

“The Wrong Holy Ghost”: Discerning the Apostolic Gift of Discernment Using a Signaling and Systems Theoretical Approach

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Abstract I develop a case study of demonic glossolalia (speaking in tongues) for its cues in conveying religious commitment among a congregation of Apostolic Pentecostals. From the perspective of signaling theory, costly or hard-to-fake signals may convey psychological dispositions of members and would-be members toward an inclusive community. I utilize signaling theory in a broader systems approach to make sense of an incident of speaking in tongues that a congregation decries as demonic. To facilitate this interpretation, forms and motivations of glossolalia—the sine qua non that one has accepted Jesus as personal savior—are described and examined, including examples of calm and excited “Holy Ghost” and “backslider” and “mistaken demonic” glossolalia. To an outsider, some of the differences among these signaling modes may be difficult to distinguish, but the underlying religious and family dynamics provide insights as to how church members make distinctions they attribute to the spiritual “gift of discernment.” This approach promises to make unique contributions toward understanding the implicit folk psychologies of practices that, according to Pentecostals, mark them as “weird” or “odd.” [Pentecostalism, glossolalia, systems theory, signaling theory, commitment]

The 2007 mockumentary *Borat* (Charles 2006) depicts the title character faking glossolalia or “speaking in tongues” at a Pentecostal service during his exploration of the United States. It is often asked how scenes like this, in which believers seem taken in by Borat’s farce, do not delegitimize tongue speaking for those who believe in the “gifts of the Spirit.” After all, these gifts, including speaking in tongues and “discernment” of fake tongues, among others, are God’s validation that one has accepted Jesus. Why is no one discerning Borat’s fakery? Perhaps a better example is the 1972 documentary *Marjoe* (Smith and Kernochan 2008). A former child evangelist and practiced showman, Marjoe literally performs the gifts of the Spirit for revivalist tithing, the rewards of which he is shown splitting with his shyster hosts before moving on to the next town.

Despite such exposés of religious chicanery, the Pentecostal/Charismatic (P/C) movement has continued to grow, becoming the most successful Christian movement of the 20th century (Cleary 1997). What those who puzzle over the Marjoes and Borats fail to appreciate is that Pentecostalism is successful because of its flexibility (Robbins 2004) and, I suggest, the tension between this flexibility and internal check-and-balance systems. In religio-cultural systems like Pentecostalism, wherein many aspects of “proper” decorum are

not expressly taught, the personal experience of getting it wrong may be part of the spectrum toward getting it right. “Faking” is a socially constructed behavior and only defined as chicanery when behavior violates codes of conduct, whether these codes are formalized or implicit.

A discussion of fakery is important in the context of understanding Pentecostal religious behavior for at least three reasons. One, without further attention, it is not always possible to distinguish between conscious fakery and a more subtle problem of incomplete socialization or confusion that is typical during conversion to a new religion or denomination. Two, the motivation to fake religious behavior may indicate unmet needs or desires that may ultimately lead to conversion. Finally, lack of attention by congregants to such mistakes can spiral out of control as others errantly emulate them, leading to destabilization of the system. Initially, as an outside observer, I found distinguishing the meaning of differences I observed in Pentecostal behavior difficult, especially since church members frequently lack reflective insight into their own motivations and attribute them to the influence of the Holy Spirit or, to a lesser extent, the Devil. In reflecting on an incident observed in an Apostolic Pentecostal church in Poughkeepsie, New York, where I carried out ethnographic and interview-based research, I develop an integration of signaling theory and a systems approach to elucidate the underlying folk psychology of practitioners toward discerning behavioral fakery and mistakes in Apostolic ritual practice.

The Apostolic Setting

In 2007, I began a project exploring the moderating influence of glossolalia on the physiology of stress response among Apostolic Pentecostals in upstate New York (see Lynn et al. 2010, 2011). My *a priori* notion was that, because many non-Pentecostals consider it odd, speaking in tongues is an adaptive marker of in-group affiliation. Consistent with other scholars (e.g., Bourguignon 1976; Goodman 1972, 1988), I thought that, since it is a form of ecstatic practice, it must have the potential to also accrue physical benefits to Pentecostals who practice it in context over a period of time. However, early in the course of my research, I witnessed cases of what congregants interpreted as demonic glossolalia that forced me to rethink this simplistic model. It is important to address contradictions with preconceived notions because they provide routes by which to improve hypotheses or dispense with those that merely add to the confusion of studying culture. Pentecostalism does not represent a monolithic culture, so the behaviors I observed must be put in context.

Pentecostalism is a form of evangelical Protestantism characterized by faith healing, divine speech (glossolalia), interpretation (ability to understand glossolalia), discernment (ability to detect divine, demonic, or human influence), and other charismata (gifts of the Spirit) (Synan 2004). Pentecostals, Charismatics, and Neocharismatics combined comprise the world’s second-largest Christian group after Catholics, with 614,010,000 adherents as of mid-2010 (Johnson et al. 2010). This achievement took shape in just over 100 years. The

success of the P/C movement is attributed to direct access to the divine, cultural flexibility, ability to mold to preexisting belief systems, capacity to empower victims of oppression and modernization, and the presence of frameworks for recovery from illness (Robbins 2004).

Within the P/C movement, groups are distinguished by ecclesiastical practices and doctrine. Apostolics are Oneness Pentecostals, who argue the Holy Trinity is a polytheistic tripartite conceptualization of the same being. This distinction from Trinitarians marked an early rupture in Pentecostalism (Fudge 2003). Apostolics consider glossolalia the preeminent sign of the acceptance of Jesus as personal savior, not merely one of several—as with less conservative denominations (Synan 2004). Individuals are thus motivated to receive the Holy Ghost in the presence of their congregation and generally do so for the first time as part of their spiritual baptism or “Baptism of the Holy Spirit,” which includes acceptance of Jesus and renunciation of sin, water immersion baptism, and receiving the Holy Ghost or speaking in tongues.¹

It is the behaviors associated with this spiritual baptism and the supplication toward receiving the Holy Ghost that, according to informants, have led outsiders to regard them as “weird” or “odd.” Oneness Pentecostals in particular are derogated as “Holy Rollers,” one church elder told me, due to their tendency to be taken over by the Spirit and fall to the floor between pews and in the aisles during services. In sermons and casual conversation, Apostolics invoke a belief that outsiders consider them weird and odd, almost as a badge of honor, to distinguish “us” from “them.” Consistent with this, I have spoken to many non-Pentecostals who have attended Pentecostal services and even to adults raised in Pentecostal churches but who are no longer members who report their experiences observing charismata as strange and even “scary.” It is specifically these reports and my observations of relatively higher rates of glossolalia among Apostolics, after visiting a number of Charismatic congregations, which led me to choose them for the focus of my research.

My preliminary data collection involved understanding the “emic” or “native” view of glossolalia experiences while also addressing “etic” or underlying functions (Harris 1976). Without exception and consistent with other accounts (Chesnut 1997), Apostolic informants I interviewed quickly focused on their first experiences with tongues and the initial pressures they had felt to produce them. Some church members encouraged me to speak in tongues as well, though less intensively than they pressed others. I have been told by elders of the two Apostolic churches in this study (one in Poughkeepsie, New York and the other in Kingston, New York) that they consider me a member, but the fact that I was a member of two churches marginalized me in both, as it demonstrated my inconsistent commitment to either one of them.² When I failed to manifest tongues after a few months, which one pastor suggested is the average for committed converts (though I never undertook a formal conversion process), I began to sense their frustration with what they seemed to view as my inalcitrance. Thus, it became clear that an emphasis on manifesting glossolalia might have the potential to produce fakery among would-be members seeking to belong and to alleviate such tensions.

In the fall of 2007, I observed what I refer to as the “wrong Holy Ghost” incident, which I believe exemplifies the potential of such pressure. A woman who was not a member but married to one and trying to be accepted by his congregation (though not to convert to Oneness Pentecostalism) was ostracized for her manifestation of tongues. Her behavior was deemed demonic by the Apostolic congregation, which was the first suggestion to me that glossolalia has the potential for negative valence. While this was, according to informants, a rare incident, it was not an isolated one and pointed toward potentially unique cultural features that should be explored to avoid “universalizing” possession as a monothetic phenomenon, which can obscure local variation (Lambek 1989). Thus, it became important to me to recognize when glossolalia would be emically evaluated as negative or positive and to know how to recognize these differences or shifts.

Informants attributed this ability to the gift of discernment, or, more specifically, they would say, “my Holy Ghost told me.” Interviews and observations I conducted subsequent to this incident led me to recognize some of the mechanics of this discernment, which is largely intuitive and varies from person to person but draws on cultural construction, meaning, and value. To tease apart the psychology underlying discernment, I use a combination of signaling theory and a systems approach.

Signaling Theory

Religious behaviors like glossolalia and other charismata can be viewed as signaling willingness to cooperate with other in-group members. Signaling theory “looks for mechanisms that link information—*signals*—to mechanisms that generate mutually benefiting social-interactive behaviours—*cooperation*” (Bulbulia and Sosis 2011:371). The principle of signaling theory is that signal senders and receivers both have a stake in honest interaction. Understanding what characteristics or features of individual religious behavior may signal commitment to a particular group provides important information for inferring signalers’ mental states (Alvard 2005; Tomasello 1999). The benefits of *sending* honest signals of a willingness to cooperate, in this case, may include acceptance into the group and concomitant social support. The benefits of *receiving* honest signals include gaining a member who will contribute to and not merely exploit the group.

There are a number of types of signals, from *indexical* signals, like a rash that indicates an allergic reaction, which are impossible to fake (Cronk 2005), to what are referred to as *costly honest* signals, which involve the communication of information relatively expensive to produce (Bliege Bird and Smith 2005). In economics, costly honest signaling is most closely associated with conspicuous consumption, in which extensive spending indicates financial largesse; in evolutionary biology with the peacock’s large tail feathers, which signals the genetic capacity to carry a physical handicap without fitness cost (Zahavi and Zahavi 1997); and in religious studies with religious rituals of duress or danger, such as the snake handling of Holiness churches, which signals willingness to jeopardize health on behalf of a group vision of faith. Another type is “hard-to-fake” signaling (Irons 2001), which suggests

willingness to cooperate but does not bear the same expense as costly honest signals. The opportunity, resource drain, and temporal costs (when someone could be doing something else) may be sufficient to prevent community “free riders,” who exploit benefits but do not contribute (Cronk 2005). Hard-to-fake signals appear when broad categories of signalers and receivers are in conflict, such as Pentecostals and the non-Pentecostals who consider them weird, but those of individual signalers and receivers within the faith converge (Cronk 2005:605).³ Studies find hard-to-fake religious behavior predicts community longevity and in-group cooperation better than the behaviors of similar secular groups, suggesting that such cooperation is critical to group stability (Bulbulia and Mahoney 2008; Soler 2008; Sosis and Bressler 2003; Sosis and Ruffle 2003).

Religions vary dramatically in their hard-to-fake signals and even shift from congregation to congregation, as was true between the two Apostolic groups that were the primary focus in my study. Yet Sosis (2006) suggests all religious signals can be identified as one of three types: *behavioral* signals or what people do; *badges*, such as body adornment or iconography; and *bans*, which anthropologists have classically termed *taboos*. The sine qua non of Pentecostal signaling is glossolalia, but there are numerous other signals more and less specific to Pentecostals, such as waving arms in praise or being “slain in,” “falling in,” or “resting in the Spirit” (Csordas 1997), which involves falling (usually to be caught by other church members) as the Holy Spirit takes possession of one’s body. Badges are similarly relative and sometimes include head coverings for women or other specific church attire, often varying by gender or age. There are numerous bans, ranging from the ubiquitous Christian taboo on premarital sex to the more specific Pentecostal ban on crosses or pictures of Jesus in the church, which they interpret as idols. Bans only become visible in violation through cues that intrinsically link to such violations. Cues are distinct from signals in that signals can be turned off or on, whereas cues are fixed to a specific act and point in time (Maynard Smith and Harper 2003). Thus, pregnancy in an unwed woman would be a cue that the ban on premarital sex had been violated.

Systems Theory

A key to understanding the behaviors, badges, and bans of a particular group, especially in the Pentecostal churches in which I have worked, is insight into the church as a system and appreciation for the overlapping systematics of families in the church. The family-systems approach takes the position “that the family is an example of an open, ongoing, goal-seeking, self-regulating, social system, and that it shares the features of all such systems” (Broderick 1993:37). Systems theory implies that motivations for displaying characteristic behavior are oriented toward contextually relevant goals and that there are a number of socially contingent pathways within systems for achieving those goals (Broderick 1993). The churches I studied are family-oriented places, and the church brethren comprise several families integrated in the church through leadership positions and with each other through intermarriage. Additionally, the church structures are organized like a family. In one church I studied, the mother of the pastor was also the “church mother.” Men and women are “brothers” and

“sisters in the faith.” Elders expect family rituals to be inclusive of church members. For instance, weddings are supposed to be coordinated by church elders, to take place in the church, and to be attended by church members. The goals in the life of the church family are like those of secular families—health, longevity, bounty—and sermons expressly convey as much. Church members therefore manifest behaviors in a syntax that symbolizes the extent of their allegiance to this system with spiritual salvation and social support as the goals of these behaviors.

Much of the information informants provided me after the “wrong Holy ghost” incident I describe below related to who was violating family and church values. Whereas the pressure among Apostolics to produce tongues may explain the form of the event, the underlying motivations of the ostracized woman and her husband can be understood in light of her reported desire both to establish her family boundary and to bridge that boundary to be part of her husband’s church community. Attempting to navigate these two systems may have brought her “strong-tie” and “weak-tie” networks into conflict. Strong ties are a small group of close friends and family most relied upon in times of need, whereas weak ties are one’s amorphous and extensive but more casual group of connections (Broderick 1993).

This theoretical approach coincides with signaling theory, as they both relate to communication within and between systems. As Bliege Bird and Smith point out, “the poor reputation of functionalist analysis comes from the fact that many analyses fail to suggest any feedback loop linking consequences and action, thus leaving the causal connection mysterious” (2005:243). To resolve this, Bateson’s (2000) concept of “schismogenesis,” or the “progressive differentiation” that takes place between groups in discordant contact, may shed some light on the development of distinctive signals within systems. “Symmetrical differentiation,” according to Bateson, occurs when two groups with the *same* aspirations and behavioral patterns are differentially oriented with respect to those patterns. For instance, Apostolics and Trinitarian Pentecostals share the same goals of happiness, spiritual salvation, and fulfilling lives dedicated to Jesus. Internally, group members of respective denominations treat each other with courtesy and acceptance. However, I’ve observed that Apostolics are sometimes guarded and critical toward Trinitarian Pentecostals, and the Trinitarians treat Apostolics in kind, creating the potential for a negative feedback loop. As negative behaviors toward out-groups increase through this feedback, they amplify rifts between groups. As with an arms race, the features that distinguish each group diverge (but still not their underlying aspirations and in-group behavior) (Bateson 2000) as each side of the rivalry ups the ante in response to the rival. Among the implications of these negative feedback loops is the destabilization of church or religious systems.

The second type of schismogenesis is “complementary differentiation,” when members of two groups have *different* aspirations and behaviors (Bateson 2000). These groups need not be two separate cultures but can be groups of individuals, different families, or different social classes. Thus, there is potential for rifts within churches, as groups of members have varying desires and dispositions with respect to their church. Williams (1984) has identified four membership types that reflect the behavioral dynamics within the churches I

observed and provide potential for complementary schismogenesis. These include “elite” (pastor, elders, and others with direct influence on church policies), “core” (other officers and those with structural roles in the church), “supportive” (“Sunday Christians” and ad hoc committee members), and “marginal” (newcomers, sporadic attendees, children, “backsliders” or saved individuals who have slid back into sin, and infirm individuals). In particular, supportive and marginal members can have aspirations that contrast with other members and produce tension within the system. An important dimension of an integrated system is to prevent total fracture through maintaining balance among interactive feedback loops.

Data Sources

The utility of these theoretical vantages became clear in the course of data collection, which took place while attending over 100 services at six different Pentecostal and Charismatic churches in New York’s Hudson Valley from March 2007 through July 2009, the majority at two Apostolic churches in Kingston and Poughkeepsie, New York.⁴ The data include transcriptions from 15 semistructured person-centered interviews and field notes developed in the course of participant-observation. Interviews involved eight males (one interviewed twice) and six females, ages 18–56, and focused on (1) why the individual was Pentecostal and had come to this denomination, (2) why she or he joined this particular church, and (3) the experiences of the individual with the gifts of the Spirit. Initially, I selected church members I had observed speaking in tongues for interviews. Subsequent to the episode I outline below, I chose interviewees to round out a bimodal representation of Williams’ (1984) membership status types (elite/core, supportive/marginal). Most interviewees were either core or supportive members, but I was careful to also include elite and marginal members, as I considered this range important toward explaining potentially contrasting interpretations and motivations for glossolalia and other Apostolic signaling behavior.⁵ With these latter interviewees, I added questions about divine and demonic manifestations of glossolalia and about the incident discussed below in particular. I have known and consulted all informants except marginal ones since beginning this research in 2007, and many continue to inform me.

I collected and analyzed data using a grounded theoretical approach (Strauss and Corbin 1998). Following Charmaz (2006), I coded my notes and transcripts throughout data collection. I noted the importance of glossolalia as a preeminent signal, of it being witnessed, and that it should accompany an approved suite of behaviors. After the incident to be described, my coding shifted as my frame of interest began to include discernment of demonic presence as well as the forms and motivations for the production of glossolalia. I began asking interviewees about the pressure to produce glossolalia, about fake tongues, and about how one knew when a manifestation was divine or demonic. This grounded theoretical approach is largely inductive—i.e., I was not testing hypotheses related to religious signaling or family processes. Relevance to theory became clear through the emergence of conceptual categories in my notes and ex post facto literature review.

Ethnographic Profile

While I worked at both the Poughkeepsie and Kingston churches equally, I focus the ethnographic profile on the Poughkeepsie church, where the incident took place. The two churches share the same doctrine but differ in ethnic composition. According to one informant, approximately 90 percent of the Poughkeepsie congregation were immigrants from Jamaica, but there were also African Americans from Barbados, Ghana, and the United States. Periodically there were nonblack marginal members who went through baptism, but they did not maintain their memberships long. Socioeconomic status ranged from low to upper-middle class, and education ranged from some high school to graduate degrees. Sunday service attendance ranged from 50 to 150 attendees. They actively fellowshiped with churches, Apostolic and otherwise, and were affiliated with an incorporated church in Toronto for tax purposes, with whom they regularly interacted. They did not exhibit the overt hostility my explanation of schismogenesis (Bateson 2000) suggests, but tensions were evident in remarks of members and visitors.

The congregation formed around elite and core members of two families and their acquaintances from the same village in Jamaica. These members had previously broken away from a similar church in Poughkeepsie they had also helped found. Upon arrival in the United States, according to the pastor, who was not ordained at the time, the family had sought a church with a “Caribbean flavor.” They could not find one, so they enlisted a Jamaican pastor in New York City to start one. Within a few years, some friction developed with the Jamaican pastor when my informant began pastoral training. As Broderick (1993) points out, there is not necessarily an executive function within social systems. The only assumption is that when negative feedback spirals out of control and tolerance levels are exceeded, some form of dampener will kick in or destabilization will occur. The family’s departure to start a new church suggests such destabilization occurred, resulting in irreparable schismogenesis and the fracturing of that church community.

The pastor’s family, in starting their own church, shifted from sub- to superordinate in this system. All elite members of the Poughkeepsie church I studied with one exception were part of this splinter. The exception was a young male evangelist who converted from Trinitarian Pentecostalism, joined the church as choir director, and was deemed an elder during the course of my fieldwork.⁶ The pastor’s family included his wife (an evangelist in the church) and two children; his mother (the church mother); one brother (a deacon), and his wife (a missionary) and three children; and two other adult brothers (both in the church music ministry), one of whom married another church member while I was conducting fieldwork. The pastor’s father and an adult sister (the pastor was the middle child among six brothers and four sisters—these few lived in Poughkeepsie) were marginal members who only attended sporadically, though the sister’s husband was a core member who was integrally involved in church activities. The assistant pastor’s family included his wife (a missionary), two adult daughters (both choir members), and a teenage son. These family compositions changed somewhat due to marriages during my fieldwork.

While it was difficult to assess how these members felt about my general presence, their response to the study was varied. Members were friendly and generally open to research being conducted in their church though not all wanted to participate. Even some spouses or family members participated while others did not; some preferred to give only interviews, while others would only take part in other aspects. There was no clear pattern and no indication that data was in any way biased by members trying to impress anything upon me. I interpreted the lack of inquisitiveness about the study as disinterest, but the pastor once complained to me that his congregation was not direct in expressing themselves to him either and that he often found out about problems only through the rumor mill. When I revisited the church in 2010, the congregation had recently experienced another schismogenic rupture, perhaps the culmination of this distance experienced by the pastor. He and other elders had loosened rules regarding attire and cosmetics for women (a change in the value of badges of commitment), as they felt these rules were vestiges of Jamaican cultural mores that had been erroneously associated with biblical doctrine. This resulted in departure of the aforementioned young male evangelist and a contingent of other members to start a new church that maintained what they considered a more conservative ethos. One indication that this occurred along complementary lines is that the split is not between “real” families (i.e., affinal or sanguine) but through them. For instance, the splinter drew away the assistant pastor’s married daughter but not her husband.

This context should help clarify an incident that occurred during a Sunday midday service in the fall of 2007 in which a husband was being exorcised of demons while his wife, who was trying to help him, was accused of being possessed by them. This incident illustrates the worship activities of Apostolic membership types and the fine-grain dynamics of commitment signaling. Analysis of this case reveals three motivations underlying two forms of glossolalia associated with church status.

Case: Incident of “the Wrong Holy Ghost”

Approximately 100 people were attending the service wearing their Sunday best, which was a suit for elite and core males. Supportive and marginal attendees were in suits or business casual attire (e.g., colored short-sleeve shirts with dress slacks). Elite and core women wore dresses that cut below the knees with collars to the neckline, stockings, head coverings—elegant hats or doilies—and very little in the way of cosmetics or jewelry. Some supportive and marginal members were indistinguishable from elite and core members in dress while others had visible tattoos and other forms of adornment. Some of the women had shorter dresses with V-neck cuts and no stockings or wore blouses with pants and had no head coverings, while some males wore jeans and t-shirts. This disparity in badge signaling among members suggests “private, incomplete, or asymmetrical information” (Hagen and Hammerstein 2005:241) about the expectations of decorum in the church. Given such differences, the extent to which signalers and receivers understand the meanings of shared behaviors, badges, or bans is not always clear (Chibnik 2005). Members do expressly discuss dress code in weekday services. I recognized some supportive and marginal individuals by

their incomplete knowledge of the social expectations, due most likely to their absences at those meetings.⁷

The church was medium-sized, with around 10 rows of pews arrayed in two columns with three wide aisles for people to pass back and forth to the altar. By a little after 11 a.m., the choir had performed and the air was crackling with excitement. As the music wound down, people continued swaying and singing, hands up, eyes closed. Some of the brethren moved around the space praying aloud. One of the deacons, a recently promoted elite member, did so with his eyes closed. “*Jee-sus! Oh, Jee-sus!*” he exclaimed. Then a core member nearby gave a sudden anterolateral jerk of her torso as her arms shot out and knees buckled slightly, as though she had received an electric shock. With her eyes closed and head to one side, she began speaking in tongues, her mouth pulsing staccato with what were to me nonsensical sounds. This glossolalia seemed to trigger it in another supportive member next to her and then another, illustrating what Grady and Loewenthal (1997) identify as the “excited” type of glossolalia. Similarly, the deacon began trotting around the church, eyes closed, thorax tilted forward, arms slightly up and to the side, hands open in a supplicating posture. He periodically convulsed with small spasms characteristic of the excited appearance of being filled with the Holy Ghost.

From a marginal member of the church named “Richie” in the middle of the congregation, I heard a throaty, rapid, repetitive “*kak-kak-kak-kak*,” like a quickly skipping record.⁸ Richie was a barber in his thirties brought up in the Jamaican Apostolic tradition. His marginal status was due to his backsliding, including fathering a child out of wedlock. He had just returned to the community after a probationary exile. Richie wore a fashionable zoot suit with hair in cornrow braids and was standing next to his young son, but, along with the harsh sounds, he began jerking from what looked like an epileptic seizure. He fell back in the Spirit, arms waving, pews flipping topsy-turvy, as others moved in to catch him.

In some churches, I have observed falling in the Spirit as a methodical practice, wherein a church member who has received the Holy Ghost will walk down a row of supplicants “tarrying” or emphatically praying (Austin-Broos 1997), “lay hands” on them, and as a result, they crumble to the floor. They are generally caught by other members and lowered to the floor and may lie there for some time and writhe or remain still before opening their eyes and arising. In this church, falling in the Spirit was rarely so systematic and tended to occur spontaneously, as in this case. Some around Richie plucked his son out of the way as several church members prayed loudly over him, laying on hands. Laying on hands, according to informants, is practiced only by those who have received the Holy Ghost in order to assist others in doing the same and to help rid them of or protect them from demons, which cause all manner of harm, including ill health.

After 15–20 minutes, the pastor called for the congregation to “calm their anointing,” which meant to calm down their spiritual excitement. “The Devil,” the pastor said, beginning his sermon presciently, “knows more tongues than all humans combined.” In this sermon, the pastor chastised people who come to church only on Sunday and think it is enough or who

only come to church and speak in tongues and think that is enough. Some of these people, he said, may think they are Holy people but be under the spell of the Devil because they think they are speaking in God's tongues, but it is the Devil's tongues instead.

As he spoke, rather than pause between thoughts, he muttered the refrain, "Oh Jesus." This was sometimes followed by a slight twitch or shudder of the body and a word or sound that was difficult to catch but did not coincide with the words around it, as though he was suddenly overcome. In isolation, such shudders would scarcely be as noticeable, but I noted them occurring in many Charismatic preachers and learned these are more subtle instantiations of "calm" glossolalia (Grady and Loewenthal 1997).

After the sermon was the "altar call," wherein the pastor invites people forward to accept Jesus, which generally entails emotional supplication by supportive and marginal attendees. Richie answered the call and within minutes fell convulsively to the floor again. A group of the brethren gathered around him to perform what appeared to be spiritual triage, laying hands on his head, shoulders, and back. With their eyes closed, they prayed loudly, some speaking in tongues, as they seemed to extract and throw invisible tension away from him. As told to me later by "Missy," an elite member in her early twenties and a daughter of the assistant pastor, they were literally pulling the demons out of him.

Meanwhile, Richie's wife, "Amanda," was in the center aisle near me. She is African American and was a member of a Trinitarian Pentecostal church in town, according to informants. Apostolics are generally considered more conservative, especially with regard to what they consider acceptable commitment signaling, which applies not only to tongues and other behaviors but also to badges and bans. She was wearing a knee-length dress with a V-neck and no stockings or head covering, ignorant perhaps of the mores of this church. A group of women gathered round and laid hands on her. As they prayed, she slumped to the floor as though she was slain in the Spirit. However, the women were not prepared for her fall, perhaps because they did not perceive her as having received the Holy Ghost, and she hit the floor relatively hard.⁹ Amanda seemed unperturbed when she got up and went to assist with her husband, who was still being exorcized of his demons. However, within moments an usher pulled her away and escorted her back to her pew, which was odd, where she sat, dress clenched around her thighs, appearing anxiously concerned.

The pastor, who had been leaning quietly against the pulpit, presently made an announcement: "I have never encountered something so difficult before in this church and have never had to say this to someone, but I just can't let it go anymore. You," he said, addressing Amanda, "have the wrong Holy Ghost. . . This is not me saying this. My Holy Ghost is upset and cannot abide by this and insists that I say something so I cannot remain quiet. You have the wrong Holy Ghost." What he meant is that what he discerned as the true manifestation of the Holy Ghost in himself informed him she was possessed by the Devil, though Amanda believed it to be the Holy Ghost. In saying she had the "wrong Holy Ghost," the pastor was speaking euphemistically to minimize her embarrassment. When I later asked

why he did not just speak with her privately, he said his Holy Ghost compelled him to speak out against the imminent danger of the Devil's presence.

Though the pastor's demeanor remained respectful, Amanda was obviously agitated. Standing in the midst of the congregation, she argued that she had been baptized in this church, so how could she have the wrong Holy Ghost. Furthermore, she said, she had been to five other Pentecostal churches, and no one had ever told her she had the wrong Holy Ghost. Amanda emphasized what she believed was evidence of her commitment, saying, "My husband has been like this for two days, and I have been trying to help him. I admit I did some bad things in the past but not since I was baptized. I go to church, read my Bible every night, and do everything I'm supposed to do. How could I have the wrong Holy Ghost? I even asked my husband where he wants to go, and he said he wanted to come here, so I brought him here," she snapped.

The pastor responded by expressing doubt about the efforts she was putting into the marriage, which was an odd turn at the time, as divorce is forbidden by Apostolics except, following their literal interpretation of the Bible, in cases of adultery or abandonment.

Angrily, Amanda banged her hand on the altar, demanding, "You are a Holy man saying I have the wrong Holy Ghost, and this is a Holy building; I should be able to get the right Holy Ghost!" A group of brethren tried to acquiesce by laying on hands, but, after a few minutes, Amanda arose and stormed out, slamming the door behind her.

On the other hand, Richie got up from the floor during this exchange with his wife and sat placidly in the first pew. Afterward, he was smiling and nonchalant "because," he told me later, "I know that I'm at peace. I am safe, I'm protected." Richie's tranquility was the result of a release, as he put it, of the tension between God and the Devil battling inside him, whereas stress was elevated for Amanda.

In this incident, glossolalia manifested in two emic forms—the divine tongues of the pastor, deacon, and other elite and core members and the demonic manifestations of Richie and Amanda. Apostolics view the divine form as a legitimate gift of the Spirit to signify acceptance of Christ, while demonic forms involve being fooled by the Devil through allures of sin or deception. I also detected two overlapping etic forms of glossolalia, calm and excited. As the following section clarifies, calm glossolalia signals greater spiritual maturity, whereas the excited form conveys broader psychocultural information.

How Forms of Glossolalia Signal Degrees of Commitment

Since an Apostolic is expected to exhibit glossolalia, it is a keystone signal of commitment but may only represent a preliminary step. Learning the relative importance of how and when to manifest glossolalia and other cultural signals requires patience and persistence, as it is "like learning to speak a foreign language in an unfamiliar country, with new and different social

cues” (Luhmann et al. 2010:67). The appropriate behavioral modality is ostensive—there is no specific pathway, just positive and negative examples—and no guaranteed induction can be ascribed through any codified “religious practices” (Taves 2009). Adult initiates must rapidly intuit, using an implicit folk psychology, what it should feel like to receive the Holy Spirit.

Signaling theory, with special attention to the 3B’s of religious signaling (behaviors, badges, and bans), affords clues (Sosis 2006) as to how initiates figure out when what they feel and what others exhibit is the Holy Ghost. For instance, I observed that infrequent attendance at weeknight services can suggest a lack of commitment but might be overlooked if one has other known responsibilities to which to attend, such as work or childcare duties. However, a steadfast refusal to answer the ritual call to the altar by the pastor to accept Jesus can lead to suspicion. On the other hand, answering an altar call may signal little of significance if one does not attend the same church regularly. I saw many newcomers answer altar calls but then not return to the church. Signal stability and value are determined by the relative cost of the signal performance (Sosis 2003). Devoting time and energy to one community and getting to know community members is generally a costlier signal than spending a half hour or less praying at the altar. Proper attire is also an important badge, as it signals that one attends services often enough to learn the mores, not just on Sundays. And violating bans such as marrying without the permission of the elders, engaging in extramarital sex, or laying on hands without first receiving the Holy Ghost are clear indications that one has not committed oneself to learning the Apostolic spiritual ethos.

In terms of signaling through glossolalia, congregants recognize Holy Ghost and demonic tongues as forms of religiosity that are reflective of contrasting degrees of commitment to the church and its principles. They consider Holy Ghost glossolalia to be true divine possession and verification of the acceptance of Christ, whereas demonic glossolalia indicates significantly less commitment and at least partial influence by demons. Within the emic syntax of tongues, those who have received the Holy Ghost can display either calm or excited glossolalia forms, adding a finer-grain to these communicative modes, while demonic tongues can manifest through backsliding or mistakes in socialization. This coupling of demons and backsliding with glossolalia may appear to be a contradiction, since by definition backsliders are people who were saved but slid back into sin. Yet, according to informants, once someone has received the Holy Ghost, it is always present. So backsliders can manifest divine tongues but, as with Richie, are more accurately described as embodying a battle between the Holy Ghost and the Devil, who also speaks in tongues. Similarly, as with Amanda, mistakes in socialization can lead individuals to believe they have received the Holy Ghost, though the brethren interpret this manifestation as demonic.

Figure 1 depicts this spectrum of divine and demonic glossolalia as resembling a mountain. This is neither a rigid model fully agreed upon by every member nor necessarily consistent across generations, as affirmed by other glossolalia typologies (e.g., Hammond and Hammond 1973; Kavan 2004; Smolik 2004). Yet, Figure 1 reflects a patterned process dependent upon hierarchically structured interactions, the benefits of which are emergent, according

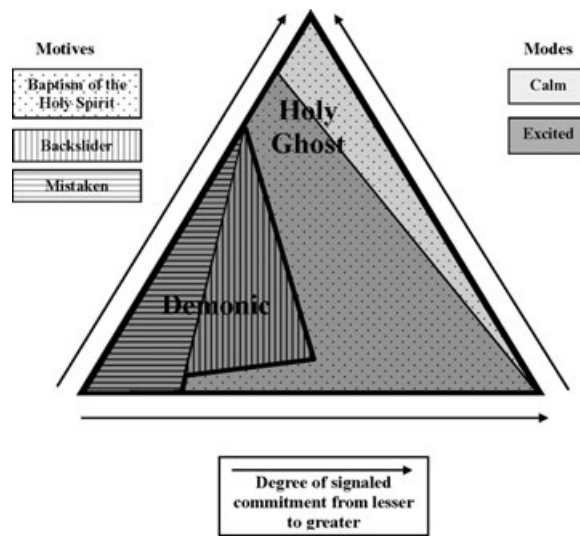


Figure 1. Modes and Motives of Glossolalia Signaling with Regard to a Spectrum of Apostolic Commitment.

to my interpretations of observations and informant interviews. The triangle of glossolalic types represents a system for “spiritual ascent” among Apostolics who have received the Holy Ghost as evidenced by speaking in divine tongues. Adherents can ascend this triangle mountain, fall from it in part or completely, and reascend. However, unlike a mountain, it is not necessary to start climbing at the bottom, as almost any form of glossolalia can occur as one’s first experience. However, excited Holy Ghost glossolalia is usually first while the calm form is usually last and the pinnacle signal of mature faith. Excited-type glossolalia is the more common entry point, as depicted by the greater width along the bottom margin in Figure 1. Each of these archetypal forms signals a different degree of commitment, which I clarify by drawing on the “wrong Holy Ghost” episode.

Holy Ghost Glossolalia

Holy Ghost glossolalia is displayed in the “wrong Holy Ghost” case I outline above by the pastor, the deacon, and the woman who triggers glossolalia in several others. This emic form is linked to baptism of the Spirit, the approved mechanism by which God infills the brethren to be witnessed as having accepted Christ. Variations in glossolalia signaling can be distinguished not just by the appearance of the glossolalia, but also by those who manifest it. For instance, according to informants, all church officers have received the Holy Ghost, or they wouldn’t be selected as officers. Thus, to anyone familiar with the hierarchy of the church, glossolalia manifestations by officers in the course of services are affirmations that the Holy Spirit is present. These manifestations of Holy Ghost tongues can take the typical excited form and serve a symmetric role in situations of cultural contact (Bateson 2000) by signaling to insiders and outsiders that one is a Charismatic practitioner. Consistent with religious signaling theory (Cronk 2005; Irons 2001; Sosis 2006), it also suggests something about the individual’s cooperation potential to strangers. But Holy Ghost glossolalia can

also take a calmer form that is more personal, detectable only to the trained receiver, and represents a signal of greater specificity.

Calm

Calm Holy Ghost glossolalia distinguishes the spiritually committed and mature from those still on the path to maturity. In the “wrong Holy Ghost” episode, calm Holy Ghost tongues were exhibited by the pastor as subtle “blips” in his sermon, lasting a few seconds at most, and only noticeable by a slight spasm and unintelligible vocal non-sequitur. I frequently saw and heard this when preachers and church members were giving sermons or testimonials or leading songs or meetings. Smolik (2004) refers to calm-form glossolalia as “doxa-speech,” culturally consonant “praise to God” that is “pleasant and gentle” in its tone, constituted by inward or outward praise, and taking place anywhere.

“Jarel,” an African American male and core member of the Poughkeepsie church in his late teens, explains that the calm form can be glossolalia that is merely private, as the person no longer needs to be witnessed to be accepted as born again. God is humble, he says, and does not always need to have a person rolling in the aisles to demonstrate His presence in one’s life. Calm glossolalia can occur, he says, when people are at work or in the car and the Holy Spirit comes over them. Jarel attributes this to daily maintenance of one’s relationship with God. Charismatics in a New Zealand study of glossolalia report that “tongues became a mechanical activity that they primarily did when driving the car and doing the housework, a routine verifying that they were Spirit-baptised Christians” (Kavan 2004:178), and Goodman (1972:96) noticed a similar correlation between spiritual maturity and a diminishing rate of observable glossolalia in her study of Apostolics.

Excited

Excited Holy Ghost glossolalia is the quintessential signal of Pentecostalism and epitomized in the “wrong Holy Ghost” episode by the deacon loudly tongue speaking as he trotted around the church and by the female core member whose tongues served as a trigger for glossolalia in several others. Excited-type glossolalia is a two-part phenomenon, including vocalizations and kinetic behavior (Goodman 1972). The woman’s convulsive start and the deacon’s movement, both with eyes closed and hands up, embody behaviors typical of the excited-type kinesis. It can also take other appearances, such as rolling on the floor or hunching over spasmodically. The utterance, which Smolik (2004) refers to as a “babbling”-type, is also stereotyped and can be similar cross-culturally yet retain morphemes specific to a region or even church (Goodman 1972). “Jenny,” a Bajan-American woman in her thirties who joined the church and received the Holy Ghost for the first time during my data collection described the two-part experience as what Prince (1968) terms a “psychomotor amnesic state” of possession trance.

I can’t remember what it was, “Oh hallelujah, Jesus, Jesus.” I can’t remember what it was, but I know I was saying it. And before I knew what was happening, my tongue was

just flowing. It wasn't "Jesus" anymore—it was just flowing with stuff that I didn't know what it was . . . And really and truly, after I received, I have no idea, all I remember is hitting that back wall . . . But they say that I got up, I took off, ran a couple of laps around the church.

Again, the context provides the information necessary to identify the degree of commitment these forms signal. Jenny had married the church's cook, who was a cousin of the pastor's wife. Jenny joined the choir and helped her husband in the kitchen, thus quickly becoming a core member of the community. In the wrong Holy Ghost episode, the deacon is a known officer of the church, and other individuals became progressively more active and excited in response to him as he shuddered and sweat, entering an apparent trance state before manifesting tongues. Glossolalia is often mistakenly conflated with trance, but glossolalia and trance are not necessarily always coupled (Grady and Loewenthal 1997; Kavan 2004; Samarin 1972). Yet with excited form, the linguistic utterances of glossolalia are precipitated by and do combine with physiological markers of trance. The physical energy focused on communing with God results in specific systemic outcomes, what Wier terms "trance force" (1996). The trance force exuded by experienced glossolalists helps create the atmosphere by which others can get into the mood of a church service and receive the Holy Ghost. The implication is that members taking such leadership roles, provided others follow suit, are likely signaling relatively high degrees of commitment.

Such context is important because demonic glossolalia can be easily mistaken for the excited-type Holy Ghost without it.

Demonic Glossolalia

Demonic glossolalia is characteristically harsher or more chaotic than the Holy Ghost counterpart, which church members attribute to the Devil trying too hard to deceive them by emulating the most obvious features of excited Holy Ghost glossolalia. However, the kinetic and linguistic markers of demonic tongues are sometimes indistinguishable from excited-form Holy Ghost, and detection of demonic tongues requires the gift of discernment. My observations indicate that such discernment involves knowing the backgrounds of offending parties. Essentially, a person who is not behaving in accordance with Apostolic values would not be validated by the Holy Ghost. Thus, as with Holy Ghost tongues, it is sometimes obvious that the Devil is in the room not by the form taken but by the person manifesting him. These may be backsliders who have returned to the church to reassert themselves spiritually or people confused as to the tacit rules of Apostolic spiritual maturity.

Backslider

Richie's harsh utterances in the above incident typify what I observed multiple times as backslider glossolalia. Backsliders are Christians who have fallen under the spell of multiple demons. Matthew 12:43–45 (King James Version) says that seven new demons stronger than the first unclean spirit that inhabited the person are recruited by that spirit to beset

backsliders every time they fall back into sin. Backsliders return to the church to be freed of these demons, which is why Csordas terms backslider glossolalia “demonic crisis” (1997:229). The reckless chaos of Richie’s behavior in the outlined episode embodied a battle between God and the Devil, according to informants. The real Holy Ghost, say the brethren, keeps you and others from any real harm, which the Devil is not prone to do. This public contest is a cue of Richie’s contrition about having done wrong and of his desire to have the demons removed as well as an indication that he is eliciting support from the congregation.

Since the build-up of trance force is often important for excited Holy Ghost glossolalia, suddenness or out-of-proportion chaos may be a cue to the presence of demons, but insiders say there is something more. “Looking at people that have backslidden and then gave their life to God,” said Jarel, “I done seen people that the Holy Ghost came on them, they started crying and started falling out, shaking, you know. And all of a sudden, you see a spirit come out of them, like a demon being cast out of them.” The discernment of a cast-out spirit by an insider affirms the complementary role of backslider tongues within the Apostolic signaling frame—only spiritually mature insiders are likely to have or recognize this spiritual gift of discernment.¹⁰ As Missy put it,

when a person has the Holy Ghost, you are able to know the real deal. It’s just something inside you . . . One function of the Holy Ghost is to be able to discern, to know what’s going on around you. You know what to discern if something is coming in the atmosphere that is not of God, because the fact is, the Devil has a mandate to get each one of us. And so, like the soldiers, we have to be on point.

Another aspect of this mandate, according to Missy and others, is to help new members along to obtain these same gifts, at least those willing to be helped.

Mistaken

Mistaken-form demonic glossolalia generally takes the excited mode, as in the farcical *Borat* example, because excited glossolalia is the best-known type for people forcing themselves to speak in tongues to imitate. Mistaken-form is similar to the backslider manifestation, in that it can require inside information to identify, but differs in that it is likely due to incomplete socialization—it is essentially considered an honest error. Such mistakes might occur, for instance, in an outside convert or visitor who does not receive guidance but merely acts as those around them are acting, which appears to have been the case with Amanda. As Missy states, “Once we get baptized in Jesus’ name, it’s a must that you get the Holy Ghost. And we will work with you, we will work with you until you get the Holy Ghost . . . And if we’re working with you, and something is not right, we’ll know.”

During Richie’s exorcism, I was cued that something was amiss when the usher led Amanda back to her seat and by her relatively revealing dress, but since the church rules regarding attire were in transition and Amanda was essentially a visitor, these observations didn’t clarify much. Her surprising fall when she was slain in the Spirit was unusual but also didn’t indicate

what others knew that made it so. Things became clearer when she tried to cite acceptance of her status by other church pastors, as the brethren view opportunistic church attendance as a lack of commitment, but why her condemnation was so extreme was still puzzling. As I was informed later, these cues were indicative of a systemic problem with her behavior with respect to her husband.

As the pastor would explain, they had been on guard against Amanda, who had attended other churches where she reportedly said she had received the Holy Ghost, though she had left them in anger when they told her that her tongue-speaking was not of God:

My Spirit, along with many other Spirits in the church, were not in agreement with the tone that was coming out of that young lady. And even before we had the manifestation, her husband came to me and told me that was something she'd practice in the bathroom. So even the [other church] had said to her that she had a fallen angel or something . . . that Holy Ghost that she said she have was not from God.

While informants like Jarel were critical of such behavior, which they considered “lying,” others gave Amanda the benefit of the doubt. The pastor suggested that because she didn't stay put at one church, she was not receiving a consistent message. He did not believe people would go to the trouble of arguing the way she had if they were actually faking—a signal to him that she was sincere:

Now to me, that would not be something that one just fake, because if I'm faking something and I'm found out, I would leave it at that. I wouldn't proceed and pursue it in the sense that I'm try to prove that what I'm doing is genuine when I know deep down that I'm faking something. So according to what we got from her is that she believed that she got the Holy Ghost. But according to what was revealed on that day by her husband, it's right in line with how our Spirit discerned.

Amanda's lack of humility was another signal that she didn't understand the Apostolic socialization process. Missy suggested that the Devil makes use of a person's own stubbornness in such cases:

It was a very intense one because the Devil decided that he wasn't gonna let up. And you know, we can rebuke and we can cast out the spirit all we want. When if the Devil doesn't decide to let up, there's nothing—if the person doesn't decide to let up, there's nothing we can do. 'Cuz if you believe something, you're gonna hold on to it, no matter what . . . And it doesn't matter what I do, I could hold onto your belief and literally pull it from you, you're still gonna hold onto it . . . You don't want to hear that your ring is fake.

The danger of such situations is that, if mistaken behavior is allowed to flourish, a negative feedback loop can be amplified if others emulate the mistaken behavior or become angry because it is not addressed. Unchecked negative feedback undermines the stability of a system. This potential for instability is emically interpreted as a real and present danger to the brethren: the Devil in the room that day could have literally killed Amanda or her

husband. The pastor called Amanda after the incident, and she asked him for an apology for embarrassing her. “That was not an embarrassing moment,” he reportedly told her. “As a matter of fact, what God tried to do on that day was save your life’ . . . and I told her the only thing I will not do . . . I’m not gonna be a counselor to God . . . and could not apologize . . . she said I shouldn’t call if I’m not gonna apologize. So we left it at that.”

Despite the problems demonic glossolalia may cause for the church, it is important to consider these manifestations as part of an integrated system. Demonic manifestations convey a desire for the spiritual and material benefits of membership and absolve individuals of some responsibility for their violations, giving them opportunity to correct mistakes, gain maturity, and return to the fold. The gift of discernment prompts other members to help those displaying problematical behaviors, but it is clear that discerning demonic glossolalia requires idiosyncratic information that only comes from understanding the religio-familial dynamics of a respective church.

How do Family Dynamics Create a “Wrong Holy Ghost”?

One of the family roles of the Apostolic brethren is to mediate transitions such as marriage. They advise members in mate choice, grant marital blessings, and facilitate marriages deemed compatible. This arrangement brings perspective, experience, and some useful objectivity to the process in a manner similar to that outlined by Nanda (2000) for Indian arranged marriages. There was skepticism about Richie and Amanda’s relationship from the beginning. Richie and Amanda ignored the pastor’s council and married without permission or the rites the church usually facilitates. Richie then had second thoughts and, again without consulting the elders, separated from his wife and acted out his ambivalence through having sex with other women. Amanda and Richie divorced, which the church also prohibits—then went on to repeat the process several successive times. Richie’s indecision and confusion are clear in his somatically oriented explanation:

Before I even get married, the pastor told me not to get married and wait. “Let him search, let him pray, and find out if this is what God has for me, if this is the woman” . . . That God’s like this, not dark place, that this is not what I have for you. But in the meantime, the Devil always interfere and lock you up with something they thinking of God, but it’s not of God, because God didn’t—that’s not the preparation God has for your life. But sometime the Devil intervene. Slowly, God will put you through some things. And let me tell you something, I go through headaches and heart aches and my body aches, the whole time I was in this situation, I was in—the first time when I got married . . . I was laying down to sleep and, I was laying there, and I’m a guy who fall asleep quick, and I couldn’t go to sleep. From my toes to my knees was numb . . . And my head was spinning like this. I couldn’t think right, I was in my bed, my knees hurt; I was trying to touch them to see if they were still there, my legs still there. And my heart hurt so bad, I couldn’t breathe. And I said, “This is—something’s wrong—this is not the way I’m supposed to feel! When somebody married, this the way they’re supposed to feel?”

Despite this ambivalence, Richie was aware of the religious expectations as a Jamaican brought up in Apostolic churches, while they may have been less clear to American-born Amanda. These distinctions suggest Richie and Amanda were engaged in the processes of complementary and symmetrical differentiation (Bateson 2000), respectively. Members of this church were part of Richie's strong-ties network, people he counted on when in need. Though he knew his expected complementary role within the church hierarchy and sought to regain his place in the community, Richie relied mostly on his own dreams and visions for guidance, which he interpreted as messages directly from God. This reified the rift that had led to his probation:

God has something to do with me, and I don't know . . . when God has something to do with you, He wants you by yourself, into a closet, by yourself. Because things around you are gonna interrupt you. The man gonna interrupt it . . . God wants you to walk with Him by yourself. God want you to talk to Him by yourself . . . Like a dog, when a dog hear your voice and that's your dog, what do we do? . . . We run to you.

On the other hand, Amanda was attending Richie's church, which was part of her weak-ties network, as a gesture to him to enhance their marriage and family, values consistent with other religious systems. Weak-tie networks can be beneficial, as it is through them that people find jobs or other services and information, but they are also the networks through which rumors spread (Broderick 1993; Granovetter 1983) and can therefore have negative influences. Amanda's efforts were in part viewed as oppositional by Richie's church, though the values of both parties were largely symmetric. In fact, Amanda's behavior was not altogether exceptional with respect to the mores of less conservative churches, which makes her embarrassment at being called out in public understandable.

One hypothesis to explain how her seemingly good intentions resulted in such an embarrassing public spectacle for Amanda is that mixed his/her-network arrangements are reflective of dichotomized internal family-interaction structures (Bott 1955). Marital flexibility may predispose couples to develop healthier overlapping social networks (Bott 1955), whereas in marriages with a "loose connection" (Marks 1989), like that of Amanda and Richie's, the couple invests more energy in separate and personal outside interests than in each other. My interview with Richie affirmed that he viewed his and Amanda's marital roles as very different. All he asked of Amanda, Richie told me, was for "communication, a clean home, some good food, and some clean clothes. And some, and a little compassion . . . It's not what you do, it's what you're not doing."

It is clear is that there are many facets of and motivations behind what some might consider faking. Just as there are different ways of displaying allegiance to a group, there are multiple ways to request help, which indicate varying degrees of commitment to that community. Understanding these signals requires understanding the meaning invoked, the relationships among the agents in the system, and the dynamics that inform them.

Conclusion

Review of an incident wherein several forms of glossolalia could be discerned—what I have referred to as calm and excited Holy Ghost glossolalia and backslider and mistaken demonic glossolalia—has revealed the dynamics of seeking in-group benefits through tongue speaking. It should be clear that the Apostolic glossolalia is an open system not limited to the described forms and motivations. The values of these forms as communicative signals are contextually and temporally relative, as is true of costly honest signals in general (Bliege Bird and Smith 2005). Nevertheless, the dynamics of Apostolic Pentecostal signaling hinge on appropriate manifestations of glossolalia. As both the pastor in this case and scholars (Bateson 2000; Bliege Bird and Smith 2005) point out, the danger of leaving inappropriate manifestations unchecked is instability in a whole system. The pastor frames this as a mortal danger, which Apostolics view as imminent if the brethren stray from the path of Jesus. They are perhaps justified in this view given the schismogenic rift that resulted in the formation of their church and the congregational split that came later.

The approach utilized to draw these conclusions (1) illustrates how behavior that outsiders consider strange conveys internal meaning and provides mechanisms to demonstrate and assess commitment and (2) provides a theoretical vantage by which to evaluate culturally relative demonstrations of commitment. This signaling and systems approach can be generalized to any context in which cooperation is critical to group success. As such, I have provided a framework for considering signaling within a larger and pluralistic religious marketplace. Controlling for other ecological and historical factors, the relative vitality of any church may be taken as the difference over time between summed positive and negative feedback cycles as assessed through behavioral signaling repertoires, facilitating a comparison among churches regardless of doctrine. Recognizing the relativity of “faking” glossolalia in this case study is therefore a step toward understanding the interactions of individual and group behavior that sustain church communities.

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Notes

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1. “Baptism of the Holy Spirit” or simply “of the Spirit” is the expression commonly used in the congregations in this study. It is also termed “baptism *with* the Spirit” or “*in* the Spirit” by others. According to my informants, spiritual baptism is distinct from but inclusive of what is commonly conceived of as Christian baptism, which

involves some form of anointing or rebirth through water. Spiritual baptism describes being taken over by the Holy Ghost via speaking in tongues and is the process by which one becomes “saved” or “born again.”

2. Over the course of the more than two-year initial field study, I did not seek membership in either church but attended services at both regularly. This would sometimes involve attending a Sunday midday service at one church and an evening service at another or both Sunday services at one church and weekday services at the other. When I needed to meet participants who only attended Sunday midday services at both churches, I would even attend the beginning of one church’s service and the end of the other’s. Though members of the Kingston church pressured me to receive the Holy Ghost, I resisted engaging in behaviors that would implicitly suggest I had accepted Christ and purposefully maintained a position of ambiguity. Though my training was in biological anthropology, I did not take positions on belief, evolution, or any of the social issues of concern to the churches. I consistently emphasized that it was important for me to remain objective for the sake of the study and, as a consequence, was once told that “Jesus may not put your salvation on hold until your study is done.” Despite this, I was once introduced as “an anthropologist doing a study—but don’t worry, he’s a Christian,” though, in fact, I am not.

3. The necessity of hard-to-fake signals among signalers and receivers with convergent interests is important when they are strangers. For instance, the P/C movement is a global evangelical phenomenon with much potential for exploitation by those seeking the benefits of social support without contributing their own time and resources to the stability of the group they join. When more resources are used by members than are contributed, the potential for the destabilization of the group is higher than when resource contributions are equal to or outweigh usage. Sosis (2006) predicts that the elicitation of hard-to-fake signals will be greater where resources are scarcer and the opportunity to obtain scarce resources is one of the primary motivations enticing new members, which has indirectly been supported in other studies (Iannaccone 1992, 1994).

4. Letters of support were received from the churches for this study, and the University at Albany Institutional Review Board approved all protocols.

5. The informants I considered marginal are people with “backsliding” tendencies, sliding back into sin after receiving the Holy Ghost. At the time, these individuals would go to church sporadically then disappear for months on end.

6. “Evangelist” is a leadership title or “gift” in the church, as are all titular roles, including “pastor.”

7. Although I was not present at a weekday service where dress code was discussed, I attended many others where discussion revolved around questions of everyday secular and spiritual practice. For instance, I was present when they discussed what types of sexual behavior was appropriate and in what context, whether it was advisable to skip work or school for church services or vice versa, and mores around dating. Such discussions were pro forma particularly at youth-oriented services.

8. All names used in this article are pseudonyms.

9. Amanda’s status is confusing because she received different aspects of what she perceived as the baptism of the Spirit at different churches. According to the Apostolics, one must be rebaptized if one didn’t receive water immersion in Jesus’ name only (*not* in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost—for this reason, Oneness Pentecostals are also termed “Jesus Only” Pentecostals) or if receiving the Holy Ghost can’t be validated by other Oneness Pentecostals. The spiritual baptism that Amanda received at non-Apostolic churches was not accepted by the Apostolic brethren here as legitimate, including her manifestations of tongues.

10. As Jarel was a teenager at the time of this interview, it should be pointed out that developmental maturity is frequently, but not always, consistent with spiritual maturity. As an individual can be of advanced age and physically

mature but have little experience in the church and, thus, little spiritual maturity, so can a person be young in age and lack life experience but have spiritual maturity due to the time and energy devoted to spiritual practice. Csordas points out that spiritual maturity in a religious community is not simply a matter of “taken-for-granted assimilation and inculcation” but that some people, whether child or adult, “develop an internal, personal relationship with God” (2009:419) and some do not. I have frequently observed young people in churches with advanced spiritual maturity who are given positions of leadership and core roles because of this maturity, and Jarel was one such individual.

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