Worship, Ritual, and Pentecostal Spirituality-as-Theology
Global Pentecostal and Charismatic Studies

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Worship, Ritual, and Pentecostal Spirituality-as-Theology

A Rhythm That Connects Our Hearts with God

By

Martina Björkander
To my dear children,
Jeremia, Efraim and Filemon
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Prelude

Every researcher brings their own personal story and preferences to research, some more than others, and some more overtly than others. As I read through what became my thesis—now transformed into this book—it is clear to me that whatever came out of my research was distinctly and unequivocally coloured by me. I admit, I love music. I admit, I love dance. I admit, I love clothes. I admit, I love stories. I admit, I love worship. I admit, I love Africa. There is not much I can do about it. I hope this love permeates my writing, making it better rather than worse. I also hope that it has not hindered me from doing some fine and detailed critical analysis. The two—love and analysis—need not be in tension, but may instead spur each other on. The feelings expressed by ethnomusicologist Samuel A. Floyd resonate strongly with my own. His early introduction to practices and narratives within the African-American community became an important resource for his scholarship, a checkpoint for his ideas and conclusions. As he writes, “The feeling of having such a cultural memory to inform and ignite the intellect is powerfully gratifying; it confirms the validity of new knowledge and new ideas as no amount of rational thought will or can.”1 In a similar manner, I have found my upbringing in Central Africa, and our family’s continuous contact with African Pentecostalism, a well of inspiration and a compass for my analysis.

At the same time, the love and heritage may at times have made me especially keen to distance myself from a subject that is so close to my heart. One way to do so has been to apply ritual theory to worship practice. Some readers, especially my fellow Pentecostals, may react to my use of the words ‘ritual’ and ‘liturgy’ in this book, and find them provocative. These are not words that we normally use to describe worship. Worship is a practice in which Pentecostals place great value and do not want dissected into pieces by some meddlesome researcher. However, I hope that once I have argued my case, readers will have found the analysis illuminating and explanatory. Failing that, I suggest sceptics should consider it a language game, or a mirror. For a short while we can try out this new language of ritual, look at ourselves in the mirror, and see what we discover. Either we learn something new about ourselves, something important that helps us appreciate our rituals more deeply, or we rework them

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to bring them more into line with our values. Or, we resolve that this language game is not for us and put the mirror down, no damage done.

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