

Playing in the Father's Love: The Eschatological Implications of Charismatic Ritual and the Kingdom of God in Catch the Fire World

Peter Althouse, *Southeastern University*

Michael Wilkinson, *Trinity Western University*

Introduction

In the early 1990s reports of religious fervour at a Vineyard Church in Toronto began to spread throughout North America and Europe and other regions of the world. The British media dubbed it the “Toronto Blessing” as thousands of people came to Toronto to experience the latest wave of pentecostal-charismatic renewal. During those years the church became independent from the Vineyard Association following a series of questions about the role of renewal and renamed itself the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship. The renewal meetings reached their peak in about 1997 and some scholars reported that it was over. However, while scholars gave the Toronto church less attention the renewal was transforming and gaining momentum in other ways.

In the last decade the church has extended its reach, expanding into numerous countries with new churches. Rebranding itself in 2010, the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship is now known as Catch the Fire (CTF) Toronto with nearly a dozen branch campuses located in the Toronto region and surrounding suburbs. Numerous events are still held with thousands of people in attendance. CTF Toronto has planted new churches in Montreal, Quebec, Raleigh, North Carolina, Houston, Texas, London, England, Oslo, Norway, and Reykjavik, Iceland with plans to expand into Germany, South Africa, and Australia. CTF Toronto has also developed ministry training schools for young adults, inner healing programs, and prayer schools and seminars. CTF Toronto has partnered with other renewal churches through a global network such as Randy Clarke and Global Awakening, Heidi Baker

and Iris Ministries, Bill Johnson from Bethel Church in Redding, California, and Mike Bickle's International House of Prayer.

In this article we focus on the eschatological implications of the charismatic renewal of Catch the Fire, which is part of what Peter Wagner called the third wave of pentecostalism or the second stage of charismatic renewal, distinct from the denominational charismatics of the 1960s and 1970s.¹ We especially focus on three aspects of charismatic renewal—playfulness, the Father's love, and advancing the kingdom. Our discussion is based upon two years of research where we have interviewed 125 leaders and participants from charismatic renewal and observations from twenty-five events including prayer schools and centres, healing rooms, seminars, and major gatherings in Toronto, Raleigh, Houston, Tampa, Virginia, Seattle, London, and Montreal.² Specifically, we argue that the subjunctive quality of renewal is eschatological, allowing charismatics to envision a new world shaped by a particular view of the kingdom of God.

Catch the Fire and the Sociology of Love

At a Soaking in His Presence Weekend in Tampa worship leaders Connie and Jeremy Sinott were teaching the approximately fifty attendees about the ritual practice of soaking prayer, a meditative or contemplative form of prayer that intentionally cultivates spiritual formation, hearing God and “revelation” by opening one's self up to the Father's love. In one of the sessions, Connie playfully dramatized the experience of soaking. She pretended that she was thirsty and had a cup of water in her hand. She raised it to her lips and imagined that she was drinking. Connie encouraged the audience to join her in the playful drama. She repeated the performance and continued to drink from the cup. Each time it got bigger and bigger. She

1. The charismatic renewal of Catch the Fire is a subset of the third wave of pentecostal renewal and therefore has family resemblance to other subsets such as the Vineyard or Global Awakening, even with the tensions that occasionally emerge between them. The first wave of the pentecostal movement emerged from the Azusa Street revival; the second wave was the charismatic renewal of the 1960s and 1970s in the Roman Catholic and historic Protestant churches. See Peter C Wagner, *The Third Wave of the Holy Spirit* (Ann Arbor, MI: Servant Publications, 1988).

2. Support for this project by the John Templeton Foundation (West Conshohocken, PA), Flame of Love Project/University of Akron (Akron, OH), \$150,000.

then pretended a large barrel full of water was in front of her; she strained to lift it and dumped the water on her head soaking herself. Finally, she imagined the heaviest barrel that she along with the audience strained to lift. In an ironic reversal, she had the audience dump the water on each other to soak their neighbours' heads instead of their own. The audience was jubilant. Connie then started praying for people and as she prayed people would spontaneously fall down in a behavioural phenomenon called "resting in the Spirit." Others cried softly, started to moan or laugh. Some developed bodily jerks, grunted or swayed. Many of the ecstatic phenomena are captured in the ritual of soaking prayer. Soaking prayer was a term originally used by Francis MacNutt in the 1970s to describe prayer for the purpose of physical and inner healing.³ CTF Toronto, in an innovative way, has expanded the practice of soaking prayer, which now captures a number of types of prayer including resting in the Spirit, anointing, prayer of the heart, divine presence, waiting or tarrying, contemplation, hearing God, intimacy, prophecy, impartation, and healing. It cultivates the experience of divine love, which in turn facilitates acts of forgiveness, reconciliation, compassion and benevolence.

Playing and having fun is an important aspect of charismatic worship. In the worship services of CTF, participants will stand up and sway, dance around, spin and jump, raise their hands, and wave flags as they worship. A music group usually consisting of guitars, keyboards, other instruments, and singers play Christian dance or rock music from the stage. At the same time, other participants can be observed lying down along the sides or at the back of the auditorium soaking in the Father's love. Charismatic worship

3. Tommy Tyson, a Methodist minister who served as the chaplain at Oral Roberts University, coined the term "soaking prayer." Francis MacNutt, *Healing* (New York: Bantam Books, 1974), 182–83. MacNutt popularizes the term for healing ministry as long-term prayer for the sick. "'Soaking prayer' conveys the idea of time to let something seep through to the core of something dry that needs to be revived. That's the way it is with the laying on of hands when we feel that God is asking us to take time to irradiate the sickness with his power and love." Francis MacNutt, *The Power to Heal* (Notre Dame, Indiana: Ava Maria Press, 1977), 39. Macnutt spoke at the Toronto renewal a number of times, suggesting influence on the development of soaking prayer in *Catch the Fire*, but our site observations at Christian Healing Ministries reveal that MacNutt's understanding of soaking prayer is linked to the "duration of prayer" needed as people soak a person desiring healing over extended periods of time. Also see Pavel Hejzlar, *Two Paradigms for Divine Healing: Fred F. Bosworth, Kenneth E. Hagin, Agnes Sanford, and Francis MacNutt in Dialogue* (Leiden: Brill, 2010).

best resembles what Victor Turner identifies as carnival and exemplifies ritual play. Theories of ritual play engage the “as if,” or subjunctive mood in which the world is envisioned as if it were different than it is currently. Charismatic play rituals envision an alternate world and therefore have potential consequences for the mundane world. Rituals of play can either affirm or subvert the cognitive, technocratic and rationalized world of today. The subjunctive mood allows participants of ritual to imagine a different world.

The subjunctive mood coincides with Christian theology’s notion of the eschatological presence of the kingdom of God that is pressing in from the future. As a category of eschatology, the kingdom of God presses into the world and is made present through the incarnational presence of Jesus Christ by the Spirit, but also not yet here in that the great reversal of sin and injustice still occurs. Typically called inaugural or proleptic eschatology, the already and not yet of the kingdom is enacted in the worship, rituals and sacraments of the church as the intersection of the eschatological vision of the coming kingdom that creates space for the theological imagination of a different, more loving and just world. What if the world were more like that which has been described by the biblical prophets and apostles, or charismatic visionaries throughout history, a world proclaimed and lived by Christ? This world as envisioned in charismatic Christianity is one defined by unselfish love that is “received” from God and expressed or “released” to family, friends, neighbours and even enemies. The theological imagination of the kingdom already here in the Father’s love but not yet in its fullness is the nexus between the religious and the scientific described as the subjunctive.

Theoretically, our assumptions are shaped by recent developments in two areas namely the sociology of love and altruism as well as ritual studies. More specifically, Margaret Poloma, Stephen Post, Matt Lee, Ralph Hood, and John Green have contributed to the development of a model referred to as “Godly Love” that is shaped by Pitirim Sorokin’s idea of “love energy” and Randall Collin’s work on interactional rituals and “emotional energy.” The “Godly love” model attempts to investigate the relationship between numerous interactions of love among actors, exemplars, collaborators, beneficiaries, and the divine. What the model allows researchers to observe are the experiences of divine love for participants, the role of charismatic leaders as exemplars, and the consequences of these interactions especially

altruistic acts of benevolence. Godly love is a conceptual model and does not refer simply to the experience of loving God or love of neighbour, but focuses on the *process of interactions* whereby one's perceived experience of divine love fuels consequential acts of love.⁴ The "Godly love" model is informed by early twentieth century Harvard sociologist Pitirim Sorokin in his book *The Ways and Power of Love*.⁵ Sorokin was one of the first sociologists to examine the social consequences of a "love energy" for society and culture. The model is also complemented by the sociology of ritual as developed by Randall Collins.⁶ Collins, like Sorokin, focuses on the social energy that emerges through ritual in a series of interactions that sustains long-term behaviour. In order to evaluate emerging research on "Godly love" as developed by Poloma, Post, Lee and Hood, the consequential outcomes of the kingdom-subjunctive nexus will be employed. The subjunctive is a mechanism of "Godly love" that produces "love energy" through empathy for others, and moves people to experience love, forgiveness and reconciliation.

In her investigation of the Toronto Blessing in *Main Street Mystics*, Poloma began to work out the relationship between religious experience and altruism in the context of charismatic renewal. The heart of religious experience in renewal is love as a tangible experience of being loved by God with the consequence of extending love to others. She comments: "Social scientists are reluctant to speak of love. Yet it is love—experiences of divine love that in turn affect human love—that is at the heart of the

4. "Godly love" is technically a model for observing a variety of interactions. See Margaret M. Poloma and Ralph W. Hood, Jr. *Blood and Fire: Godly Love in a Pentecostal Emerging Church*. (New York: New York University Press, 2008), where they describe the interactional relationships between social actors who perceive experiences of divine love and are then motivated to express love in benevolence or altruistic ways. Godly love research is part of a developing field in the social sciences related to altruism funded by the Templeton Foundation as the Flame of Love project. Subsequent publications on Godly love include Margaret Poloma and Matthew T. Lee, *A Sociological Study of the Great Commandment in Pentecostalism: The Practice of Godly Love as Benevolent Service* (Lewiston: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2009) and Margaret M. Poloma and John C. Green, *The Assemblies of God: Godly Love and the Revitalization of American Pentecostalism* (NY: New York University Press, 2010).

5. Pitirim A. Sorokin, *The Ways and Power of Love: Types, Factors and Techniques of Moral Transformation* (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 1954 [2002]).

6. Randall Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2004).

renewal.”⁷ She employs an interactional process between human actors who feel the presence of the divine actor, which then actualizes human actors to engage others through prophetic charisma.⁸ The term “Godly love” and the model employed to define it was later developed in *Blood and Fire*. Poloma and Hood defined “Godly love” as “the dynamic interaction between human responses to the operation of perceived divine love and the impact their experience has on personal lives, relationships with others, and emergent communities... Godly love begins with a relationship between God and the individual, but its empowering potential spreads to influence others and the community of faithful....”⁹

The model expands the work of Sorokin, who thought that the energy of love could be sociologically analyzed according to a five-dimensional model. These dimensions include intensity, extensity, duration, purity and adequacy. Each dimension involves a low to high range that can be measured. Intensity ranges from simple acts of love such as helping a person carry groceries to high intensity acts where a person sacrifices health and life for the good of another. Extensity ranges from love of one’s self solely to love of all humanity and creation. Duration measures the length of time love is expressed from a short, momentary act to a whole lifetime. Purity measures the motivation or intent of love from a pure, unselfish love act (high) to an egoistic act for the benefit of the actor (low). Adequacy measures the consequences of love from a discrepancy between the consequence and the love act to a fulfilment of the goal of love and its consequences.¹⁰

The model is expanded with sociologist Randall Collins’ ritual interaction chains theory (IR). According to Collins, interactions are characterized by emotional energy (EE) that appears in bodies through intense face-to-face situations. Collins describes IR as “a mechanism of mutually focused emotion and attention producing a momentarily shared reality which thereby generates solidarity and symbols of group membership.”¹¹ The basic ingredients of IR include the physical assembly of a group of people, a process involving shared action, awareness, and

7. Margaret M. Poloma, *Main Street Mystics* (Walnut Creek, CA: Alta Mira, 2003), 140.

8. *Ibid.*, 68, 119, 138–141; quote from 138.

9. Poloma and Hood, *Blood and Fire*, 4.

10. Sorokin, *The Ways and Power of Love*, 15–20.

11. Collins, *Interaction Ritual Chains*, 7.

emotional energy, which contributes to new group symbols and identity. The creation of emotional energy is, however, prolonged through symbols that effect morality. Collins states: "When the practices stop, the beliefs lose their emotional import, becoming mere memories, forms without substance, eventually dead and meaningless. By the same token, new symbols can be created; whenever the group assembles and focuses its attention around an object that comes to embody their emotion, a new *sacred object* is born."¹² EE, however, is not just about a highly charged ritual that demonstrates a lot of excitement or the dramatic effects that one might associate with religious contexts like the charismatic renewal. EE refers to the long-term effects of successful IR. In other words, EE is a long lasting effect that carries over to such an extent that participants are convinced of the experience to such a degree that they act upon the experience. Collins says: "EE is instead a strong steady emotion, lasting over a period of time, not a short-term disruption of a situation. A general characteristic of EE is that it gives the ability to act with initiative and resolve, to set the direction of social situations rather than to be dominated by others in the micro-details of interaction."¹³ EE not only supports Sorokin's notion of "love energy," but the production of emotional love energy fuels social action with definite social consequences.

In *The Assemblies of God*, Margaret Poloma and John Green tested the "Godly love" model and employed Rolf Johnson's love typology: union-love defined as love for the beloved in romantic, but also mystical ways; care-love, which is love expressed in compassionate, benevolent, and prosocial ways; and appreciative-love, which is a more aesthetic though distance type of love.¹⁴ The authors state: "*Godly Love is the dynamic interaction between divine and human love that enlivens and expands benevolence.*"¹⁵ In *A Sociological Study of the Great Commandment*, Matthew Lee and Margaret Poloma test their model of "Godly love" through a qualitative study of 101 interviews of exemplars and their collaborators in pentecostal Christianity.¹⁶ Using grounded theory they develop a threefold typology of benevolence: *servers* who express benevolence in community service, *renewers* who

12. Ibid., 37.

13. Ibid., 134.

14. Margaret M. Poloma and John C. Green, *The Assemblies of God*, 56–57 and passim.

15. Ibid., 103; authors' emphasis.

16. Lee and Poloma, *A Sociological Study of the Great Commandment*, 13.

work to revitalize the church and *changers* who work for structural social changes and justice. As might be expected, changers are not as prevalent in pentecostalism as the other two.¹⁷ Using the work of prominent pentecostal theologian Frank Macchia, Lee and Poloma developed an interactional model between the vision of the kingdom of God and spiritual experiences that lead to benevolence. They tested the model with grounded theory and found a strong relationship between the exemplars' visions of the kingdom and benevolent action.¹⁸

In this article we offer an explanation of charismatic renewal and views of the kingdom of God employing insight from the sociology of love and ritual studies and informed by theological studies. Specifically we examine the role of play among charismatics as a form of ritual action that highlights the subjunctive quality of renewal. The subjunctive quality of ritual play and the liminal boundaries it crosses has broader consequences than just opening up the imagination. The potentials, possibilities, and eschatological visions grasped in sacred space and fuelled by the subjunctive produce empathy for others, which in turn opens possibilities for visions of a new world based upon a theology of the kingdom of God. Subjunctive play in charismatic ritual instils empathy and produces love that moves people to forgiveness and reconciliation, even to altruistic behaviour. An engaged spirituality that includes experiences of visions, dreams, and a sense of transcendence is an important part in the healing process that brings forgiveness and reconciliation. Healing too is a playful charismatic ritual in which both bodily and psychological/emotional health is an outcome of the subjunctive and a sign of the kingdom. In healing, divine love is experienced and love energy is produced. Put negatively, disease constitutes an impediment to "Godly love" because the focus on one's own lack of health restricts the flow of love to others. Charismatic renewal captures the subjunctive aspects of play, creates the space for empathetic identification with other individuals or groups, both in the in-group and outward to other groups, and through empathetic identity act in compassionate and benevolent ways. Our focus here is predominantly on the divine-human interaction of the model of "Godly love" captured in ritual play that produces in the social actor a desire to love and help others.

17. Ibid., 62 and passim.

18. Ibid., 60–61, 66–67.

Ritual Play in the Charismatic Renewal

Ritual play is an important aspect in charismatic worship, but one that has received little attention. Laughter, crying, bodily jerks, groans, the utterance of animal-like noises with imitative behaviour such as the bodily movement of a clucking chicken or roaring lion are playful rituals, sometimes spontaneous and at times imitated among participants. CTF Toronto has ritualized much of its worship as playful performance. One of the core values of CTF churches is to have fun while playing in “Daddy’s love,” i.e., God’s loving presence.

As we have observed different worship services throughout Canada, the United States and the United Kingdom, we have noted other playful activities. During charismatic worship many will stand, sway and clap their hands at their seats, but other participants will move to the front of the auditorium or church to dance and spin around to contemporary worship music. People are often strategically placed with flags that are waved as an act of worship. At times flag wavers as well as others will be dressed in bright costumes. One pastor of a nondenominational charismatic church explained it this way: “I am a radical worshipper. I love to dance. I love fast music.... I’m a shouter, and we use more Jesus Culture [and] IHOP [International House of Prayer] music, which is stronger and fast... the dance and the shout and the flagging and the strength and worship, so it’s very much who I am, and it’s very much a part of me.” Charismatic worship often resembles a carnival with the master of ceremonies or charismatic leader directing the show while various sub-activities take place throughout the church or auditorium.¹⁹ Charismatic leaders like John Arnott, Pastor and founder of CTF Toronto, function as emcees who are un-phased by the events that occur and guide the direction of the performance. During the service participants will lie on the floor throughout the auditorium while the worship is conducted and the message is preached. Others may be uttering verbal sounds such as glossolalic utterances, or a deep groaning signifying the moving of the Spirit.

The role of ritual play in religion is a nexus for cross-disciplinary dialogue between the social sciences, especially sociology, anthropology and theology; and these insights can be applied to pentecostal-charismatic

19. Poloma, *Main Street Mystics*, 2.

ritual. In anthropology, Victor Turner argues that the ritual of play (“ludic”) is represented in liminality in dancing, riddles, jokes, rites of reversal, practical joking, etc., as the religious has been relegated to the sphere of leisure and in competition with games, sports, pastimes, hobbies, tourism, entertainment and mass media. Religion becomes less serious yet more solemn in that it now occupies the space of leisure, but has specialized in ethical standards and modes of behaviour in a social context with a multiplicity of personal choices, rapid changes and secularization.²⁰ The free and ludic reconfiguration of culture into multiple possible patterns is the space or boundaries where liminality and its cognate liminoid occur.²¹ Wishfulness and desire pervades liminoid space while obligation the liminal. “One is all play and choice, and entertainment, the other is a matter of deep seriousness, even dread, it is demanding, compulsory....”²² Ritual liminality approximates the subjunctive mood, creates social potentiality and produces new meanings and symbols. Celebrations such as fiestas, fairs and carnivals exemplify the subjunctive mood.²³

Seligman, Weller, Puett and Simon’s cross-disciplinary approach expand on the subjunctive mood of ritual, an “as if” that is distinguished from other social worlds. The symbolic sharing of the subjunctive produces potentiality, a vision of what *could be* and through ritual grasps a sense of this world “as if” it were real. Ritual play points to the incongruity of the world that is, and the world that could be.²⁴ This “as if” quality allows ritual to deal with the ambiguities of the social world in interaction with the unseen world, and to oscillate between boundaries in ways that not only cross them, but violate, blur, reaffirm, re-establish and/or strengthen them.²⁵ In a theological sense this other world is defined as the eschatological

20. Victor Turner and Edith Turner, *Image and Pilgrimage in Christian Culture: Anthropological Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1978), 35–36.

21. Victor Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre: The Human Seriousness of Play* (New York City: Performing Arts Journal Publications, 1982), 28. Technically liminality refers to ritual practice in pre-industrial world, while liminoid refers to ritual practice in industrial, technocratic and highly rationalized world, though for our purposes liminality will be used for both.

22. Turner, *From Ritual to Theatre*, 43.

23. *Ibid.*, 84–85.

24. Adam B. Seligman, Robert P. Weller, Michael J. Puett, and Bennett Simon, *Ritual and its Consequences* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 20.

25. *Ibid.*, 43.

kingdom of God, which can be seen as both a future and a present “as if” reality.

The subjunctive is related to several ideas from sociology. Max Weber pointed out that religious ideas played important roles in shaping social action. In his book *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, Weber demonstrated how the theology of Calvinism shaped economic behaviour.²⁶ Ideas of work, vocation, calling, the will of God were not simply the theologies of another world, but were beliefs that shaped this world. The “Thomas Theorem” developed by W.I. Thomas and Dorothy Thomas in the early twentieth century purported that when people define situations as real, they become real in their consequences.²⁷ Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann developed ideas in the sociology of knowledge demonstrating the constructed nature of social life. Specifically, the subjective reality of social life is constructed through a series of ongoing interactions, including beliefs, about the nature of reality, which in turn are institutionalized.²⁸ The subjunctive focuses specifically on the role of ritual in the social process of making real the beliefs and experiences we describe here.

Seligman et al., draw upon four principles: play is a free, non-coerced activity; it is disinterested in economic or material human needs in the mundane world; play is distinct from ordinary life with its own set of meanings and purposes; and play establishes its own order. When applied to ritual theory, ritual has both an end but creates unending truth, while play’s ending is unknown. Ritual incorporates the past into the present while play defers and projects the present into the future. In this way ritual play is unending even though its performance has different endings.²⁹ Also drawing on Roger Caillois, Seligman et al., divide play into four categories: *agôn*—competitive games that equalize external conditions in order to test innate skills of the players, i.e., football, chess, etc.; *alea*—games of chance in which players have little to no control over the outcome, i.e., casino games, dice, etc.; *mimicry*—imaginary play often simulated, i.e., pretending to be

26. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (New York: MacMillan, 1958).

27. W.I. Thomas and D.S. Thomas, *The Child in America: Behavior Problems and Programs* (New York: Knopf, 1928), 571–572.

28. Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann, *The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge* (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1966).

29. Seligmann, et al., *Ritual and Its Consequences*, 74.

dragons, cops and robbers; and ilinx—(literally whirlpool) pursuit of vertigo or near panic behaviour, i.e., spinning in circles, tickling, white-water rafting or riding roller coasters. Rituals of play can allow the self to remain in control or to lose control and they either affirm or subvert the social order. Agôn and alea affirm social roles and in doing so reveal the identity of the players (aggressive, defensive, tacticians or strategists). Mimicry and ilinx allow players to abandon their identities and roles, to give up self-control.³⁰ The implication for ritual is that some forms of ritual play follow external rules in order to cultivate and shape participants identities, social roles and self-control and to reaffirm social boundaries, i.e., high church liturgies or rules of faith, while others allow participants to assume alternate identities, to assume other roles, to “let go” of control, and to subvert social boundaries, i.e., charismatic ritual. Charismatic ritual best fits the category of ilinx play though one can observe slippage into other categories such as alea and mimicry. However, charismatic ritual is subversive to the mundane world calling in question its frenzied, technocratic structures.

The theology of play is a subject of interest as well, given the ritual nature of religious liturgy. In *Feast of Fools*, Harvard theologian Harvey Cox sets out to re-appropriate festivity and fantasy in the religious life by means of a ludic methodology. Songs, dance, prayer, stories and celebrations are key elements in *homo festivus*, whereas visionary dreaming and myth-making are elements of *homo fantasia*.³¹ The human capacity to play, celebrate and story-tell connects the species to the larger historical and cosmic realities of life, to situate the human presently between past and future, between creation and the kingdom of God.³² The mystic, or more precisely the neo-mystic, assumes an important role in mediating religious festivities. The neo-mystics emphasise spiritual celebration through loud music, bright costumes, dancing around and speaking a language all their own. In the 1960s, “hippies” and “flower children” were considered neo-mystics.³³ Poloma’s identification of the charismatics stemming from Toronto as “mainstream mystics” is an accurate assessment and analogous

30. *Ibid.*, 77–78.

31. Harvey Cox, *The Feast of Fools: A Theological Essay on Festivity and Fantasy* (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1969), 10–11.

32. Cox, *Feast of Fools*, 14.

33. *Ibid.*, 101–102.

with the neo-mystic. Although these charismatics draw upon the mystical historical tradition, they have innovated mystical practice in ways that inculcate spiritual insight and embodied manifestations.³⁴ The neo-mystic assumes the tradition of the holy fool and prophetic insight assumes a kind of foolishness in that it criticizes and even subverts commonly accepted ways of living. At times the mystic can inspire radical and even revolutionary hope in an effort to transform society by calling everything into question. Charismatic mystics hold the potential through its subjunctive envisioning to change the world.

Prayer is a playful ritual, which has implications for understanding soaking prayer among charismatics. Cox argues: "In my view, not only are prayer and play analogous but their kinship provides us with a sound contemporary access both to our religious tradition and to the future."³⁵ Prayer is a playful spiritual discipline. *Supplication* is risk-taking in that a person imagines him or herself in an "as if" "nonexistent future situation that is richer, in some important respect, from his present."³⁶ *Intercessory* is empathetic in that the person imagines what it would be like "as if" someone else. The participant must imagine what it would be like to be another person emotionally, physically, spiritually, or socially. This type of prayer is a form of mimicry. *Thanksgiving* expresses gratitude through celebration with its repertoire of song, dance, verbalizations, physical displays, embrace, and so on. *Penitence* is the request and offer of forgiveness, to envision one's self in a broader, relational context and in need of restored relationships, and willingness to forgive others in an effort at communal healing. Once again, the "as if" comes into play in order to imagine that a person's direction in life is not bound to past events and is therefore freed from the past. Penitence frees a person to change and start a new direction.³⁷ Later, Cox follows up on the ludic methodology when he proposes that the role of fantasy or make-believe is important in theology. Make believe functions as a form of ludic empathy and thereby engages the subjunctive as means

34. Poloma, *Mainstreet Mystics*.

35. Cox, *Feast of Fools*, 146.

36. *Ibid.*, 147.

37. *Ibid.*, 145–148.

to inculcate love and express love through consequential acts.³⁸ What if, for example, I were dying of cancer as an elderly patient in palliative care; or what if I were homeless and had to dig through garbage bins for my next meal all the while trying to evade the scorn of the public and the strong arm of the law. The nexus between receiving love and the consequential acts of care-love for others is anchored in empathy formed through the subjunctive, “as if,” mode.

Protestant theologian Jürgen Moltmann notes the liberating function of play. In the context of political oppression and human suffering, play frees and emancipates people to be truly human. Play has the potential to critique the complex, rationalized structures of industrial society and instills vision for a better, more liberated world. Moltmann says: “We enjoy freedom when we anticipate by playing what can and shall be different and when in the process we break the bonds of the immutable status quo. We find pleasure in games and enjoy the suspended state of playing when the game affords us critical perspectives for change in our otherwise burdensome world.”³⁹ Play and games serve a critical function by constructing “counter-environments” or other worlds that “open creative freedom and future alternatives.”⁴⁰ Eschatological hope is important in Moltmann’s theology of play, but hope is not cast in a romantic, utopian yearning, or in the transformation of messianic hope for a better world into mystical inwardness.⁴¹ The future of which Moltmann speaks at this point in his career is counter-revolutionary in the social realm, but also of the glorification of God dwelling among us in the new creation, a future that has an end to oppression and suffering but endless in its opening to eternity. Interestingly, Moltmann shifts from human play to divine play. God’s play is creative freedom with unlimited potentialities, without purpose either in the beginning of creation or the playful purposelessness of the eschatological kingdom. God’s play is the outworking of divine love.⁴² The implication of Moltmann’s theology of play for our purpose is that the creative play of God that finds its fulfilment

38. Harvey Cox, *The Seduction of the Spirit: The Use and Misuse of People’s Religion* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1973), 319ff.

39. Jürgen Moltmann, *Theology of Play*, trans. By Reinhard Ulrich (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1972), 12.

40. *Ibid.*, 12.

41. *Ibid.*, 4–5.

42. *Ibid.*, 17–18, 26, 35–40.

in the eschatological kingdom is a divine act of love that invites others to participate in the game as they overcome oppression and suffering in the world. The invitation to play instils compassion for others and seeks transformation for the good of all.

A number of scholars have applied theories of play to pentecostal-charismatic ritual worship. Suurmond applies theories of play to charismatic worship in order to construct a theology of creation. "The common characteristic of play is its uselessness. It serves no purpose," argues Suurmond, "but is an end in itself. This attitude of play seems to be the only right attitude to God, to our fellow human beings and to creation in general."⁴³ Worship too is useless and is stripped of all pretensions of utility because human existence itself is unnecessary. Worship, celebration, art, love without reason is what makes us human. Consequently creation has no utilitarian value and exists because it pleases God. Humans are not called to dominate creation and make it useful, but to enter into its game, to play in and with it. Suurmond then develops a theology of creation in which the play between Word and Spirit is an end in itself and we are invited to join in this play. Word represents the order of the game (its root meaning of *logos* is rational ordering) while Spirit is the dynamic, surprise and enthusiasm of creation (the root meaning of *pneuma* is the movement of air or breath). "The tension between rules and spontaneity characteristic of play, the tension between the necessary and the possible, between structure and dynamics, is the tension between the Word and the Spirit. This tension vibrates in creative wisdom, the world order as God means it to be."⁴⁴

Dutch Anthropologist André Droogers proposes methodological ludism as an approach to the study of religion that is non-reductionist and applies this methodology to the study of pentecostalism. Play is both a heuristic tool employed by ethnographers to provide a theoretical framework for the religious, but also an important dynamic in ritual practices of religion.⁴⁵ In

43. Jean-Jacques Suurmond, *Word and Spirit at Play: Towards a Charismatic Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmanns, 1994), 29.

44. *Ibid.*, 40.

45. Especially, André F. Droogers, "The Third Bank of the River: Play, Methodological Ludism and the Definition of Religion," in ed. Anton van Harskamp, et al., *Playful Religion: Challenges for the Study of Religion* (The Netherlands: Eburon Academic Publishers, 2006), 75–96. Other essays in the volume by Droogers include "The Normalization of Religious Experience: Healing Prophecy, Dreams and Visions," "Identity, Religious Pluralism and

subjunctive play dissimilar realities are brought into juxtaposition by which humans make reference to the hidden and invisible reality of the sacred. The subjunctive of play refers to creative potential, a general human capacity rather than a human product, and allows for multiple sets of rules to be grasped simultaneously even when only one set is being followed at a given time such as when one is in a state of play. The capacity for holding two or more realities together simultaneously through play allows humans to grasp the “ambiguity of reality as one in diversity” to articulate a wholeness to reality while speaking of its dividedness.

Peter Versteeg builds on Droogers’ ludic methodology and uses play in order to interpret and analyze charismatic worship. Versteeg’s context is the Vineyard Christian Fellowship, a charismatic group with direct implications for understanding Catch the Fire, since the Toronto Airport Christian Fellowship was originally a Vineyard church before its separation. He noted the role of humour in the creative prophetic images leaders would use while ministering to others. Fundamental was the belief that God played with believers as children. The emphasis was on intimacy with the Father expressed as “sitting on Daddy’s lap.” Children would play with their Daddy God and God would play with them. Prophetic ministry took on a playful quality and would cultivate the notion that reality is a spiritual reality and that God would communicate prophetically through signs and wonders, music, dance, words and colours.⁴⁶ Versteeg goes on to argue that prophetic praying is playing a trick that never stops and defies the rules of play. This play spills over into reality and affects the believers’ life-world. In prophetic play the subjunctive shifts and becomes indicative. Prophetic playing is reality seen from the divine perspective, which moves from representation to presence. The implication for the researcher is that she cannot enter into that liminal space without crossing a line of belief, and this is risky methodologically, but one that takes seriously the intersect between the religious and mundane worlds. Versteeg concludes that playing in the charismatic world is not only recognized as playing, but also as a

Ritual in Brazil: Umbanda and Pentecostalism,” and “Paradoxical Views on a Paradoxical Religion: Models for the Explanation of Pentecostal Expansion in Brazil and Chile.”

46. Peter Veerstag, “Playful Religion: Experience, Meaning and Ludic Approach,” in ed. Anton van Harskamp, et al., *Playful Religion: Challenges for the Study of Religion* (The Netherlands: Eburon Academic Publishers, 2006), 100.

sign of sacred reality. Ritual playing not only discovers the divine order of reality, but attends to this reality by attuning to the whispers and presence of God.

Veerstag's observations were replicated in our own observations of Catch the Fire churches. At a conference on the Father's Love at CTF Houston, we observed the use of playful rituals. CTF Houston is one of Catch the Fire's newer churches and time was set aside on the opening night for the leaders who had traveled from Toronto to Houston to anoint the new husband and wife pastors. However, instead of using a little dab of olive oil to anoint the pastors for ministry, an entire bottle of oil was dumped on the husband and wife team, who collapsed to the floor (the ritual of resting in the Spirit or soaking prayer). At the end of the service, the guest speaker, who is considered gifted in prophetic ministry, called people to the sides of the church. As he prayed for their anointing they would spontaneously fall to the floor or rest in the Spirit. One woman, however, decided to lie down to be prayed for so that she would not fall, something the speaker found amusing. On the following day the congregation was asked to come for prayers of anointing. Four different lines were formed and as people were prayed for, the ministers used an empty bottle of olive oil fancifully decorated with colourful tassels, and pretended to pour the oil over the petitioner, imitating what had been done the night before. "Catchers" were employed to catch those who would fall down. One of the researchers was pressed into the role of catcher, which allowed him to hear what was said to each person as the leaders "anointed" the petitioners and prophesied over each of them, usually involving mental images or "revelations" for each person. One researcher was eventually anointed and told that his "revelation" was a mental picture of sweet tasting honey all over his head and face. The taste of sweetness is an important part of the revelation. No explanation was offered as to what the revelation meant, though honey is a biblical image of God's blessing. Rituals of prophecy or revelations in charismatic renewal are understood as hearing from God and often involve mental images. Both prophecy and revelations, which are believed to be forms of divine communication, engage the theological imagination and are playfully expressed to others. Wolfgang Vondey is especially insightful: "The players are not performers; instead play becomes present through them regardless of whether or what they perform. In other words, play is

not the kind of activity that conditions the effects of revelation but a mode of being in which revelation is actualized.”⁴⁷

Margaret Poloma also noticed this playfulness in her sociological fieldwork on the Toronto Blessing.⁴⁸ Poloma observed the playfulness of worship in Toronto in the various ecstatic phenomena such as fits, trances, visions, manifestations, impartations or anointing, animal noises and mimicry, prophetic mime, and drunkenness. The language of drunkenness can throw off an outsider with its playful reversal of meaning that one can be inebriated in charismatic experience rather than through alcohol. John Arnott explains spiritual drunkenness in *The Father’s Blessing*: “Every time they go down [resting, slain in the Spirit], it’s like they had another glass of booze, but it isn’t that at all. It’s the Lord’s Spirit....When people are under the Spirit they are delivered of all sorts of problems. They go into the heavenlies [a reference to visions]. They come back, and they are no longer the same. They are transformed.”⁴⁹ On different occasions we would hear leaders and participants describe this experience as “drunkenness” or “being drunk in the Spirit” because it appeared similar to alcoholic inebriation, a description that fits theilinx type of play that emphasizes vertigo and inebriation.

Although ritual play has been a focus in the social sciences, particularly cultural anthropology, the analogy of play is also proposed as a theological category. In his analysis of pentecostalism, Wolfgang Vondey proposes that play rather than performance is a theological category better able to capture the essence of global Christianity and therefore able to advance ecumenical discussions.⁵⁰ On the one hand, performance is a term that emerges from drama and theatre and is proposed by predominantly Reformed theologians as a category for articulating an ecumenically descriptive theology. It also aligns with western socio-economic structures where performance is a way to assess the health of the economic landscape. However, the difficulty with performance is the passivity and minimal participation of the Christian in liturgical praxis. On the other hand, Vondey sees play as a potentially rich

47. Wolfgang Vondey, *Beyond Pentecostalism: The Crisis of Global Christianity and the Renewal of the Theological Agenda* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2010), 76.

48. Poloma, *Main Street Mystics*.

49. John Arnott, *The Father’s Blessing* (Orlando, FL: Creation House, 1995), 146.

50. Vondey, *Beyond Pentecostalism*, 13.

category for understanding and analyzing global Christianity. Since play better reflects the characteristics, practices and sensibilities of pentecostalism it gives pentecostals a theological voice in the dialogue.⁵¹ The notion of play is disinterested in any one particular theological or liturgical perspective and therefore more sensitive to the broad scope of the global theological task. Play equalizes the playing field and encourages maximal participation. Different perspectives are like different worlds. They can be engaged simultaneously through the subjunctive. Play is joyful activity engaged for its sheer delight rather than for its performative, competitive, rationalistic or utilitarian value.⁵² Another charismatic ritual that is especially important in experiencing love is healing, which engages the subjunctive in its hope for emotional and bodily health.

The Kingdom of God and the Subjunctive Imagination

The eschatological vision in the charismatic renewal is diverse and constantly changing. However, the Toronto Blessing was initially part of John Wimber's Vineyard Christian Fellowship, a charismatic grouping of churches sometimes identified as the third wave of pentecostalism.⁵³ John Wimber and the Vineyard was influenced by Fuller Seminary Professor George Ladd's "already but not yet" or inaugural eschatology. The theological framework in the Vineyard for the charismatic activity such as prayers for healing and glossolalia is inaugural. Kris Miller, a Vineyard official, states: "In short, that basic framework can be called an 'inaugurated eschatology,' the presence of the kingdom of God already inaugurated by Jesus but not yet consummated until his return. Within this basic framework, Vineyard churches will vary in its practice of prayer for healing, including those churches who offer extensive time blocks for healing prayer."⁵⁴

51. Although Vondey's focus is primarily classical pentecostalism, he includes renewal in his discussion and therefore defines pentecostal broadly to include the whole gambit of pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity.

52. Vondey, *Beyond Pentecostalism*, 13.

53. Wimber makes use of Wagner's terminology in John Wimber, "Introduction" and "Afterword," in ed. Kevin Springer, *Power Encounters: Among Christians in the Western World* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), xix–xxxiv and 211–216 respectively.

54. Kris Miller to Peter Althouse, email correspondence on behalf of Bert Waggoner, 22 June, 2010.

Wimber articulated an eschatological theology that the kingdom of God will fully come in the final second coming of Jesus Christ, but that supernatural manifestations break into the present through believers who make space for God's kingdom power. For Wimber, the power of the kingdom, which is revealed in "signs and wonders" and supernatural manifestations, will overthrow the powers of Satan in the world. Kingdom theology emphasizes proclamation of the kingdom, healing the sick, casting out demons, and performing miracles. However, Stephen Hunt argues that this theology is more than merely an attempt at manipulation of cosmic and metaphysical forces, but an attempt to make social and psychological space for the working of the Spirit of God. Healing is a charismatic ritual and one of the signs of the kingdom and viewed more holistically to include psychological as well as spiritual and physical elements.⁵⁵

Catch the Fire World exhibit similarities to the inaugural eschatology of the Vineyard. Healing, signs and wonders, charismatic manifestations, dreams and visions, ecstatic behaviours are all interpreted as the "inbreaking" of the presence of God as "foretastes" of the coming kingdom. In fact, sensory descriptions such as taste, smell, hearing, and touch are prominent in the language used to describe divine presence. The charismatic leaders in the movement are bearers of the kingdom and disclose it through the impartation of spiritual gifts to participants. An impartation is normally passed on through touch or the laying on of hands, but even here playful innovations are evident such as blowing from the mouth (representing Spirit) or pretending to "shoot" the person with the power of the Spirit. Soaking prayer facilitates the experience of the inbreaking kingdom through which prophecies, revelations, visions (mental picture images), healing, weeping and laughter are mediated in the body as divine communication. Charismatics play with God as if the kingdom has already arrived, but with awareness that there is a discrepancy between what is and what is to come. The emphasis is on the realization of the kingdom (some would say over-realization) in the present by which divine love is experienced through signs and wonders, healing, physical or bodily manifestations, and so on.

55. Stephen Hunt, "Doing the Stuff": The Vineyard Connection," in ed. Stephen Hunt, Malcolm Hamilton, and Tony Walter, *Charismatic Christianity: Sociological Perspectives* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1997), 84–85.

In the charismatic renewal, healing is an element of ritual play that enables participants to “get back into the game.” Although bodily healing is stressed, inner or emotional healing plays a more important role for experiencing the Father’s love and experiencing forgiveness and restoration of relationships. At the tenth anniversary celebration of Catch the Fire conferences at the Founders Inn in Virginia Beach, John Arnott led the full capacity of approximately fourteen hundred people in a time of worship and healing. The worship leaders had led the congregation in fast-paced music that reached a crescendo and then quieted down in a calming manner. Arnott then addressed the congregation. He referenced Jesus’ encounter with John the Baptist and stated that the kingdom of God is at hand and asked people to raise their hands as high as they could into the air to press into the glory of the Lord, to reach their hands into the heavens. He said “Let my hands be an extension of Jesus.” As the congregation received the “anointing” in their hands he then had them touch areas of their bodies that were in need of healing. He claimed that the manifestation of miracles is the sign that the kingdom is present. As he called out various healings that he believed were occurring, he called those people who believed they were healed to the front of the auditorium. There were approximately thirty to forty people who came forward. Arnott then interviewed a few of them, and continued to pray for each of them. Many fell down and rested in the Spirit, while others would be overcome by spontaneous bodily movements.

Manifestations and miracles are indicators that the kingdom of God has come in the power and presence of the Spirit. Healing is a sign of God’s outflow of love. The presence of the Father in love is an expression of divine presence to bless and heal people in their life circumstances. In *Grace and Forgiveness*, John and Carol Arnott say: “[God] is the very embodiment of perfect flawless love. His heart for us is to see us living our spiritual lives where we are operating with the dynamics of His Kingdom just as Jesus did. It is a Kingdom of love, filled with faith, aware of the bigness of our God; aware of His willingness to interact with us and do things for us as we act in loving obedience to Him.”⁵⁶ The intersection between the subjunctive of play rituals and the eschatological manifestation of the presence of the kingdom of God produces love that energizes people for various activities

56. John and Carol Arnott, *Grace and Forgiveness* (Chichester, UK: New Wine Ministries, 2009), 14.

including their own healing and personal renewal. The healing of the body, emotions and interrelationships allow people to experience the energy of divine love, enabling them to express that love to others.

One couple who was impacted by the experience of love, healing and empathy in the charismatic renewal in a way that eventually led to compassion ministry provides evidence for the relationship of divine-human interaction of love and how that love is expressed to others as captured in the “Godly love” model. Similar stories are often repeated in our interview data. Dana and her husband Charles (pseudonyms) are renewal leaders and involved in missionary work. Dana had not truly experienced love though she defined herself as a Christian from an early age. She was raised by a “manic depressive” father that created a “very interesting childhood.” Though she loved Jesus and loved the Spirit, she hated the Father because her relationship with her own father was strained. At ten years of age she developed epileptic seizures, and then developed “chondromalacia patella” (degenerative disease of the knees), migraine headaches, lactose intolerance and ovarian cysts. She was informed by her doctors that she would be wheelchair bound by the age of thirty. In 2003, she and her husband attended a “Father Loves You” Conference in Toronto. In the context of charismatic worship she was healed of her emotional hatred and was able to forgive her father. She says:

I hated the word ‘Father,’...And to cut a very long story short, I forgave my earthly father for all the belief stuff of the heart. And I’d forgiven him a zillion times, but carried on dishonouring him, hated him, didn’t have anything to do with him, and now I realize that I hadn’t actually done it from the heart. I needed to step up in grace, and as I did that every single sickness left my body instantly. And the key was the bitterness and the bitter root that I’ve had in my heart for so long, and my body literally shut down.

Dana experienced inner healing because she experienced a profound sense of love and was able to forgive, and as a result experienced bodily healing.

Yet the story does not end here, because through the ritual experience she and her husband have developed a passion for a compassion-based ministry. The couple works with orphaned and impoverished children who struggle with hunger and starvation, addictions, and disease. The couple have worked to develop feeding programmes, schools and residential housing and training programmes in carpentry and electrical apprenticeships. Yet their

compassion work is specifically linked to their experience of the Father's love, inner and physical healing, and the ability to forgive. They comment:

Dana—We got broken. We got ripped before with the compassion of the kids, but the Father actually didn't release us until after I got healed. It was amazing. It was really, really interesting.

Charles—We don't know why. It just took a while. And we know that the reason it took a while was because we were too broken and wounded ourselves to do any good to anyone else until we actually encountered who God really was. Because they aren't gonna feed a child. What God wants is His heart to be reflected and revealed to those children. And so it was only when we really understood who He was that we believed God actually released us into what we're now doing.

According to Dana and Charles' claims, their ability to love others in acts of compassion was impeded by their own bodily and emotional concerns. By experiencing God's love in the context of charismatic renewal they experienced a "release" from the physical and emotional problems that were impeding their expression of love to others, and were "released" to work for needy children in compassion ministries. The reports of divine-human interaction that lead to benevolent action in human-human interaction is a good example of the social interactions of the "Godly love" model that considers divine experiences of love as motivation for human expressions of love.

Conclusion

The vision of the eschatological kingdom of God inspires the theological imagination with hope, and possibilities of what the future may potentially hold. The repertoire of charismatic gifts, prophesy, revelation, healing, and bodily expression are signs and wonders of that future embodied in the human heart and reflective of a world of unlimited love. The subjunctive refers to the "as if" world of the kingdom of God, one through which the presence of God is inculcated in ritual play. The subjunctive is activated through play and activates the theological imagination, as it attunes to the spiritual dance ("perichoresis," literally, "to dance around") between Word (rules of the game) and Spirit (free flow of play) in relation to the Father (love of play). The subjunctive is the mechanism through which love is instilled in both the individual and religious community, and through which

people and their communities are moved to love others, to forgive and heal broken relationships, and to act in compassionate, and benevolent ways.

Charismatic ritual with its carnivalesque elements and emphasis on embodied experience is viewed by participants as the presence of God's kingdom in love and engages the subjunctive world through play. The ritual interaction of bodies in sacred space where participants engage in dramatic performances, kinaesthetic movement, playful use of colour and sound, prophetic utterance, and bodily/emotional health all contribute to the production of emotional energy where people can experience the energy of love and forgiveness. Soaking prayer is a ritual practice in which love energy is experienced and is used to expand the renewal through charismatic networks. Soaking prayer is practiced individually and corporately in the context of charismatic worship, in conferences and seminars, in homes and churches. Play rituals allow the players to empathize with others by imagining what their own lives could be like as if they were the other. The belief that the kingdom of God is at hand and not in some distant future or disembodied afterlife contributes to the subjunctive quality of charismatic life and envisions a world where love abounds. Love is shared with others through renewed relationships and acts of compassion. The "Godly love" model is a way to investigate the various interactions between social actors who are energized by love in order to see how perceived experiences of love motivate participants to act in loving ways.