



Seeing Visions, Dreaming Dreams, Prophesying

THE PENTECOST AS A RESOURCE FOR DEMOCRATIC POLITICS

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Paper for submission to the *Journal of the Society of Christian Ethics*

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In her 2007 volume, *Theology, Political Theory, and Pluralism*, Kristen Deede Johnson calls attention to the problematic dichotomization of unity and diversity in recent political theory. In the twentieth century, the “fact of pluralism” has become increasingly visible.¹ Multiplicities of traditions, practices, and beliefs exist in modern democratic society and often come into conflict with one another. How might we, against the backdrop of such pluralism, manage this conflict? Johnson observes that two schools of thought contend with this fact. The first, exemplified in John Rawls’ political liberalism, seeks to consolidate difference into an overarching “overlapping consensus”; the second, represented by agonists such as William Connolly and Charlotte Mouffe, prefer to protect difference from assimilation. The first school aspires to unity; the second aspires to diversity. Both, Johnson writes, do injustice to pluralism insofar as they prioritize either unity or diversity at the expense of the other.² Certainly, the agonists are right to bemoan the violence done to minority perspectives by Rawlsian consensus building—and yet, Johnson reminds us, their approaches ontologize difference in a way that renders communal unity impossible.³ We ought not, Johnson says, to be so willing to throw out the democratic baby with either the assimilationist or the agonistic bathwater.

Johnson proposes a solution rooted in Augustinian theology, which forthrightly recognizes the inconceivability of a perfect harmony of diverse voices in the earthly city. Yet earthly citizens

¹ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 66, passim. Young says this is a result of difference, or individuals’ “irreducible particularity,” within a community in Young, “The Ideal of Community and the Politics of Difference,” 304.

² Johnson, *Theology, Political Theory, and Pluralism*, 16.

³ *Ibid.*, 21.

are still invited, in an Augustinian account, to work toward such harmony in their loving and humble interactions with otherness.⁴ This way of life is marked by what Johnson calls “rich conversation,” in which “people live together and engage with one another from within the embodiment of their differing narratives.”⁵ By interacting with one another in love and humility, neither eschewing the value of difference nor the laudable goal of mutual understanding, we can transcend the toxic divide between unity and diversity that has prevailed in recent political theory.

Johnson is right to point out the pitfalls in pitting unity and diversity against one another, and her suggestion that Christian theology can offer resources for overcoming the chasm between unity and diversity is well supported. Yet the “rich and deep conversation” Johnson proposes in *Theology, Political Theory, and Pluralism* merits further fleshing out.⁶ That is to say: it would be helpful to know what linguistic practices, exactly constitute conversation that is sufficiently rich and deep, in Johnson’s assessment. In this essay, I offer a more concrete account of the kind of communication that Johnson’s theology prescribes, which largely resembles Iris Marion Young’s theory of communicative democracy.⁷ I find in the Biblical narrative of the Pentecost an instructive example of that rich and deep communication Johnson promotes.⁸

Drawing heavily on Willie Jennings’ portrayal of the episode in his relatively new commentary on Acts, I discover in the Pentecost a paradigm for communication between divergent

⁴ Ibid., 255.

⁵ Ibid., 235.

⁶ Ibid, 258, *passim*. Luke Bretherton makes this point in Luke Bretherton, “Theology, Political Theory, and Pluralism: Beyond Tolerance and Difference,” *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 76, no. 1 (2008): 170–73.

⁷ See Iris Marion Young, “Communication and the Other: Beyond Deliberative Democracy,” in *Democracy and Difference: Contesting the Boundaries of the Political*, ed. Seyla Benhabib, 1996, 120–35.

⁸ Ibid., 243.

communities that respects difference *and* underscores possibilities for union.⁹ I discuss four developments in the Acts story in turn. First, as the disciples speak in languages not their own, they enter unfamiliar worlds—yet they do so, second, to edify and encourage strangers in their midst. Third, they tell a story about the God that has been revealed to them, rather than merely defending a dispassionate argument about the nature of that God. Finally, their narration invites their audience to join them, not just in creed but also in practice. The heteroglot community—that is, the community composed of the speaking of different languages—born at Pentecost embodies Johnson’s ideal form of conversation.¹⁰ It is comprised of divergent constituencies, and yet is nevertheless integrated by communicative practices.

THEY BEGAN TO SPEAK IN OTHER LANGUAGES

The closing chapter of the Gospel of Luke depicts Jesus’ resurrection and appearance to his disciples. Just before his ascension, Jesus promises his followers that they will receive that which was promised by God—the Holy Spirit—and be clothed with power from on high (Lk. 24:49). The opening of Acts, which was written in concert with the Gospel of Luke, recapitulates this promise (Acts 1:5, 1:8). The disciples will receive the Holy Spirit, and with it, heavenly power. This is quite a considerable promise from the putative messiah, the one before whom all nations will bow (Dn. 7:13-14). The Hebrew language pronouncing the power of the Messiah was not merely figurative. It also implied a very real political dominion—a notion which inspired myriad political

⁹ Willie James Jennings, *Acts: A Theological Commentary on the Bible*, Unabridged edition (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2017).

¹⁰ The word “heteroglossia” derives from the Greek ἕτερος, “different” and γλῶσσα, meaning “languages.” See Acts 4:2.

insurrections.¹¹ The disciples must have received Jesus' promise of the Spirit and heavenly power, then, with the anticipation that the Israelite kingdom was going to be reestablished (Acts 1:6). The power that they were promised (δύναμις) was that same power that was attributed to God in the closing chapters of Job and in the Psalms: the power to create the world, to still the seas, to wrestle leviathan. Surely, the moment in which the disciples would be given such power would bring about quite a spectacular scene.

The narrative in the second chapter of Acts that describes the disciples' subsequent acquisition of power from on high does involve miraculous wonders. Instead of receiving kingly authority, however, the disciples receive a somewhat odd power: the ability to speak in foreign languages. While gathered together, they hear a rush of wind and see shapes like tongues of fire rest on each man, and, empowered as promised, they begin to speak in languages they could not have known (vv. 1-4). Whether they were in private or in public—the text is unclear¹²—the disciples' speech is heard by native speakers of the foreign languages in which the disciples had somehow begun to communicate. The foreigners are astonished as they listen to the disciples proclaim the great acts of God (v. 11). In their amazement, they ask each other: “what does this *mean*?” (v. 12).

It is remarkable that the kind of power with which Jesus endowed his followers—which they would have fairly imagined to be *political* power—was not political control, but fluency in foreign languages. The disciples are not granted dominion over their world, but instead are given the ability to enter the world of the stranger. Given that, as Wittgenstein teaches us, our language demarcates

¹¹ See, for example, Evans, “Daniel in the New Testament,” 502, 509.

¹² The text suggests they were in a room, but it is unclear whether this was a private room—as perhaps the Upper Room, in which the Last Supper took place—or perhaps a room in the public synagogue. See Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 1:114; Keener, *Acts*, 1:796.

our very world, to speak a foreign language is to enter a foreign world.¹³ In their spirit-filled gathering, the disciples were given the keys to realms they had never known: Parthia, Media, Elam, Mesopotamia, Judea Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, Phrygia, Pamphylia, Egypt, Libya, Rome, Crete, and Arabia (vv. 9-10).

As Willie Jennings notes, the fact that the disciples are given, before any other gift, the ability to speak the languages of foreigners deserves our thoughtful attention.¹⁴ Speaking a foreign language is tough work; it involves risking making blunders as we speak. It is also difficult because speaking in another language draws us closer to those to whose world we do not belong. Becoming fluent in a foreign language, Jennings indicates, also entails fluency in another people's food, and music, and stories. It means becoming fluent in a *strange* world. It means, ultimately, recognizing and validating a world that is beyond our own native domain.¹⁵ The precarious fluency the Spirit compels the disciples to assume is deeply humbling and deeply uncomfortable.¹⁶

Indeed, for the Hebrews, speaking other languages was certainly mentally uncomfortable, but it also stirred up the melancholy legacy of domination that the Hebrews had repeatedly suffered. In Egypt, they were subjugated by “a people of strange language” (Ps. 114:1). The ruthless Assyrian invaders were described by Isaiah as “insolent people, the people of an obscure speech that you cannot comprehend, stammering in a language that you cannot understand” (Is. 33:19).

Jeremiah's prophecy of the Israelites' exile described Babylon as “a nation whose language you do not know, nor can you understand what they say” (Jr. 5:15). Being forced to speak other languages

¹³ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, 68.

¹⁴ Jennings, *Acts*, 29.

¹⁵ Cavell, *The Claim of Reason*, 28.

¹⁶ Jennings, *Acts*, 30.

was counted in Deut. 28:49 among the potential penalties for Israel's unfaithfulness to God, and the Jews' adoption of languages other than Hebrew in Neh. 13:24 is taken as evidence of apostasy. Meanwhile, speaking the Hebrew language meant political liberation: the prophesied demise of Egypt included the Egyptians' adoption of the Hebrew language (Is. 19:18). The Hebrew tradition was deeply influenced by an arguably warranted xenophobia, and discourse in foreign languages likely bore the traumata of foreign conquest.¹⁷ How jarring, then, it is that heavenly power is bestowed upon the disciples in the very same manner that God's people were repeatedly dominated by their harshest oppressors.

Yet, as Jennings has it, this is the only just way to appreciate difference. The Rawlsian consensus building that has received support in recent decades too nearly resembles Nebuchadnezzar's golden idol—that revered ideal to which all, even malcontents, must bend the knee. Still, the alternate option, which involves the ontologizing of the division between God's peoples, is also unacceptable. At Pentecost, therefore, we witness God's "impartation of divine desire into us for others, to become one with them."¹⁸ The former imposition of foreign languages as an oppressive strategy does not mean that all talking in a foreign language must be oppressive. Rather, in Acts 2, the disciples are empowered by their new fluency to witness to strangers and liberated from their cultural monism into new possibilities of community with strangers.¹⁹ The fluency with which the disciples are endowed allows them to relate to strangers without demanding that those strangers surrender their identities, stories, and worlds before being invited into the

¹⁷ Gravett et al., *An Introduction to the Hebrew Bible*, 203.

¹⁸ Jennings, Guest Lecture.

¹⁹ Young writes that communicative democrats must "explicitly acknowledge the others whom they aim to persuade." In Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 62.

disciples' community. The disciples' risky adoption of Parthian and Cappadocian and Phrygian does enable them to witness to God's work, but it also draws them into relationship with those who inhabit other linguistic worlds. In fact, while the disciples evince their identification with their audience at the outset by speaking in their foreign audience's languages, in his subsequent speech to the multinational crowd, Peter plainly calls the multitudes his fellow citizens, and even his brothers.²⁰

This power to enter other worlds and draw near to strangers, is a gift that Johnson's scheme ought to incorporate. That gift empowers the disciples to articulate their experiences from their social positions, but it also allows them to recognize and validate the social positions of their foreign audience. Only in so doing can the communication that Johnson promotes take place.

SO THAT ALL MAY LEARN AND BE ENCOURAGED

At this point, it is important to consider the purposes for which parties engage in conversation in the first place.²¹ One of the misconceptions adopted by many champions of multicultural dialogue assumes that mere contact with otherness leads to greater tolerance.²² In fact, at times intercultural encounters lead to a greater perception of threat, the single most

²⁰ In v. 14, Peter addresses his speech to "Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem"; but in v. 22, he calls the same audience "Israelites"; in v. 29, they are his brothers. Though this could be taken as addressing a narrower subset of his audience, it is more likely that this signifies Peter's identification of foreigners as compatriots. See Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 1:139. This satisfies Young's prescription that democratic speakers "reflexively attend to the audience in speech" in Young, "Communication and the Other," 130.

²¹ Johnson prefers the word "conversation" to "dialogue," because she observes that "conversation" does not imply the kind of subsumption into "larger universal and unifying categories"—which tend to suppress difference—that "dialogue" entails. Further, according to Johnson, "conversation" encompasses both verbal and non-verbal interaction. See Johnson, *Theology, Political Theory, and Pluralism*, 240.

²² The recent immigration crisis in Europe, which has brought millions of Syrian refugees into close contact with naturalized European citizens, is an example of contact exacerbating xenophobia, rather than diminishing it. See, for example, Freitag and Rapp, "Intolerance Toward Immigrants in Switzerland."

determinative factor in increasing intolerance.²³ The mere expression of a speaker's particular perspective does not guarantee greater mutual understanding of the sort Johnson desires; this fact is insufficiently attended to in Johnson's text. Mere contact between diverse groups does not necessarily ease tensions between them.²⁴ Mutual understanding is only possible when groups communicate with the purpose of conveying meaning to one another. Thus, Iris Marion Young writes that "[i]t is not enough to make assertions and give reasons. One must also be heard."²⁵

In the Pentecost narrative, the disciples clearly do not enter foreign linguistic worlds simply to air their views.²⁶ They speak to their audience with the patent aim of conveying specific content to their hearers.²⁷ They seek to make known the greatness of God's deeds. Of course, their method for doing so—by taking on the language of foreign nationals—certainly enhances the efficacy of their witness. But we must not lose sight of the fact that the disciples are not empowered to speak in the foreign languages merely so that they can offer their audience familiar sounding words. At Pentecost, the disciples are empowered not just to *assert*, but also to *convey* God's goodness.

Here we find helpful instruction in Paul's discussion of speaking in tongues found in 1 Corinthians 14. Though Paul examines *glossolalia* (the articulation of generally unintelligible utterances) rather than the Pentecostal *xenoglossia* (the miraculous ability to discourse in

²³ Gibson, "Political Intolerance in the Context of Democratic Theory," 332.

²⁴ The famous Robbers Cave Experiment conclusively shows that friction between groups is best alleviated by the introduction of superordinate goals, not contact or communication. See Sherif et al., *The Robbers Cave Experiment*.

²⁵ Young, "Communication and the Other," 130.

²⁶ Johnson seems to miss this point when she writes that "the political... may instead be a forum for airing some of our most deep-seated differences and conflicts" in Johnson, *Theology, Political Theory, and Pluralism*, 236. However, she does later affirm that we must nevertheless "try to understand others in their differences and particularity" in *Ibid.*, 241.

²⁷ For Young, a prerequisite of communicative democracy is that communicative action must involve the "aim to reach understanding." In Young, "Communication and the Other," 125.

previously unknown foreign languages), his insights concerning effective communication nevertheless shed light on the present theme. In 1 Corinthians 14, Paul explains that the spiritual gift of *glossolalia* ought not be deemed as an end in itself. Speech inspired by the Holy Spirit needs to be interpretable to achieve its proper end: the building up of the church (vv. 5, 12, 26). All spiritual gifts ought to be offered in worship with the express goal “that all may learn and all be encouraged” (v. 31). Someone endowed with the gift of *glossolalia* cannot edify others with her inspired locutions unless she has an interpreter to reveal the meaning of those locutions. Without interpretation, she is simply “speaking into the air” (v. 9). Even words of thanksgiving, if they are not meaningful to a speaker’s neighbor, are squandered insofar as they do not build up the church community (vv. 16-17). Thus, Paul advocates praying in spirit and in intelligible language, in order that one’s prayer might also strengthen others (v. 15). The bugler must make a clear call, after all, if it is to call anyone into battle (v. 8).

Paul thus makes clear that expression alone is not sufficient for communication. He rebukes the Corinthian *glossolalia* enthusiasts’ focus on expression, and their unconcern with the transmission of meaning. The Corinthians’ expression-driven practices impede mutual hearing and, thereby, mutual understanding. Paul reminds us that the purpose of communication is not only to express, but also to be heard, paid attention to, understood. For this reason, even ten thousand words in indecipherable, purportedly spirit-filled gobbledygook are not as valuable as five instructive words in meaningful, purposeful language (v. 19).

Paul repeatedly emphasizes the perils of speech focused on expression rather than the transmission of meaning. Utterances that are only intended to express, rather than convey meaning, render us unintelligible to one another. They divide us. “If I do not grasp the meaning of what someone is saying, I am a foreigner (βάρβαρος) to the speaker, and the speaker is a foreigner (βάρβαρος) to me” (v. 11). Here, Paul seems to anticipate Wittgenstein’s insight that there is always the possibility that “one human being can be a complete enigma to another.”²⁸ In such cases, we cannot “find ourselves” in those foreigners which are enigmatic to us, and we discover that we cannot even speak to them.²⁹ Without the ability to find ourselves in others, and to converse with them in language intelligible to them, how might we edify and encourage them?

This is the reason that the disciples’ spirit-given power to speak other languages at the Pentecost is so critical. In recognizing and entering the world of strangers, the disciples show at the outset their desire to relate to those strangers. They transcend the pitfalls of single-mindedly expressive language by employing the hitherto unknown language of their audience, indicating their desire not only to speak but also to be heard. The miracle at Pentecost is not that the disciples can suddenly speak in other languages, but that they are empowered to communicate in foreign languages to strangers who are spiritually edified by that communication. The spirit inspires them to witness to God’s deeds not just for the sake of witnessing, but for the sake of drawing insiders and outsiders together, that all might be edified.³⁰

²⁸ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 223.

²⁹ Cavell renders Wittgenstein’s “Wir können uns nicht in sie finden” as “We cannot find ourselves in them,” in contrast to Anscombe’s “We cannot find our feet with them.” In Cavell, *Must We Mean What We Say?*, 67.

³⁰ This edification need not mean “Christian education” as such. Young reminds us that the expressing and challenging of situated perspectives “adds to the social knowledge of all the participants” in Young, “Communication and the

Though the disciples' discourse in foreign tongues already evinces their desire to be heard, in a sermon immediately following the miracle, Peter explicitly implores his foreign audience to listen to him, to hear what he has to say (Acts 2:14, 22). This is no mere intercultural encounter. Peter deliberately develops a line of argument in his sermon—the first recorded sermon from the early church—with the express purpose of convincing his audience of the Lordship of Jesus.³¹ He clearly intends to instruct and encourage his hearers in Jesus' teachings. We now turn to an examination of the genre of Peter's sermon before the multinational crowds, in order to uncover an approach to communication for the edification and encouragement of others.

PETER'S WORDS PIERCED THEIR HEARTS

As mentioned, Peter's discourse in Acts 2 is not a task in objective description. It is an oratory composition expressly designed to convince the multiethnic crowds of Jesus' Lordship. Having lured the crowds in with the disciples' inspired foreign speech, Peter fulfills his vocation of fishing for people by capturing his audience with his persuasive, impassioned sermon. He exercises rhetorical techniques in order to be heard and understood.³² He does not disregard his particular social location, as certain contemporary deliberative models would require of public speakers, but engages with the Jewish tradition in order to provide reasons that his audience ought to accept his account.³³

Other," 128.

³¹ Keener, *Acts*, 1:862.

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Rawls requires that public speakers "abstract from and not be affected by the contingencies of the social world" in order to engage in fair deliberation. In Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 23. Habermas disallows "perlocutionary" or rhetorical argument, because he suspects that it leads to deceit in political discourse; his position is helpfully described in Allen, *Talking to Strangers*, 55–59. See discussion in Young, "Communication and the Other," 125.

Against those who worry that such situated communication introduces arbitrariness in public conversations, Young points out that the democratic giving and exchanging of reasons is made possible, more often than not, by rhetorical turns such as greeting and politeness.³⁴ She gives three examples of verbal elements that facilitate reasonable communication: greeting, rhetoric, and storytelling.³⁵ Peter employs all three.

Regarding greeting, the first of the three elements, Young explains that parties to intercultural dialogue must recognize one another before effective communication can take place between them. She builds on Levinas' theory of speech, which posits that before assertions can be made and defended there must be "a moment of opening to and directly acknowledging others."³⁶ The speaker must express an openness to and responsibility for the other. This act is what Young calls greeting. "Especially when parties to dialogue differ in many ways," she writes, "their effort to resolve conflict or come to agreement on a course of action cannot begin without preliminaries in which the parties establish trust or respect."³⁷ Peter certainly communicates in greeting. As discussed above, Peter begins his sermon before thousands of foreign nationals by addressing them as "men of Judea and residents of Jerusalem" (v. 14). The same audience is later identified as Peter's "fellow Israelites" (v. 22) and even his "brothers" (v. 29). His greeting is invitational: he recognizes those pious Jews who hail from distant lands as his compatriots and kinfolk, and invites them to

³⁴ The former concern is from Benhabib, "Communication and the Other," 83. Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 60.

³⁵ Young, "Communication and the Other," 129–132.

³⁶ Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 58.

³⁷ Young, "Communication and the Other," 129.

recognize him as such in return.³⁸ It is a vulnerable gesture, as was the disciples' assumption of foreign languages, but it performs the recognition that is so essential to communication.³⁹

Rhetoric, the designation by which Young names the speech that “constructs speaker, audience, and occasion by invoking or creating specific meanings, connotations, and symbols” also unmistakably appears in Peter’s sermon.⁴⁰ He deliberately supports his claims before the crowds with language that would “color and condition its substantive content.”⁴¹ After greeting his audience, Peter opens his speech by dismissing the skeptics’ mockery with a witty riposte.⁴² Then, he explains the morning’s events by referring to prophecy familiar to Jews of the time, using ancient authorities to bolster his claim. In so doing, he demonstrates his own piety and mnemonic ability, the latter of which was taken by antique Greeks and Jews as a sign of the speaker’s erudition.⁴³ In his reference to Joel, Peter also activates his audience’s recollection of the scriptures, whereby they internally join Peter’s recitation of the ancient prophecy. Notice that, in citing Joel, Peter introduces the sense of sight to the overwhelming sense of hearing in the scene thus far (v. 16). For there, God declares: “I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream

³⁸ A digression worth mentioning is the complex relationship that the Hebrews had in the past with those of their nation who adopted other tongues as in Neh. 13:24 (see page 6). It might be fair to conjecture that, given the association of forsaking the Hebrew language with forsaking the Hebrew faith altogether in the Hebrew Bible, the Diaspora Jews in Jerusalem, though pious, suffered the stigma of native Hebrew speakers. Keener also observes this in Keener, *Acts*, 1:834.

³⁹ For more on this deeply important topic, see Taylor, *Multiculturalism*.

⁴⁰ Young, “Communication and the Other,” 130.

⁴¹ Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 65.

⁴² Keener, *Acts*, 1:867. According to Young, “[o]ne function of rhetoric is to get and keep attention... Humor, wordplay, images, and figures of speech embody and color the arguments, making the discussion pull on thought through desire.” In Young, “Communication and the Other,” 130–131.

⁴³ Keener, *Acts*, 1:873.

dreams.” Evoking Thomas’ demand to see Jesus, Peter suggests that his audience are themselves fulfilling Joel’s prophecy, seeing visions, and dreaming dreams. He thus invites them not only to join in his conviction that Joel’s foretelling is fulfilled in the Pentecost miracle, but to participate in its fulfillment.

Nevertheless, Peter also refashions Joel as he recites it, both to make the prophecy identify the Pentecost miracle more explicitly and to emphasize the universality of God’s salvation.⁴⁴ In later movements in his sermon, he invokes meaningful images including the great patriarch David (vv. 25, 29, 34) and the highly anticipated messiah (vv. 31, 36). Repeatedly, Peter conjures poignant passages from the psalms, which, Wright observes, “[given] its continual emphasis on the importance of the Temple and on the promises made to David, would have formed an important part of the mental furniture of the average Jew.”⁴⁵

Storytelling, however, is by far the most noticeable of Young’s three communicative elements in Peter’s sermon. After recognizing his hearers and inviting them to listen to him, and calling to mind powerful age-old images, he tells a story. In fact, Peter interpolates his recitation of Joel with a narrative, in order to describe the Lord whose name Joel says everyone must call upon.⁴⁶ Recurrently using the second person to address his audience, Peter recalls Jesus’ miraculous works—“as you yourselves know” (v. 22)—and narrates Jesus’ crucifixion and resurrection. In his use of Davidic psalms to explain Jesus’ messiahship, Peter seems to be portraying a scene in which

⁴⁴ Ibid., 1:875–877.

⁴⁵ Wright, *The New Testament and the People of God*, 241.

⁴⁶ Keener shows that Joel 3:1-5a, as recorded in the Septuagint, finds a parallel in Acts 2:17-21, but the parallel to Joel 3:5b does not appear until Acts 2:39, after Peter offers his narrative about Jesus. In Keener, *Acts*, 1:876.

David's throne is ceded to the true king of the Davidic kingdom, Jesus the Christ.⁴⁷ By affirming that "all of us are witnesses to this" (v. 32), he invites those progressively convinced to identify themselves among the "us," while continuing his efforts at persuading those who remain skeptical with generally accepted proof.⁴⁸

In *Theology, Political Theory, and Pluralism*, Johnson dismisses the apprehension that Habermasian and Rawlsian thinkers have concerning the rhetorical turns championed by Young and embodied by Peter in his sermon in Acts 2.⁴⁹ Johnson would doubtless eagerly endorse these styles of communication as an effective method for the "sharing of our differences and our particularity."⁵⁰ I offer the preceding discussion to spell out specific examples that would fulfill Johnson's recommendation. I also want to underscore that Peter exercises these three rhetorical movements with specific aims. It is appropriate to reiterate here that Peter is not simply summarizing an early Christian narrative, but preaches following the Pentecost miracle in order to stimulate faith in Jesus as Lord in his audience.⁵¹

THEY DEVOTED THEMSELVES TO FELLOWSHIP

One of the few missteps in Johnson's work can be seen in her repeated opposition of speech and praxis. To her credit, she obviously means to encourage Christians to practice what they

⁴⁷ Ibid., 1:950–964.

⁴⁸ Black, *The Rhetoric of the Gospel, Second Edition*, 129–130.

⁴⁹ Johnson, *Theology, Political Theory, and Pluralism*, 236.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Peter doesn't simply "enter from [his] own particularity into conversation with others in their particularity," as Johnson puts it in Ibid., 247. Rather, Peter has express objectives in his speech before others: the repentance of God's people. See especially Black, *The Rhetoric of the Gospel, Second Edition*, 129 n. 48. Keener makes clear that "[t]he purpose of [Peter's] accusation is to summon the hearers to a response." Keener, *Acts*, 1:970.

(literally) preach; she suspects that too many Christians fail to do so.⁵² However, as she situates speech in opposition to action, she overlooks the ways in which language and action are closely interdependent. While Austin and Wittgenstein both observe this, we can see it already in the initial reaction of the foreign crowds at the Pentecost. Moved, Peter's audience implores the disciples: "brothers, what shall we do?" (v. 37) Already, it is clear that Peter's audience senses that his speech necessitates action. After returning Peter's inclusive gesture by addressing the disciples as brothers, the crowd seeks guidance concerning how they ought to proceed in light of the disciples' witness. Peter instructs them to repent and be baptized (v. 38), and after three thousand do so (v. 41), they enter into a new form of life with those who had miraculously spoken their languages on Pentecost morning (v. 42). In fact, the text says they enter together into *κοινωνία*, an incredibly rich word that signifies both spiritual and earthly communion.⁵³

In this tableau, we witness the outcome of the disciples' vulnerability in their recognition of strangers and the impassioned sermon Peter delivers. Together, they learn, share, break bread, and pray (v. 42). Thus, the disciples and their multinational listeners are not only drawn together in communicative performance, but their communication also draws them into life together, in communal practice.⁵⁴ Indeed, Keener points out that some New Testament scholars have hypothesized that the order of early church worship recorded by Justin Martyr traces back to the fourfold practices discussed in v. 42.⁵⁵ In either case, it is clear that, per Wall's theological characterization of *κοινωνία*, the newfound community is comprised of reconciled strangers who,

⁵² Johnson, *Theology, Political Theory, and Pluralism*, 243.

⁵³ Zizioulas, "The Church as Communion," 3.

⁵⁴ Barrett, *Acts of the Apostles*, 1:160; Keener, *Acts*, 1:1000.

⁵⁵ Keener, *Acts*, 1:1000–1001.

having been drawn together, embody that reconciliation in concrete practices.⁵⁶ Even as they hail from markedly different backgrounds and speak different vernaculars, they are integrated by rich communicative practices.

Here Johnson subscribes to Cavanaugh's assertion that Christians' public participation in such concrete practices is the "most fruitful way to dialogue with those outside of the church."⁵⁷ However, once again she prefers to promote "interaction between different manners of life," rather than recognize the theological content communicated by those practices.⁵⁸ Returning to Paul's illustration of the bugler's battle call, we ought here to note that the parties to the conversation Johnson rightly promotes must not only express ideas, but also call their audiences into action. In the Pentecost narrative, that call to action does not come without the disciples' uncomfortable and vulnerable recognition of irreducible difference, nor without their earnest desire to draw near to foreign others. But neither does it come without the intention of convincing others of the gospel story, that all might learn and be encouraged in the spirit.

THE HETEROGLOT COMMUNITY

In his 1934 essay, *Discourse and the Novel*, Bakhtin points out that, unlike the genres of literature preceding it, the modern novel reveals to its reader multiple perspectives and voices. In epic poetry, for example, a more authoritative voice is embodied by the author, who reports things as if from on high.⁵⁹ The novel, however, presents the various social dialects that exist even in the same language—common tongues, refined patois, specialist jargons—and brings them together in a

⁵⁶ Wall, *The Anchor Bible Dictionary*, Vol. 1, 1:1103.

⁵⁷ Johnson, *Theology, Political Theory, and Pluralism*, 239–240.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 235.

⁵⁹ Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 271.

multivocal work of art. The term that Bakhtin offers for such a setting is *разноречие*, best rendered in English as *heteroglossia*—the recognition and integration of irreducibly particular voices. Bakhtin lauds the novel insofar as it lifts up divergent voices, rather than attempting to centralize language as previous genres did.⁶⁰ In the decades since, Bakhtin’s depiction of the “heteroglot novel” has been lifted up as contributive to democratic forms of art and dialogue.⁶¹ Modern democratic communities need to provide spaces for the “process of interaction and engagement with meaning among others,” where multiple languages and dialects are entertained.

Nineteen centuries before Bakhtin’s writing, the very inception of the ecclesial community is characterized by *heteroglossia* at Pentecost. The very phrase appears in the original Greek, describing the scene in which the disciples begin to speak *ἑτέραις γλώσσαις*, “in other tongues” (Acts 2:4). The disciples do not simply “tolerate” otherness, but are willing to enter into it, given their conviction that there are possibilities for transformation and relationship building in so doing.⁶² In their act of adopting the language of others, they recognize their audience in love, and resist the centralization of language that Bakhtinian shows is undemocratic.⁶³ The disciples do not do violence to their foreign audience by subsuming their language into an overarching way of life. Instead, in recognizing the event as miraculous—“how is it that we hear the Galileans speaking our languages?” (vv. 7-8)—the witnesses of the Pentecost appreciate the irreducibility of particularities

⁶⁰ Ibid., 293.

⁶¹ Jungkunz, “Dialogic Politics and the End of Democracy,” 34.

⁶² Young writes that it is essential that we remain willing to “envision transformative possibilities” in our communities in Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 10–11.

⁶³ In fact, even God says that he will not balk at speaking in foreign languages, in order to transform called people in Isa. 28:11.

between the disciples and their audience. Agonists such as William Connolly could hardly be dissatisfied by the respect for diverse constituencies demonstrated here.⁶⁴

Yet we do well to not lose sight of the purpose of heteroglossic communication, which is so critical to democratic communities: the transformation of all. Communication here is not only used to express, but also to *convince* and *motivate*; this, also, is a form of respect for difference. Such respect is not only shown in the disciples' assumption of the foreigners' language, but also in Peter's regard for their agency as he puts forth a cogent argument and lets his audience decide. Peter thus fulfills Young's prescription for democratic speakers as he "attempts to persuade listeners by orienting proposals and arguments towards their collective and plural interests and desires, inviting them to transform these in the service of making a judgement together, but also acceding to them as the judges."⁶⁵ Like speech that must not go uninterpreted in 1 Corinthians 14, Peter's arguments and rhetorical moves are rendered in order to mean something to his audience. As this essay has shown, one of the things that Peter's speech means to his audience is the urgency of acting in response to Peter's witness (vv. 37-40).

In view of the problematic contrast between those who would subsume difference in an overarching consensus and those who would give up on unity altogether in order to protect difference, Johnson is right to seek a *via media*. Her "theology of public conversation" makes the first steps in the right direction, and deserves further development, as Luke Bretherton noted in his

⁶⁴ In adopting the language of others, the disciples seem to be practicing Connolly's "ethos of critical responsiveness," which "does not reduce the other to what some 'we' already is" but respects the autonomy of the other in agonistic respect. In Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization*, xvii.

⁶⁵ Young, *Inclusion and Democracy*, 80.

review of the book.⁶⁶ In this essay, I have argued that the heteroglossia of Pentecost exemplifies the kind of rich and deep conversation Johnson promotes. In their speaking of other languages and their attempt to motivate their foreign audience through rhetoric into action, Peter and the disciples embody the communication that both respects difference and draws people together in search of the truth.

⁶⁶ Bretherton, "Theology, Political Theory, and Pluralism: Beyond Tolerance and Difference," 172.

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