

The rise and fall of the Pentecostals

The role and significance of the body in Pentecostal spirituality

The body has always been centrally important to Christianity. Michael Featherstone (1991a: 182) observes that prior to the twentieth century, Christians predominantly glorified the soul and suppressed the body. For close to two thousand years, in the pursuit of greater intimacy with God, the physical body has been ordered in particular ways during worship (e.g. kneeling during prayer), or disciplined and denied as part of daily religious practice (e.g. fasting, self-flagellation). Giuseppe Giordan (2009: 228) notes that Christianity has controlled the body 'through a complex system of rules, rules governing everything from sexuality to dreams, from food to desire, from work to emotions, from medicine to dress, from birth until death, including even the celebration of mourning'.

In the final century of the millennium, however, a discernible shift has taken place in popular religious practice away from ordered asceticism to an eager 'consumption' of the power of God, especially in the Pentecostal and charismatic churches. In Australia, the UK and Western Europe, Pentecostals are one of the few Protestant groups to have grown in the past two decades. Within this tradition the body is not subordinated to attain a higher spirituality, rather spiritual experiences are openly signified through the 'out-of-control' body. The body is the site where the 'power' of God is manifested *through* the believer (as is the case with speaking in tongues). With experiences of this kind the worshipper is overcome by the 'power' of God, rather than instigating the bodily experience themselves, as is the case with swaying during prayer, fasting or liturgical dancing.

This paper addresses the role and significance of the body in contemporary Pentecostalism. It begins with a description of the various body-centred spiritual experiences common in this tradition. Next, it considers the social context of the Pentecostal body, arguing that the premium and importance placed on outward bodily experiences is consistent with a broader societal focus on bodies and bodily appearance. Finally, it draws on in-depth inter-

view data with Pentecostals to illustrate the processes involved in coming to have an experience in which one's body becomes the highly visible locus of spirituality.

The body in Pentecostalism

The term 'Pentecostal' refers to an ever-increasing sub-group of Protestant denominations or independent churches who place a strong emphasis on the so-called 'gifts of the spirit', which include speaking in tongues, being slain in the Spirit, prophecy, visions and miraculous healing. The doctrine of being 'baptised in the spirit' is central to Pentecostal teaching.¹

It is widely agreed that the Pentecostal movement began with the Azusa Street Revival in Los Angeles in 1906 and spread across the US and then further afield. Worldwide, it is now among the fastest-growing movements within Christianity. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2006: 1) notes that 'The major strands of Pentecostalism now represent at least one quarter of all Christians . . . ranking second only to Catholicism in the number of followers.' Internationally, the Assemblies of God is the largest Pentecostal denomination. Well-known Pentecostal denominations active in Australia include the Assemblies of God, Christian Revival Crusade, Christian City Churches and the Vineyard churches. Worship in these churches is contemporary: the music is loud and modern, the preaching fast-paced and lively. Pentecostal churches tend to have a very functional appearance and there is little use of traditional religious imagery (e.g. stained glass, altars etc.).

Closely related to the Pentecostals is the charismatic movement. The term 'charismatic' applies to individuals and groups within larger mainstream denominations who are either favourably disposed towards the Pentecostal experiences or have these experiences themselves. In Australia and Europe, charismatic congregations, small groups and individuals can be found in the Church of England (Episcopalian), Catholic, Baptist, Lutheran and Churches of Christ denominations, amongst others. The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life (2006: 1) observes that Pentecostal and charismatic groups are

1 Baptism in the Holy Spirit refers to a 'second blessing' or spiritual experience, following conversion, in which the believer is empowered by the Holy Spirit to enjoy a deeper and more profound Christian walk. According to Alan Black (1991: 107), Pentecostals see baptism in the Holy Spirit as 'distinct from, and usually later than the experience of being born again, and quite distinct from the experience of baptism in water'.

often referred to as 'renewalists' because of their common belief in the spiritually renewing gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Body-centred spiritual experiences are an integral part of the renewalist movement and are interpreted as evidence of 'God's power' manifest here on earth. The two main body-centred spiritual experiences found in the Pentecostal tradition are speaking in tongues and being 'slain in the spirit'. Speaking in tongues (also known by the technical name 'glossolalia') involves speaking in an unknown, yet realistic-sounding language of which the speaker has no previous knowledge. It consists of indecipherable strings of words and phrases which sound more language-like than simple 'gibberish.' William Samarin (1972: 2) defines it as 'a meaningless but phonologically structured human utterance believed by the speaker to be a real language but bearing no systematic resemblance to any natural language'. It is important to emphasize that the language spoken by a tongues speaker is not a known language. Before becoming a tongues speaker, a person has no prior knowledge of this language and will not develop any comprehension of what is being said as they continue to speak in tongues, though they will almost certainly become familiar with the sound of their language and use the same language as they continue the practice (see Singleton 2002).

Pentecostals and charismatics attribute an important personal religious value to tongues speaking. In her ethnographic research amongst American charismatic Catholics, Mary-Jo Neitz (1987) found that most practitioners believe tongues speaking edifies them in their relationship with God. Pentecostals and charismatics believe that speaking in tongues enables an individual to 'bypass' their mind and allow their 'spirit' to communicate with God in moments of prayer and devotion. It is thus useful in daily religious practice and is used either in private prayer or during services of worship. (For a full discussion see Singleton 2002.)

Speaking in tongues is one example of a spiritual experience manifested through the body. Other notable experiences include shaking and falling. Shaking and falling customarily take place during worship services during which the faithful expect an experience of the Holy Spirit. A person might simply shake but not fall, fall over in dramatic fashion, or fall quietly to the floor. In each case, the cause of the falling or shaking is attributed to the 'power' of the Holy Spirit. There is no convenient, universally shared catchphrase available to describe the shaking experience, but the falling experience is commonly referred to as being 'slain in the Spirit', 'going under the power' or 'resting in the Spirit' (Poloma & Pendleton 1989: 421). The phrase 'carpet time' has also become popular in the 1990s. The phrase 'slain in the Spirit' is

the arguably the most common expression used in Pentecostal churches, at least in Australia. Many Pentecostal churches routinely have moments in the service where congregants may speak in tongues or are invited to the front of the church to experience 'God's power' and so may be slain in the spirit.

Although dramatic bodily manifestations of the Holy Spirit are the dominant type of spiritual experience in the late twentieth century amongst Pentecostals and charismatics, experiences of shaking and falling are not new in the Christian tradition. They have featured prominently in the Christian revivals—a time of organised spiritual awakening and fervour—that have erupted periodically since the Enlightenment. An Anglican minister, John Wesley, was instrumental in facilitating a revival that began in the late 1730s, sweeping across England and Ireland. During many of Wesley's revival meetings his followers had fits and convulsions, whilst others shook and fell (Johnson 1976: 366). Wesley wrote in his Journal:

About three in the morning, as we were continuing instant in prayer, the power of God came mightily upon us, insomuch that many cried out for exceeding joy and many fell to the ground (cited in Kent 1995: 93).

About the same time in the United States, a revival known as the Great Awakening was also characterised by bodily manifestations of the Holy Spirit (see Chevreau 1994). By the mid-twentieth century, however, these kinds of bodily experiences are found almost exclusively within the Pentecostal and charismatic churches.

Throughout the twentieth century, there have been a number of 'revivals' that have taken place within the Pentecostal and charismatic movement, all of which are characterised by dramatic body-centred experiences. The most well-known recent example is the Toronto Blessing of the mid-1990s.² This revival movement originated at the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship in Toronto, Canada, in the winter of 1994 and spread through a number of countries, including Australia. By September 1995, six hundred thousand people had visited the Toronto church to participate in the revival, whilst many more experienced the Blessing at their home church, after it was 'brought back' by those who had been to Toronto. Martin Percy (1998: 284) describes the Toronto Blessing as 'the name of a particular *experience* rather than of a local-

2 For accounts of various aspects of the Toronto Blessing, see Chevreau 1994, Porter & Richter 1995, Poloma 1996, 1997, 1998, Lyon 1998 and Percy 1998.

ity'. Chevreau describes some of the bodily manifestations associated with the Blessing:

We saw at the Airport meetings – uncontrollable laughter and inconsolable weeping; violent shaking and falling down; people waving their arms around, in windmill-like motions, or vigorous judo like chopping with their forearms (Chevreau 1994: 13).

According to Chevreau (1994: 12), reporting on the Airport Fellowship, 'people were coming under an anointing so powerful it left them drunk in the Spirit . . . they were falling about, laughing hysterically'. In one case a woman was 'unable to walk a straight line, certainly unfit to drive, or to host the guests that came for dinner the next evening' (Chevreau 1994: 13). Having the appearance and affectations of drunkenness is one example of bodily disinhibition associated with the Blessing. Philip Richter (1995: 9) reports that 'people occasionally start running energetically around the church, jogging on the spot, bouncing up and down as if they are on a pogo stick, even pretending to be racing cars'.

The most prominent experiences encountered as part of this revival are 'holy laughter' (uncontrollable fits of mirth) and being slain in the spirit. Below is an account from someone who was slain in the Spirit during this revival:

As they prayed, I started to shake and eventually fell to the floor where I continued to shake and jerk for hours. From that time onward, the shaking got stronger and would last longer. After several days, I began jerking violently without anyone praying for me, as soon as the worship started. (Poloma 1996: 14.)

Similar manifestations were reported at a number of churches throughout Australia, in both rural and urban areas, after the Blessing had been 'brought' to Australia by those who had experienced it in Toronto.

Today, Pentecostal and other charismatic Christians are the principal proponents and practitioners of these outward bodily experiences of God, whether it be in the context of a revival like the Toronto Blessing, or during a weekly church service. These bodily encounters are central to the Pentecostal and charismatic religious experience. In the next section I consider the Pentecostal body in relation to the wider socio-cultural context and speculate as to why outward bodily experiences are so important in this growing strand of Christianity.

The Pentecostal body in social context

The Pentecostal and charismatic churches are often described as being 'late modern' in character because of their favouring of popular culture elements in worship and the individualised kind of faith they espouse (the belief that God is interested in the mundane and intimate aspects of a person's life). The particular body emphasis found in this movement also appears to be highly late modern in character. The premium and importance placed on the outward bodily spiritual experiences reflects the consumerist and body-oriented tendencies of advanced capitalist societies.

Most contemporary social theorists agree that contemporary Western society, having moved beyond the nascent capitalism of the industrialising era, is a consumer society (see Featherstone, Hepworth & Turner 1991, Featherstone 1991a, Bocoock 1993). The *primary* orientation of individuals in a consumer society is towards consuming goods rather than producing them. In addition, a consumer society is characterised by the prodigious expansion of capital into previously uncommodified areas (Jameson 1991: 36). The transition to a consumer society came about as a consequence of improved production techniques and the manufacture of a new range of goods, allied to increases in disposable income. In like manner, the producers and sellers of goods use extensive marketing and advertising to encourage individuals to increase their consuming habits—the selling of a lifestyle in which the acquisition and ownership of various goods is an important part.

The body is especially important in consumer society. It is no longer viewed as a resource for the production line, as it was in industrial times. Instead, according to Featherstone (1991b: 170), consumer society emphasises 'pleasurable' activities for individuals to pursue and, more often than not, posits the body as the *bearer* of these pleasure and desire-oriented activities—eating out, exercise, internet sex, tanning salons. Furthermore, the visual media presents a constant display of highly stylised, yet potentially attainable, body images and types (Featherstone 1991b: 170). A new and proliferating array of goods are readily available for bodily enhancement in accord with the stylised representations offered in the visual media (Featherstone 1991b: 170).

In consumer culture, moreover, the outward 'look' of the body is increasingly important. In their sociological analysis of bodies within contemporary society, both Michael Featherstone (1991a, 1991b) and Bryan Turner (1992) argue that the body can be thought of as having two categories. Featherstone identifies these categories as 'the inner and outer body', whilst Turner describes

them as the ‘internal and the external body’, though both are describing the same thing. Concerns with health and the optimum functioning of the body are centralised on the inner body, whilst the appearance and movement of the body within social space is an outer body concern (Featherstone 1991b: 171). Featherstone suggests that within consumer culture, the inner and outer body are, more than ever before, conjoined—one’s outward appearance is seen and understood to be an expression of the inner self (Featherstone 1991b: 171). The inner body is maintained so as to enhance the appearance of the outer body, whilst the outward appearance *ostensibly signifies the inward state*.

Amid this broader social and cultural shift it is of no surprise that the body has become the clearly visible and primary bearer of a person’s spirituality, and that these experiences are both central and conspicuous in the Pentecostal and charismatic movement. By way of illustration, I mentioned above that in a consumer society the inner and outer body are increasingly seen to be conjoined, with the outer body signifying the inner state. In the case of the Toronto Blessing and being slain in the Spirit, the inner body is in-filled with the presence of God, but this is manifested outwardly—to signify the higher status of an individual’s spirituality. An immanent God enters the inner body through the Holy Spirit and yet is clearly manifested in the outward bodily actions of the believer.

Furthermore, the Pentecostal preference for these experiences also reflects broader advanced capitalist trends in which goods (in this case, experiences) are increasingly consumed by individuals for personal pleasure and stimulation. This orientation towards the body may help explain the particular appeal of these churches (even in developing nations, whose peoples often want to take on the attributes of the ‘successful’ west). It is a form of religious expression consistent with the prevailing themes of the post-industrial age.

In making these claims, I am not suggesting that changes in advanced capitalism have *produced* the bodily manifestations central to contemporary Pentecostalism, slipping into what David Lyon (1998: 58) describes as ‘modernist-style reductionism’. Various religious groups have experienced ‘ecstatic’ spiritual experiences centred on the body long before the onset of advanced capitalism (since the beginning of Christianity in fact). However, the fact that bodily experiences are more important and central to a growing branch of Christianity *mirrors* broader societal changes in relation to the body. The Toronto Blessing and slain in the Spirit experiences are late-modern incarnations of previously witnessed experiences, and thus have new, contemporary meanings that make most sense when seen in their current cultural context—societies interested in a person’s outward appearance. I am arguing here that

spiritual experiences ought not to be considered apart from the contemporary cultural milieu in which they take place, for, as Anthony Synnott (1993: 36) argues in relation to the body, each new age seems to create and reconstruct the body in its own image and likeness.

Experiencing the Pentecostal body

As noted above, in the Pentecostal movement, the body becomes the conduit through which an encounter of an otherworldly kind is experienced and manifested—the body is the ‘setting for the drama’ (Lyon 1998). That said, body-centred experiences like being slain in the Spirit or speaking in tongues, while normative for Pentecostal churches, are hardly regular social experiences. Rather, by secular standards, they are quite bizarre. The person having the first-time experience of tongues or being slain is encountering something both desirable and unusual—and most importantly, given that it is centred on the body—highly visible.

So what is it like to have such an experience—one’s body becoming the ‘setting for the drama?’ In the next part of the paper I examine what it is like to have a Pentecostal body-centred experience. I will consider narratives told by two people having their first-time experience of being ‘slain in the spirit’. The two stories were told to me during a wider study of the spiritual experiences of Australian university students, during which I collected more than 45 stories about Pentecostal experiences such as being slain in the spirit, experiencing a miraculous healing, encountering evil or speaking in tongues (see Singleton 2001a, 2001b, 2002).

Why stories? Arguably, the best way to understand personal experiences is through examining the stories people tell about themselves. Telling stories assists individuals to engage in sense-making about their experiences, to order events in a coherent fashion, relate events to other events and attribute causality (Riessman 1993, Alasuutari 1995, Ewick & Silbey 1995). To assist with the analysis and discussion, each story discussed in this paper has been divided into small, numbered segments called ‘events’ (see Singleton 2001a, 2002). These are presented in the chronological sequence in which they were told.

The first slain in the Spirit story was told by a 20-year-old woman called Charlotte Heath.³ She was slain in the Spirit during a teaching and worship session on a church camp. Her story is a good account of how her body *became* the setting for drama.

Paraphrase of a story told by Charlotte Heath

1. Well, we had just finished watching a video. It was called . . . something to do with the Holy Spirit, I don't know it's video number eight of the charismatic course.
2. We were all sitting there in this wooden hut [on the camp].
3. Jamie [a pastor] stood up and says 'now I'd just like you to stand up and invite the Holy Spirit to come into our presence'.
4. So we stood there and waited for what seemed like eternity.
5. I started to hear people's breath whistling through their noses and a bit of thumping going on, like somebody collapsing.
6. I had my hand in my pocket going I don't really want to let go just yet.
7. I decided, well, OK, I'll, my hand can come up a bit now and I slowly raised it and relaxed everything.
8. I hear Jamie saying, 'would you like us to pray with you?'
9. So I hear two people behind me, in each ear and it's a man speaking in tongues.
10. The lady on the left started talking in English and she somehow had the ability to know how to say all the right things that pushed all the right buttons.
11. I started to rock with my feet, forwards and backwards, just a little bit.
12. Eventually, it was the same tempo but the swing got a lot bigger and it was like I was really teetering on the edge of falling over.
13. But I still hang on and there was like resistance there; I have got to preserve my dignity.
14. All I remember there was this great battle in my head and in my heart. Are you ready to let go are you ready to trust God to let go of everything that you'll come to me yourself?
15. For the first ten to fifteen minutes it was no, I'm not ready, it's too scary.
16. Then there was sort of this feeling, no its OK, it will be all right, you just have to trust me kind of thing.

3 All interviewees have been assigned a pseudonym and other potentially identifiable details have been altered.

17. My picture of what was going on inside at that time would be here I am standing at the edge of a cliff.
18. Suddenly I am being led in a path and I am remembering everything that was painful in my life.
19. I am remembering all the pain and I start crying and its like, I'm crying in a different way from what I usually do, usually I don't cry at all, but this is like crying from the inside.
20. They [the people praying] kept saying, 'more power, more power.'
21. It was a very gradual thing and eventually you can just realise that it is so much more comfortable to be on the floor because it's so overwhelming and I lay on the floor and I was still sobbing.
22. I was laying down on the floor and I was recovering from this amazing, overwhelming experience.
23. That day I looked around afterwards and saw the different ways in which the Spirit touches people.
24. Some people were just, oomph, fell on the floor and just lay there.
25. Some people just laughed like hyenas and couldn't stop and it was very, very funny to watch 'cos like you know that they had no control over it.
26. There was this other guy and he lay on the floor and it looked like he was getting electric shocks to his heart.

Charlotte's slain in the Spirit story describes the loosening of the rational restraint which prevented her from fully experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit, manifested in the form of a falling experience. Within contemporary Christianity the body is the setting for drama—both 'overcome' by God and the object of attention from God's subjects. Not surprisingly, Charlotte's narrative bears witness to this particular social experience of embodiment. The Pentecostal body—unrestrained, exuberant, released to worship and colonised by God—is established in the opening few events (3 & 5) as the normative body for the social context in which she found herself. As the events unfold, Charlotte describes how she brought her body into conformity with this norm.

Charlotte asserts that whilst others around her readily fell in the Spirit (event 5), she did not accede unequivocally, and much of the 'middle' section of the narrative is devoted to her describing the gentle release of her bodily control. She suggests in event five that 'I had my hand in my pocket going I don't really want to let go just yet.' At this point in the narrative, Charlotte employs a discourse of reason to represent herself as both rational and reason-

able, not given to outrageous displays of unusual bodily behaviour. Collapsing to the floor in a state of religious ecstasy is not an appropriate form of religious expression for many church participants.

By emphasising her rationality, yet also claiming to fall in the Spirit, Charlotte is placed in the position of needing to demonstrate why she fell. In event 9 Charlotte says: 'the lady on the left started talking in English [rather than tongues] and she somehow had the ability to know how to say all the right things that pushed all the right buttons.' Suddenly, being slain in the Spirit is not as irrational as it first seemed. The lady saying the 'things that pushed all the right buttons' makes the possibility of falling more acceptable. Responding to the woman's ministrations, Charlotte starts to rock and sway and eventually falls (events 11–12). She rhetorically constructs collapsing to the ground as a more measured accession to the Holy Spirit, rather than a wild, out of control action: 'it was a very gradual thing and eventually you can just realise that it is so much more comfortable to be on the floor because it's so overwhelming and I lay on the floor and I was still sobbing' (event 21). Despite variously casting herself as resistant and reasoned, at the point of closure (designated here as events 23 to 26), Charlotte's body has become the setting for drama.

Earlier in the paper I described the bodily manifestations associated with the Toronto Blessing, a revival in the mid-1990s. This charismatic revival—like other revivals—saw thousands of people being slain in the Spirit. The next story is about a person experiencing the Blessing at her home church in Australia (pastors would visit Toronto, experience the Blessing there, then return to their local church and hold revival meetings. At these meetings, the Blessing phenomena—people roaring like lions, laughing for hours and hours, being slain in the Spirit—would appear). This Toronto Blessing story was told by a 20-year-old woman called Linda Ford. Her Toronto Blessing experience took place at a suburban church in her city. The following quote from Phillip Ashton, describes a typical Toronto Blessing meeting at this church:

The agenda for the meetings was kept very simple. Some worship, a short teaching or encouraging word, some testimony from folk who had been touched by God previously, some practical issues were addressed (such as falling and not falling, and that people would not be pushed by the prayers, etc.), and then we went into a time of prayer with individuals. (Ashton 1994: 2).

At this point in the service people received the Blessing. Here is Linda's story:

Paraphrase of a Toronto Blessing story told by Linda Ford

1. I just went one Wednesday night to Dingley [the church where the Blessing meetings were being held].
2. It was a very sort of charismatic service, very over the top, people jumping around and clapping their hands and singing all these wonderfully charismatic songs.
3. After the service they cleared all the chairs away.
4. During the service I had sort of been feeling, I really don't want to stay here, I want to get out, it's too you know, way too over the top for me.
5. But we decided to stay anyway because we'd come to see what'd happen so.
6. So we were standing there looking at all these people who are dropping to the ground around us.
7. I was sort of freaking out.
8. This guy just came up to me and goes, 'Do you want to be prayed for?' and I said, oh, no, I don't think so.
9. I said to my companion, 'What should I do, what should I do?' And he goes, well this is what you came for, why don't you just go and see what happens.
10. So the next person who came along asked me and I said yes.
11. They just stood one on either side of me.
12. They just said, you know, let the Holy Spirit come and give Linda your light and Holy Spirit.
13. It wasn't hypnotic but it was very sort of calming.
14. After a while I could only hear the two voices I had my eyes closed, and I couldn't hear the guy behind me and I couldn't hear anyone else and I just felt so relaxed, like I was going to faint.
15. I just felt like I was going to collapse. I could feel the muscles in my legs twitching, trying to keep me standing upright.
16. I just felt relaxed and I just let go and I fell backwards onto the floor.
17. I just felt this heat go down from sort of like my ears right down my back, just right down to the bottom of my spine.
18. I just lay there for quite a while and listened to what was going on around me and I just felt this intense heat that was just really strange.
19. I had this heat just going all the way down my back, so I just lay there for about ten minutes and my companion came over.

20. I didn't lose consciousness, I didn't faint, I didn't pass out, I didn't, you know, I wasn't hypnotised.

The theme of the body becoming the setting for the drama is central to this story. At the beginning, Linda identifies the charismatic nature of the service (event 2) and, based on what the audience knows about both charismatics and the happenings at Dingley, the type of body sanctioned in this context is the charismatic, Toronto Blessing body—uninhibited, unrestrained and a site 'colonised' by the power of God. In the opening sequence of events, Linda makes it abundantly clear that her preference for religious experience is quite at odds with the experiences taking place at Dingley (events 4, 7, 8). Through the middle of her narrative, Linda describes the process of being slain in the Spirit. Like Charlotte, she initially represents herself as a 'reasonable' evangelical Christian, but through sequencing the events she signifies a gradual acceptance of the possibility of having an ecstatic experience—which comes to pass (event 16). The story unequivocally represents a process in which her body becomes the setting for drama.

Each of these stories has described the process of being slain in the Spirit. For the two storytellers, this experience involved uncertainty and resistance before finally falling. Earlier, I noted that while normative for Pentecostal churches, being slain in the Spirit is not a regular social experience. These stories serve to illustrate that the person having such experiences may have to negotiate many personal issues—resistance, embarrassment, uncertainty—when the body is overcome by the presence of God. These stories are not necessarily typical, rather, they are simply reflective of how it might be for some. For others the experience of being slain may be straightforward, or wilder, or more ecstatic. Most importantly, these stories show how central the body is to the expression of Pentecostal spirituality. The physical body—not the mind—is the locus for the higher experience of God in the believer's life. Pentecostal spirituality is truly embodied.

Producing the Pentecostal body

These stories also illustrate the social processes involved in having such experiences. In becoming the setting for drama, the storytellers reported that they were encouraged by others to bring their bodies into conformity with a socially acceptable Pentecostal and charismatic standard. Put another way,

their bodies were subject to processes of normalisation and forms of institutional control.

In making such a declaration, I assert that bodies can be and are shaped through social processes, rather than existing as organic, taken-for-granted objects. To substantiate this claim, an explication of contemporary social theory concerning the body is necessary. Understanding, mapping and theorising the relationship between the body and society is an important area of inquiry in recent sociological theory (see Frank 1991, Shilling 1993, Synnott 1993, Turner 1992). Historically, the body has been viewed as 'naturalistic'—an organic reality whose experiences are the *a priori* of social representation or inscription (Turner 1992: 61). The body, according to this 'naturalistic' formulation, is foundational to social processes and experience. Chris Shilling (1993: 41) argues that 'naturalistic views hold that the [natural] capabilities and constraints of the human body define individuals, and generate the social, political and economic relations which characterise national and international patterns of living.' Naturalistic conceptions of the body have enjoyed widespread theoretical and popular acceptance over the past two hundred years.

Social theorists in recent years, however, have challenged the conventional notion of the biological body as the exclusive determinant of social experience. Encompassing a number of theoretical positions, these views may be classified under the rubric of 'social constructionism' (see Shilling 1993, Turner 1992, Frank 1998). Broadly speaking, in social constructionist formulations, the body is conceived not 'as something neutral and natural, but as socially (re)produced and inscribed according to specific practices and discourses' (Cranny-Francis 1995: 19). The body is understood to be subject to various forms and processes of restraint, control, inscription and normalisation, effected and experienced discursively and materially, which 'produces' the experience of embodiment. In the words of Shilling (1993: 70), 'the body is shaped, constrained and even invented by society'. In emphasising the socially constructed nature of the body, I do not wish to re-establish a binary between constructionist and anti-constructionist positions, by discounting the effect of biology (or even spirituality). Turner (1992: 17) negotiates a useful path when he suggests that the 'body is simultaneously, conjointly and concurrently socially constructed and organically founded'.

Social constructionists argue that the body is not only shaped through social processes, but in like manner, the body and bodily processes are the 'object of interest from others' (Radley 1995: 3), including various social institutions. The work of Michel Foucault (1977) is seminal in providing a

framework for comprehending the body as an object controlled by social institutions. According to Foucault, a new modality of power emerged in the late seventeenth century, allied to the onset of capitalism in Western society. As a consequence, the body became a target of power in new and different ways. Foucault describes this new type of power as 'disciplinary power'. Foucault (1977: 215) reasons that disciplinary power 'should be identified neither with an institution nor with an apparatus; it is a type of power, a modality for its exercise . . . a technology'. Because disciplinary power consists of a series of methods and techniques, any institution can put these to use. The new modality of power centred around the production of docile bodies: 'the organisation, disciplining and subjection of the human body in such a way as to provide a submissive and productive and trained source of labour power' (McNay 1994: 92). In his work *Discipline and Punish* (1977) Foucault describes the 'disciplinary methods' through which a docile body is produced. These methods include controlling the spatial distribution of individuals, regulating their activities, organising training and integrating the body into a system. These techniques allow the body to be normalised (McNay 1994: 94). Normalisation produces a person whose behaviour, experience and identity is 'normal' for a particular social context. Foucault (1977: 184) suggests that 'normalisation became one of the great instruments of *power* at the end of the classical age', employed by institutions such as the church, army and schools to produce docile subjects.

Foucault's analysis of disciplinary practices and processes of normalisation is primarily concerned with understanding how the docile body was utilised by a nascent capitalist society. Western society, however, has moved to the different phase of advanced capitalism. The body required by advanced capitalist society is qualitatively different to the one required by capitalist society. According to Turner (1992: 21) the body required in late capitalism ceases to be the productive body—the human body is no longer primarily conceived as the bearer of labour power. The status, use and function of the body has changed. Social institutions, however, remain fundamentally concerned with regulating and governing bodily processes, not so much restraining and suppressing the body, rather, governing the normative appearance of the body. Turner (1991: 117) explains: 'the exterior body is the medium through which feelings and emotions are expressed, but these expressions have to assume a socially acceptable form, if they are not to disrupt the normal flow of interpersonal actions. The exterior body problem is not one of restraint, but of normative representation.'

Upon examination, being slain in the Spirit appears to refute any argument about social control and regulation with respect to the Pentecostal religious body. Experiences of being slain in the Spirit and the Toronto Blessing are represented within Pentecostal circles as unmediated experiences of God—the body is ‘consumed’ or ‘overcome’ by a power external to the self. Do these experiences elide human forms of corporeal control and are recipients free from processes of normalisation? No matter what the genesis and cause of the experience may be, the social organisation of being slain in the Spirit is firmly entrenched in processes of regulation and governance to produce a body which is ‘normal’ according to certain standards. As the setting for drama and the locus for spirituality, the fallen, ecstatic body is the preferred body in the Pentecostal or charismatic context and various institutional processes are geared towards achieving this ‘normal’ body. The two narratives reviewed above provide ample evidence to substantiate this claim. Each of the narrators mentioned visiting special places where they could encounter these experiences—church services, revival meetings—and how they were assisted by church representatives to fall or shake. Turner (1992: 180) suggests that Foucault’s work focuses on how ‘active, unrestrained bodies were thus rendered “docile” through disciplinary methods.’ Being slain in the Spirit can instead be refigured as restrained bodies becoming unrestrained whilst still conforming to a normative standard.

Conclusion

This paper began by highlighting the prominence of bodily-oriented spiritual experiences in the Pentecostal church. No longer restrained and ordered, the contemporary Christian body is exuberant, released to worship and be overcome by God. Being slain in the Spirit is the most prominent example of this shift in contemporary spirituality. I also observed what it is like to have such an experience, and examined the religious body in relation to wider the contemporary social context. The Pentecostal emphasis on bodily experiences is consistent with the late modern interest in the outward appearance of the body. I also argued that the Pentecostal body, despite claims to the contrary, is not free but colonised, inscribed and regulated as much as it is spiritual.

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