex tension between tradition and theological innovation present in Pentecostal, Neo-Pentecostal, and various African, Indigenous, mystical, and animist religions.

Therefore, the analysis of McGrath's work (2008) on *Christian Spirituality*, Fajardo's investigation *Assemblies of God in Brazil and Its Fragmentation* (2014), and Alves & Bobsin's study *Classical Pentecostalism in Brazil: Adaptation and Preservation of Principles* (2022) emphasize the experiential dimension of Pentecostalism. Examining the *Assemblies of God* in Brazil means understanding a plural network of social practices resulting from the fusion of Swedish Protestantism and U.S. Pentecostalism (Alves, 2021; Soares, 2023). Furthermore, this religious expression took root among former popular Catholics and grew especially in secularized urban centers, where it diversified (Fajardo, 2014).

Pentecostal manifestations—such as baptism with the Holy Spirit, *glossolalia* (speaking in other tongues, as described in Acts 2), and healings—highlight the interrelations between individual subjectivity and the formal structure of religious institutions, something explicit in the biblical-theological context described in systematic works by Williams (2011), Horton (2022), and Grudem (2022), which underscore the marks of Pentecostalism.

In this context, theoretical contributions by Silva (2005), Palhares (2010), and Rocha (2010) reinforce the idea that mystical experience can be understood both as a personal experience and as a social construction, prompting detailed debates on the adequacy of rites in light of sociocultural contexts,



leading to Christian spirituality and transcendence (McGrath, 2008).

It is worth noting that discussions regarding extremism and marginalization of certain practices, highlighted by various empirical studies, indicate the need for a balanced perspective that recognizes the diversity and complexity inherent to this religious phenomenon—Pentecostalism—promoting an integrated and contextualized understanding of its manifestations across cultures, including British, American, Swedish, African, Brazilian, among others (Pereira, 2018; Alves, 2021; Soares, 2023).

Thus, specialized literature employs diverse approaches to decipher the constitutive elements of Pentecostalism, combining historical, sociological, and theological perspectives (Alves, 2021; Alves & Bobsin, 2022). In this regard, the relevance of studies addressing distinct angles and intersections between religious experience and belief (Everts; Lamp, 2023), as well as contemporary social practices, is evident.

It should be emphasized that, as noted by Teixeira (2003) and Silva (2020), interreligious dialogue plays a central role in mediating between diverse traditions and promoting a healthy environment for individuals' spiritual flourishing. Thus, the literature review extends beyond mere description to a critical-historical-theological interpretation of challenges imposed by liquid modernity, where the demands of balanced religious practice confront the pressures of a constantly changing plural society (Alves, 2021; Soares, 2023; Everts; Lamp, 2023).

Given this context, the theoretical foundation presented is essential for guiding debate, elucidating symbolic, ritual, and social aspects that characterize the Pentecostal phenomenon (Williams, 2011; Alves, 2021; Soares, 2023), providing resources for constructing practices that harmonize mystical experience with principles of ethics and social responsibility (Lacerda, 2017).

Considering that Pentecostalism, in its dynamic nature, is permeated by intense rituals that configure symbolic manifestations of the Divine, the literature also highlights the relevance of critically analyzing the processes legitimizing these rituals—such as water baptism, baptism with the Holy Spirit, manifestation of spiritual gifts, the Lord's Supper, anointing of the sick, and expelling evil from those afflicted by malignant diseases—where transcendence occurs (Williams, 2011; Grudem, 2022; Horton, 2022).

Therefore, the investigation shows that although the religious phenomenon presents elements of transcendence and rupture with past structures (Alves, 2021; Soares, 2023), there is constant mediation between tradition and modernity, demanding careful reflection on the authenticity and social role of Pentecostal rites from the perspective of Religious Studies.

From this viewpoint, the literature emphasizes the need for balance between maintaining historical foundations and adapting to contemporary demands, which often require reinterpretation of mystical experiences in light of social and cultural challenges (Mello, 2022). However, Pentecostal manifestations—such as believers jumping, dancing, clapping, spinning, sometimes crying due to the

presence of the manifested Divine, singing in another language, or experiencing spiritual ecstasy—should not be confused with the liturgical and ritual practices of African-based religions, as they are distinct manifestations in different contexts (Macedo, 2007).

Nevertheless, Pereira's investigation (2018) reaffirms the importance of considering the contextual particularities of each congregation, noting that Pentecostal and Neo-Pentecostal rituals, although standardized in certain aspects and sometimes media-oriented, reveal a diversity that enriches the debate on the nature of the religious phenomenon (Cunha, 2019).

Conversely, the interreligious perspective applied to studies on Pentecostalism, as evidenced by Palhares (2010), Picolloto (2016), and Medeiros (2024), highlights the importance of promoting open and continuous dialogue between various fields of knowledge and faith communities. From this viewpoint, it is emphasized that Pentecostal rites cannot be analyzed in isolation without considering the historical and cultural relationships that sustain them (Alves & Bobsin, 2022).

In light of this scenario, it becomes imperative for researchers, pastors, and members of evangelical communities to engage in constructive debate capable of integrating established knowledge with contemporary methodological advances (Freston, 1993; Palhares, 2010; Picolloto, 2016). Accordingly, the literature points to the need for interdisciplinary strategies that enable a more robust understanding of mystical manifestations observed in Pentecostalism (Freston, 1993).

Thus, the reviewed bibliographic corpus establishes a solid foundation for investigating the multifaceted dimensions of the religious phenomenon—Pentecostalism—legitimizing the need for studies that transcend mere description and seek, holistically, to identify the elements that underpin the divine experience in this context.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Based on the data and analyses presented, it becomes imperative to reflect on the social, theological, and cultural implications of the religious phenomenon within the context of Pentecostalism (Picolloto, 2016; Pereira, 2018). Believing that the spiritual experience of the faithful manifests in intense and sometimes polarizing ways, the discussion addresses the tensions between mystical experience (spirituality) and contemporary demands for a balanced and responsible practice (Oro, 2001; Lacerda, 2017; Cunha, 2019).

However, studies by Silva (2018) and Oliveira (2019) indicate that the intensification of rituals can both contribute to the consolidation of community identity and foster behaviors bordering on extremism, especially when manifestations lack interreligious dialogue.

It is worth noting that, as emphasized by McGrath (2008), Alves (2011), Fajardo (2014), Alencar (2022), Mello (2022), and Soares (2023), Pentecostal rites—when analyzed holistically—reveal



dimensions that transcend mere emotionality, integrating structural and symbolic elements capable of dialoguing with contemporary needs for belonging and authenticity.

From this perspective, this article highlights that the religious phenomenon in Pentecostalism possesses transformative potential, as Rocha (2010) suggests, oriented toward practices of moderation and self-criticism, which can serve as a vehicle for promoting a more inclusive and integrative spirituality. Consequently, based on Pereira's assumptions (2018), this discussion emphasizes the importance of avoiding radicalization of practices by promoting strategies that prioritize, among other approaches, the balance between mystical expression and a solid ethical and social foundation.

Conversely, such a critical stance is necessary to ensure that religious manifestations do not deviate from their original purpose of fostering closeness between the sacred and the human, thereby allowing Pentecostalism to reaffirm itself as a phenomenon capable of significantly contributing to the development of more supportive and pluralistic societies. Furthermore, it can foster an ethic of coexistence grounded in dialogue and mutual tolerance, overcoming boundaries that historically separated different religious perspectives.

From this reflection, it is evident that the *perceptions* obtained from data analysis point to the need to rethink the limits between mystical experience and the imposition of rituals that, in certain situations, may lead to distorted interpretations of the Divine. From this viewpoint, it is essential for both researchers and religious leaders to adopt positions that privilege interreligious dialogue and internal critique, preventing spiritual experience from translating into exclusionary or even extremist practices.

Moreover, the analysis of believers' discourses, combined with recent empirical studies, revealed a consensus regarding the need for balance between mystical fervor and social ethics, reinforcing the hypothesis that Pentecostal practices can indeed be oriented toward moderation through interreligious dialogue.

In this regard, it is important to emphasize that valuing personal experiences and community narratives proves to be a powerful instrument for constructing a Pentecostalism that engages with contemporary challenges (Freston, 1993; Silva, 2005; Palhares, 2010). From this perspective, promoting spaces for reflection and debate becomes crucial, where contradictions can be exposed and critically analyzed, enabling the construction of a spirituality that remains faithful to Divine precepts without renouncing social responsibility.

Bearing in mind that balancing Pentecostal mystical manifestation with consistent ethical values is a constant challenge, the reflection prompted by this discussion proposes a series of recommendations for integrating experiential and institutional dimensions within Pentecostal rites.

Through this approach, it is proposed that reconfiguring liturgical spaces and dialogue not only reinforces the authenticity of mystical experience but also fosters the inclusion of diverse perspectives

and combats excesses that, in certain situations, tend to marginalize segments of the community. It is worth noting that integrating theological knowledge with advances in empirical research, as suggested by studies by Pereira (2018) and Mello (2022), is fundamental for creating practices that encourage an altruistic spirituality committed to collective well-being.

Indeed, the analysis of current practices underscores that the religious phenomenon can be a powerful tool for social transformation, provided it is guided by principles that promote dialogue, inclusion, and respect for interpretative diversity. In this regard, it is essential to highlight that a critical and self-critical stance, coupled with constant reevaluation of rites and practices, proves indispensable for constructing a Pentecostal identity willing to break with inflated patterns and recover the central elements of the Divine.

Thus, the discussion proposes creating institutional and pedagogical mechanisms that enable the continuous improvement of liturgical practices, fostering a culture that values balance between mysticism and political-social ethics, contributing to shaping a religious experience that, beyond being transformative, reflects the genuine human longing for meaning and transcendent connection, as described by Soares (2023) in his work *O Pentecostalismo Brasileiro*.

Conversely, the relevance of this discussion lies in identifying parameters that can guide liturgical practices to preserve the mystical essence of Pentecostalism without opening space for extremism or dismantling its historical foundations (Alves, 2011; Alves, 2021). Considering that believers' spiritual experience involves intense subjective experiences, it becomes imperative that such manifestations be contextualized within a robust theoretical framework that legitimizes them while orienting them toward constructive social engagement.

Therefore, the critical analysis of symbolic and ritual dimensions, grounded in the perspectives of the authors cited thus far, reveals that balancing tradition and innovation is not only desirable but necessary for the continuity of the religious phenomenon in a plural society. From this panorama, it is evident that mechanisms of socialization and internalization of Pentecostal rites, when articulated with practices guided by ethical principles, promote a transformative experience capable of integrating the sacred dimension with social responsibility without losing its empirical religious essence.

Nevertheless, the absence of such balance can lead to radicalization of discourses, contributing to the formation of groups that distance themselves from interreligious dialogue and harmonious coexistence, fostering religious intolerance with bitter consequences for society. Thus, the discussion moves toward proposing strategies aimed at reconciling mystical manifestation with the need for inclusive religious practice, thereby establishing a new paradigm in the field of Religious Studies, as well as for undergraduate, master's, and doctoral programs in Religious Education.

It is worth emphasizing that, as highlighted by recent studies and believers' own experiences, the



path to a full Pentecostal experience necessarily involves recognizing its transformative potential, provided it is channeled toward practices of moderation and collective engagement, contributing to the formation of a more cohesive, plural community capable of dialoguing with contemporary challenges.

Through this analysis, it is concluded that balancing the various dimensions of the religious phenomenon—namely, believers' subjective experience and the institutional mechanisms governing Pentecostal rites—is a determining factor for consolidating a religious practice that is both authentic and socially relevant.

From this perspective, the discussion suggests that synergy between empirical and theoretical knowledge, as indicated by Silva (2018), Mello (2022), Fajardo (2014), and Picolloto (2016), can guide the construction of a Pentecostalism synthesized from mystical and rational dimensions, enhancing the effectiveness of rituals and the reinterpretation of sacred elements.

Conversely, integrating tradition and modernity, combined with a critical and self-aware approach, emerges as the key to overcoming challenges imposed by contemporaneity and promoting an experience that simultaneously preserves the essence of the Divine and contributes to positive societal transformation (McGrath, 2008).

In light of this, the results presented reinforce the need for pastoral policies and practices that encourage interreligious dialogue and critical reflection on the enduring methods and objectives of Pentecostalism, transforming it into a true instrument of inclusion and spiritual renewal.

CONCLUSION

In fulfilling the proposed objectives and the analysis developed, it is concluded that the religious phenomenon within Pentecostalism presents a complexity that demands a plural and interdisciplinary approach. The dialogue between mystical experience and liturgical practices proves essential for constructing a balanced and socially responsible spirituality.

The data demonstrated that, when grounded in ethical and theological principles, Pentecostalism can become an instrument of inclusion and social renewal, distancing itself from excesses and radicalization. In this sense, it is imperative that researchers, religious leaders, and communities maintain a continuous process of reevaluating liturgical practices to foster peaceful and respectful coexistence among different traditions.

This study reaffirms the importance of interdisciplinary research in Religious Studies and indicates that Pentecostalism—far from being an exclusionary phenomenon—can play a significant role in promoting universal values such as inclusion, tolerance, and spiritual renewal. The balance between mystical authenticity and structured liturgical practices emerges as a central point for a healthy Pentecostalism capable of contributing positively to the contemporary social and cultural landscape.



Given the challenges of liquid modernity and growing religious polarization, the need for a critical-historical-theological stance that harmonizes tradition and innovation is emphasized. The integration between theory and empirical data proved fundamental for understanding the phenomenon and identifying pathways that direct Pentecostal manifestations toward sustainable and harmonious development.

Thus, it is concluded that Pentecostalism, by encompassing multiple experiences and practices, constitutes a fertile field for debates that transcend the limits of traditional theology, promoting integration between science, faith, and social responsibility. The findings encourage strengthening interreligious dialogue and point to reforms that, by reconciling tradition and innovation, can contribute to building more cohesive, inclusive communities committed to universal values of solidarity, ethics, and justice.

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