

## Vital distinctives of Charismatic and Pentecostal Churches' hermeneutics

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### Abstract

The Pentecostal movement, initiated at the beginning of the twentieth century and growing to form ten percent of the world's population or one-third of all Christians by the twenty-first century, views the Bible in a distinctive way. For them, the Bible is a witness to historical encounters of people with God and an invitation to present-day people to encounter God. It is the source of revelation, a signpost showing the way to God's revelation, including extrabiblical revelation, through the divine Spirit. Pentecostals' goal in reading the Bible is to replicate biblical characters' spiritual experiences as far as possible, in contrast to fundamentalists who attempt to find the Bible's historical meaning in the probable historical context to deduce the author's intention. For Pentecostals, knowledge of God consists of knowing God in active, developing relationality. They do not simply learn about God but "get to know" God experientially, in direct encounters. The article aims to describe the essential distinctive elements of their hermeneutics.

### Keywords

*Pentecostalism; church growth; hermeneutic; orthopathy*

## 1. Introduction

The Pentecostal movement started without members at the beginning of the twentieth century in various places worldwide. At the beginning of the third millennium, there were two billion Christians worldwide, of whom 65 million were Pentecostals, 175 million were charismatics, and 295 million were neo-Pentecostals.<sup>1</sup> It implies that as much as ten percent of the world's

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1 Amos Yong. *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2005), 19.

population, or one-third of all Christians, are part of the broad Pentecostal movement.<sup>2</sup> What is distinctive about the way Pentecostals read the Bible? What distinguishes their Bible reading practices from other traditions and informs their charismatic spirituality? By way of utilising a comparative literature analysis, the article aims to describe the essentials of Pentecostal hermeneutics.

## 2. Pentecostal hermeneutic

### (a) Anti-intellectualism and Pentecostal hermeneutic

The condition for understanding Pentecostal hermeneutics is that one should know what role theology has been playing within the movement. From the start, the movement accepted an anti-intellectualist stance.<sup>3</sup> Pentecostals were negative about theology because they perceived theology as the reason for formalised, “dead” worship in the established mainline churches. They believed that rational theology concerned with acquiring knowledge led to sermons that provided information about God that was unprofitable if it did not lead to life transformation. Instead, they emphasised that people should meet God in person and learn to know the Divinity rather than acquire theological knowledge.<sup>4</sup>

As a result, the movement, for the more significant part of its history, lacked any initiative to become involved in ecumenical endeavours; it saw the other churches as competition. A further result was a general lack of grounded theological training that marred most Pentecostal pastors’

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2 Emil Bartos. “The Three Waves of Spiritual Renewal of the Pentecostal-Charismatic Movement.” *RES: Biblical Exegesis Between East and West*. 7, no. 1 (April 2015), 20–42.

3 Wolfgang Vondey, *Pentecostalism: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 133.

4 Sarel J. Van der Walt and Nico Vorster (*Reformed Theology Today: Practical-Theological, Missiological and Ethical Perspectives* [Pretoria: AOSIS, 2017], 50) argue that the antirational and antidogmatic trends in Pentecostal churches are one of the crucial reasons why people leave the faith, as well as why extreme charismatic leaders and cults get others to believe many heresies and even to participate in atrocities. In their view, it is necessary for the human mind to be trained in its dogmatic understanding and apologetic defense of the truth. Without it, human beings can easily fall into the traps of cults and heresies.

ministry and preaching.<sup>5</sup> In fact, for the first thirty years, Pentecostals had no professional ministers but only “anointed” members that guided their congregations. They certified these acknowledged workers as evangelists, missionaries, or assembly leaders.<sup>6</sup> When they eventually employed full-time pastors, the emphasis was also on the pastor’s necessity to be filled and anointed with the Spirit. They found signs of such a charismatic anointing in people that got saved from sinful lives and supranatural healings. The anointing with the Spirit also served as the only condition for participating in the worship service.<sup>7</sup> When many members qualified, it led to all believers’ involvement in aspects of the worship service. And this practice and theoretical stance have been continued by many Pentecostals until today. In many cases, testimonies of believers, the practice of charismatic gifts and spontaneous prayers characterise worship services. The movement qualified a hostile animosity toward theology and theologians based on their emphasis that encounters with the Spirit was the condition for saying anything about God.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, many Pentecostals also perceived the negative effect that the historical-critical theological tradition had on some theologians and their belief in God.

Their anti-intellectualism and lack of solid theological grounding implied that their hermeneutical presuppositions functioned unconsciously. They never verbalised their hermeneutical angle. One can justify the animosity towards theology to some extent. As many lecturers at Pentecostal theological seminaries and colleges can testify, some of their students lose the “innocence of their faith” when exposed to critical textbooks written by authors that do not hold a “high view” of the Scriptures. Some students (and believers) experience it as an eroding of their faith in the Bible when they hear, for instance, that diverse traditions function within the

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- 5 Craig S. Keener, “Pentecostal Biblical Interpretation/Spirit Hermeneutics,” in *Scripture and Its Interpretation: A Global, Ecumenical Introduction to the Bible*, edited by Michael J. Horman (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017), 270.
  - 6 Isak Burger and Marius Nel, *The Fire Falls in Africa: A History of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa* (Vereeniging: Christian Art, 2008), 186.
  - 7 Burger & Nel 2008:384.
  - 8 Marius Nel & Fika J. v. Rensburg, ‘Integrating spirituality and rationality the long and arduous journey of the historical development of theological training in the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa’, *In die Skriflig* 50.2 (2016), 4. a1943. <http://dx.doi.org/10.4102/ids.v50i2.1943>

Hexateuch, the histories of the Deuteronomist and Chronicler represent different ideological views, biblical historiography is a form of prejudiced historical ideology, or the biblical text is characterised by many factual mistakes and contradictions, some of which can be seen in the prevalence of variants of (especially New Testament) texts.<sup>9</sup>

Eventually, however, Pentecostals realised that rejecting all theology was just too expensive. It had led to a movement without a solid historical-theological grounding and a tendency toward naïve, and therefore dangerous literalist, Bible reading practices. As a result, one finds several hermeneutical traditions within Pentecostalism, resulting predominantly in a schism between scholars and the rest of the church that conflict with each other.

### **(b) Unarticulated Pentecostal literalism**

Most Pentecostal leaders and believers accept that all words and texts are placed on the same level and given the same authority because the Spirit inspired them. They read these texts as literally as possible. Clark<sup>10</sup> opines that the movement resonated with conservative fundamentalist groups who maintain that “the record of Scripture is historically accurate, particularly in terms of the so-called supernatural stories,” including Jesus’ virgin birth, miracles, and resurrection. Like fundamentalists, their fear of modernist thought that denied God intervenes in the events of a world – qualified precisely by scientific discoveries – motivated their hermeneutical decisions. Today most Pentecostal groups accept that the Bible is verbally inspired and inerrant, especially among Africans.

Most fundamentalists emphasise that the goal of reading the Bible is to find its historical meaning by finding the probable historical context and deducing the author’s intention. Unfortunately, in practice, many Pentecostal readers follow this route and deny a vital faith value, that divine revelation is still occurring in the faith community as in the earliest church.

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9 Marius Nel, *An African Pentecostal Hermeneutics: A Distinctive Contribution to Hermeneutics* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019), 55.

10 Mathew S. Clark & Henry I. Lederle, *What Is Distinctive about Pentecostal Theology?* *Miscellanea Specialia 1* (UNISA. Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1989), 55.

### (c) Articulated Pentecostal hermeneutic

However, during the past thirty years, Pentecostal scholarship attempted to develop an articulated hermeneutics, although a consensus among Pentecostal scholars on a reading approach that reflects their community's reading practices does not exist. Instead, the attempt included scholars forcing Pentecostal reading processes into unfamiliar and perhaps incongruent categories.<sup>11</sup> To be “critical,” they associated with established hermeneutic practices of historical-critical or postmodern approaches.<sup>12</sup> While some attempted to escape traditional Pentecostal literalist interpretation, others used Evangelical categories to evade the challenge of a plurality of “postmodern” readings.<sup>13</sup> So the debate for an appropriate description of Pentecostal hermeneutics continues as scholars attempt to integrate their charismatic experience into the “horizon” of the text.

Rosinah Gabaitse<sup>14</sup> proposed a distinction between these two hermeneutical angles. The author calls the first an unarticulated hermeneutic to describe how most leaders and members view the Bible. The second is an articulated Pentecostal hermeneutic developed by Pentecostal scholars. Their unarticulated hermeneutic determines Pentecostals' way of thinking about God and the Bible, what they sing, their sermons and how they pray. Their testimonies display their spirituality's oral nature. Significantly, postmodernity also emphasises orality because of the new post-literacy,<sup>15</sup> which might partly explain why many people with postmodern worldviews and values connect with the sentiments in Pentecostalism. Ironically,

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11 Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2019).

12 Jacqueline Grey, *Three's a Crowd: Pentecostalism, Hermeneutics, and the Old Testament* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), 37.

13 Timothy B. Cargal, “Beyond the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy: Pentecostals and Hermeneutics in a Postmodern Era.” *Pneuma* 15, no. 2 (1993), 163–87. Although not all African churches co-opted Evangelicals' practices as the result of cooperation with them, American Pentecostalism strongly influenced its African nephew, including its hermeneutic.

14 Rosinah M. Gabaitse, “Toward an African Pentecostal Feminist Biblical Hermeneutic of Liberation: Interpreting Acts 2:1-47 in the Context of Botswana” (DPhil diss., University of KwaZulu-Natal, 2012), 77.

15 Lee R. Martin, “Hearing the Voice of God: Pentecostal Hermeneutics and the Book of Judges,” in *Pentecostal Hermeneutics: A Reader*, edited by Lee R. Martin (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 205-232 (231).

ancient cultures, including the Semitic and Jewish cultures, were also tuned to hearing the spoken word. Few people could read; narratives and information mainly were conveyed through the spoken word.

Simon Chan refers to this aspect and argues that the strength of their traditional way of thinking about God and the Bible lies in its powerful orality and participation of all members expressed in their testimonies, songs, trances, inspired teaching, and dance narratives. It also involves an oral liturgy with the maximum involvement at levels of prayer, spontaneous participatory worship, reflection, the inclusion of dreams and visions into personal and public worship, liturgical dance, and prayer for the sick and needy.<sup>16</sup>

It is difficult to compare a postmodern and Pentecostal worldview with each other because of the difficulty in defining such a worldview in movements as diversified as postmodernity and Pentecostalism. Margaret Poloma, for that reason, speaks of a Pentecostal worldview as an anomaly.<sup>17</sup> The worldview maintains a tension between the “rational and cognitive” and “affective and experiential,” reflecting the diversity of movements that preceded it.

#### **(d) Holy Spirit and Pentecostal hermeneutics**

Amos Yong<sup>18</sup> asserts that Pentecostals, as a rule, see the relationship between God and the world from a pneumatological perspective, the Pentecostal worldview’s most significant element. He calls the Holy Spirit the most fundamental symbol and appropriate category for referring to God’s agency in the world. He defines the world in terms of its capability to perceive the actions of God in the world in divine presence and activities through foundational pneumatology that results in universal rationality

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16 Walter Hollenweger, “The Pentecostal Elites and the Pentecostal Poor: A Missed Dialogue?,” in *Charismatic Christianity as a Global Culture*, edited by Karla Poewe, 200-216 (201) (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1994).

17 Margaret M. Poloma, *Assemblies of God at the Crossroads: Charisma and Institutional Dilemmas* (Knoxville, TN: University of Tennessee Press, 1989), p. 8.

18 Amos Yong, *An Amos Yong Reader: The Pentecostal Spirit*, edited by Christopher A. Stephenson (Eugene, OR: Cascades, 2020), p. 1.

and grammar.<sup>19</sup> The heart of Yong's foundational pneumatology is relationality, based on his integration of an Irenaean model of Spirit and word as the two hands of God with an Augustinian model of the Spirit as the bond of love between Father and Son. In this way, he establishes a pneumatological perspective on the relationality of all reality and being.

Early Pentecostals presupposed that the Holy Spirit was a central and essential part of the early church's life and individual Christians, as portrayed by the New Testament. From their perspective, in time, the church diminished the stature and status of the Spirit, only to be revived in the pneumatological emphasis the Pentecostal movement (it claimed) brought in the twentieth century by recognising the need for the Spirit's presence in their midst. Ironically, Pentecostals also experienced that a third and fourth generation considerably lost the emphasis that the Spirit and charismatic gifts enjoyed among the earliest Pentecostals. But is this view correct? Did the church, through the ages in general, betray the Spirit?

To answer the question, John McIntyre<sup>20</sup> analyses taxonomically various accounts of the doctrine of the Holy Spirit over centuries that represent diverse cultures and traditions. On the grounds of his historical study, he admits that the church, through the ages, has not entered into the entire strategy of the Holy Spirit or adequately attempted to implement the Spirit's tactics.<sup>21</sup> However, he is unwilling to admit that the church betrayed the Spirit or the Spirit's work, and I support his contention. The church never ceased to refer to and expect the Spirit's work. However, it neglected to give it the same attention as the early church probably did, given the significant influence the events on the day of Pentecost exercised in its origins. McIntyre admits that the early Christians saw the Spirit's involvement at every point of their lives. They expected the Spirit's participation when they made decisions, as Acts 15 illustrates. They perceived that the Spirit cooperated with them when they planned evangelical missions, solved interpersonal conflicts, preached, baptised, or made moral decisions. The

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19 Amos Yong, "On Divine Presence and Divine Agency: Toward a Foundational Pneumatology." *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 3, no. 2 (2000), 167–88 (175).

20 John McIntyre, *The Shape of Pneumatology: Studies in the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (London: T&T Clark, 2004), 235–236.

21 McIntyre, *The Shape of Pneumatology*, 285.

official Western church, through the ages, clearly did not enjoy the same effects of the Spirit's work.<sup>22</sup> However, that does not imply that the Spirit was not involved, although not necessarily in the same kind of extraordinary phenomena that the book of Acts relates. The lack of signs of the Spirit's work eventually led to the cessationism later adopted by many believers. In contrast, Pentecostals believe the church should live from the expectancy to encounter the Spirit in any way the Spirit may choose.

The contribution of the Holy Spirit is, in the first place, to realise the Christ-event in the present. Some have accused Pentecostals of overemphasising the Spirit's work at the cost of the Christocentric focus of the gospel.<sup>23</sup> However, the contrary is rather true because Pentecostals see the condition for the experience of an encounter with Christ that the Spirit should reveal Christ.<sup>24</sup> For Pentecostals, as for Protestants in general, the centre of the Christian message is Jesus Christ. Therefore, they consider it critical to be aware of and experience the indwelling of the Spirit because the Spirit, Christ's Spirit, (Rom 8:9; Phil 1:19) realises Jesus' presence in the believer's daily life and facilitates the encounter with Christ.<sup>25</sup>

Secondly, the Holy Spirit is the One who quickens and animates the Scriptures. Pentecostals love their Bibles.<sup>26</sup> Biblical language, symbols, themes, and narratives permeate and help to shape their interpretation of reality. They accept that the Bible speaks about God and in some way represents God's word (2 Tim 3:16–17; Heb 4:12–13). For that reason, they acknowledge its homiletical value but also accept the necessity of the Spirit's guidance as a condition for interpreting it. However, they do not value the Bible as the revelation of God but as a signpost that shows the reader or listener the way to the personal revelation of God through

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22 McIntyre, *The Shape of Pneumatology*, 285–286.

23 Francois P. Möller, "Christ and Pentecostalism," in *The Reality of the Holy Spirit in the Church: In Honour of F.P. Möller*, edited by Peter J. Gräbe and Willem J. Hattingh (Pretoria: Van Schaik, 1997), 140–44 (140).

24 Wonsuk Ma, "Full Circle Mission: A Possibility of Pentecostal Missiology," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 8, no. 1 (2005), 5–27 (8).

25 Joseph J. Williams, "The Pentecostal Reality." (2015). [Online]. Available: <http://www.cbn.com/spirituallife/biblestudyandtheology/drwilliams/bk-pentacostal-ch03.aspx>

26 Kenneth J. Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic: Spirit, Scripture, and Community* (Cleveland, TN: CPT, 2009), 161.



the divine Spirit. What makes Pentecostals what they are is not doctrine or knowledge obtained about God through studying the Bible but the experience of the presence of God in and among God's people "in a manner which is readily evident to participator and bystander alike."<sup>27</sup> Hence, the experience of the Spirit is the presupposition in Pentecostal hermeneutics.<sup>28</sup> They study the Bible to meet God. Only in such an encounter can one gain "knowledge of (not simply about) God."<sup>29</sup> In the intense encounter and communion of the believer with the Spirit, the Spirit evokes confession, claiming the believer "to be disclaimed, to be seized, taken captive and dispossessed of everything previously claimed."<sup>30</sup> These moments fulfil a critical role in the lives of Pentecostal believers and open up a different reading of reality and a different reading of the text. To understand the Bible is in itself not imperative; what is vital is to know the living God in a developing relationship of trust and love.

### (e) Authority of the Bible

For that reason, Pentecostals argue that the Spirit's authority comes before the authority of Scripture. In the words of Andrew Davies,<sup>31</sup> their reading of the Bible may be called "agenda reading," with an intended result and a goal in mind. Reading the Bible is, for them, a creative, positive, and adversarial process because they do not approach the text objectively as a construct to be understood and appreciated in its own right but rather

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27 Clark & Lederle, *What Is Distinctive about Pentecostal Theology?* 65.

28 Roger Stronstad, "Pentecostal Experience and Hermeneutics." *Paraclete* 26, no. 1 (1992), 14–30 (18).

29 Arden C. Autry, "Dimensions of Hermeneutics in Pentecostal Focus." *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 1, no. 3 (1993), 29–50 (42). Several Pentecostal scholars argue that the Hebrew concept of *yada'* is useful for describing this distinction. *Yada'* refers to a knowing in active relationality. We do not simply know about God; rather, we "get to know" God experientially, in direct encounters. Such knowledge can never be absolutized into a theological system or reduced to a series of spiritual laws. It must always arise from a constant interaction with the known one (Scott A. Ellington, "Pentecostalism and the Authority of Scriptures," in *Pentecostal Hermeneutics: A Reader*, edited by Lee Roy Martin (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 149–70 (158).

30 Rickie D. Moore, "Deuteronomy and the Fire of God: A Critical Charismatic Interpretation" *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 3, no. 7 (1995), 11–33 (23).

31 Andrew Davies, "What Does It Mean to Read the Bible as a Pentecostal?" in *Pentecostal Hermeneutics: A Reader*, edited by Lee Roy Martin (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 249–62 (256).

as a resource that they can mine for specific treasures.<sup>32</sup> As a result, they ask three questions of the text, even if on an unconscious level: What did this mean to its original readers? What does this mean to me? And what should I do about it? In their responses to the questions, their interest is less concerned with the original context but with its contextual pre-understanding (what does it mean to me?) and the enlarged meaning (what do I do about it?).

When one exalts the biblical text as authoritative and reads it literally, it becomes possible to choose the letter above the Spirit, making God a prisoner of the Bible. It should be kept in mind that the word that was good for people in one situation may become destructive for people at another time. Instead, Scripture should be seen as a dynamic authority, a living guide, standing in life-transforming interaction with readers through the Spirit. For that reason, most contemporary Pentecostals deny that patriarchalism, androcentrism, slavery, anti-Semitism, violence against people and animals and suchlike moral dilemmas are morally acceptable, although one can find support for it in various biblical passages. They changed their moral sentiments through a dialogue between the textual horizon and the contemporary horizon from which meaning derives. They accept that the text has a surplus of meaning and that the dialogue for its application in contemporary times never ends. In this way, they establish the generation of an effective history in interaction with the community's historical consciousness, in Clark Pinnock's words.<sup>33</sup> While some interpret Paul as saying women should not minister or interpret the Sodom and Gomorrah narrative as implying a ban on same-sex sexual relations, Pentecostals should maintain an openness to the Spirit's guidance, waiting for a consensus forming insight within the broader faith community and a *sensus fidelium*.<sup>34</sup>

In confessing that the Word is God (Jn 1:1), they do not mean that the Bible is God. In their thinking, the Word is primarily Jesus. As far as the Spirit

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32 Davies, "What Does it Mean to Read?" 256.

33 Clark H. Pinnock, "The Work of the Holy Spirit in the Interpretation of Holy Scripture from the Perspective of a Charismatic Biblical Theologian," in *Pentecostal Hermeneutics: A Reader*, edited by Lee Roy Martin (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 233–48 (243).

34 William M. Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War, and Women: Core Issues in Biblical Interpretation* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald, 1983).

utilises the Bible to reveal Jesus, the Bible becomes the word of God. In other words, the Bible contains ancient people’s written witness about how they met the divine word. It is a road sign that indicates where and how to meet God and what God’s will in certain situations is.<sup>35</sup> An encounter with the Bible mediated by the Spirit is an encounter with God.<sup>36</sup> If reading the Bible leads exclusively to intellectual understanding and knowledge, it does not serve the Spirit’s agenda, to transform the reader’s affections, will, and mindset.

### (e) Pentecostals, experience, and subjectivism

A distinctive Pentecostal experiential pre-understanding determines how Pentecostals interpret the Bible; their charismatic experiences dialogue with the biblical text to find its meaning.<sup>37</sup> Larry McQueen adds that the communal nature of a Pentecostal hermeneutics demands that one’s biblical interpretation is one voice among the other members of the faith community. The others’ discernment is required to ensure the validity of one’s interpretation.

The Bible also contains a specific word applicable to the particular situation Pentecostals find themselves in. To “hear” that word addressed to contemporary people,<sup>38</sup> they need the ability to hear with the ears of God and with faith, and it is also a precondition that they can speak the word of God.<sup>39</sup> The reader should listen to the text silently with patience, effort and obedience.<sup>40</sup> In the contemporary logocratic culture, the art of listening in

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35 Francois P. Möller, *Words of Light and Life: Part 1* (Westdene: AGS, 1991), 93.

36 Cheryl B. Johns, *Pentecostal Formation: A Pedagogy among the Suppressed*. *JPT Supp.* 2 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1993), 14.

37 Larry R. McQueen, *Joel and the Spirit: The Cry of a Prophetic Hermeneutic*. Rev. ed. (Cleveland, TN: CPT, 2009), p. 5.

38 Karl Barth, *Die Lehre vom Wort Gottes*, vol. 1 of *Die Kirchliche Dogmatik* (Freudenstadt: Heesen, 1947), 1.1:51.

39 Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Christian Community*. Transl. Gerhard Ludwig Müller and Albrecht Schönherr. *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works* 5 (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1996), 99.

40 Craig C. Bartholomew, *Introducing Biblical Hermeneutics: A Comprehensive Framework for Hearing God in Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2015), 19.

silence has perhaps been lost; our lack of attention to listening has left us with a kind of epistemological numbing.<sup>41</sup>

A vital danger for Pentecostals is that they may find what they wish to hear in the Bible. Especially when they allow extrabiblical revelation with directly inspired divine revelation (in prophecy or interpretation of tongues) that functions outside the narrow borders of the Bible, it can easily lead to subjectivist interpretations. Now a person feels inspired by the Spirit to speak what they perceive to be a word from God and the person uses it as personal direction or for the community. To avoid such dangerous subjectivising tendencies in Pentecostal hermeneutics is critical. It requires a holistic Pentecostal hermeneutics that incorporates both Spirit and experience.<sup>42</sup>

In Pentecostal hermeneutics, the interpretive process moves from the believing community's context to the biblical text, reversing the order of traditional exegetical processes, which normally starts from the text and then moves to the context. According to Acts 15, the Spirit enables the community that deliberately depends upon the Spirit to enlighten them in the interpretive process, going far beyond evangelical claims of "illumination by the Spirit." Here the Spirit guides the community into a new understanding of God's will, changing vital elements of the accepted Jewish theology of circumcision and the *Torah*.<sup>43</sup>

Lastly, distinctive Pentecostal Bible reading is not a different interpretive method but a distinct metanarrative to facilitate a coherent and cohesive interpretive manner in which the Spirit plays the most crucial role and the community of faith. Their metanarrative is the last hermeneutical filter, as

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41 Kenneth J. Archer, "Hermeneutics," in *Handbook of Pentecostal Christianity*, edited by Alan Stewart (DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 2012), 108–16 (108–109)

42 John C. Thomas, "Women, Pentecostals and the Bible: An Experiment in Pentecostal Hermeneutics" *Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 5 (1994), 41–56 (43).

43 See Stephen E. Fowl, *Engaging Scripture: A Model for Theological Interpretation* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1998); Kenton L. Sparks, *God's Word in Human Words: An Evangelical Appropriation of Critical Biblical Scholarship* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2008), 192.

pre-understanding forms the condition for understanding.<sup>44</sup> Amos Yong<sup>45</sup> argues that the Spirit plays a relational role in creating the Pentecostal body of Christ composed of many human members and forms the *dunamis* or dynamic power of life.

Using textual evidence, Roger Stronstad<sup>46</sup> challenges two Evangelical hermeneutical principles. The first is their exclusive use of Pauline writings to colour all discussions of the Holy Spirit. He reasons that Luke and Paul use different pneumatological lenses. While Paul uses primarily salvation-initiation language, Luke uses subsequent-empowerment language. Stronstad argues that leaving Luke to speak for himself is essential, as this would demonstrate his uniqueness. The second evangelical principle is to use the biblical didactic genre exclusively to define doctrine; they argue that one cannot use the narrative genre to reconstruct doctrine. In contrast, Stronstad asserts that the narrative genre also carries theological intent, as Pentecostals demonstrate with their emphasis on Luke-Acts and biblical narratives that define and shape their mission and mission strategy.<sup>47</sup>

When they emphasise the Spirit's involvement in explicating Scripture, Pentecostals differ in two respects from many Evangelicals: in their emphasis that the Bible has an immediate and experiential meaning that does not necessarily equate with a historical-critical or grammatical-historical analysis of the text; and their belief that the Spirit can say more than Scripture (although never in contradiction to the biblical witness).<sup>48</sup> Pentecostals are not satisfied with a hermeneutic that focuses exclusively on the author's intention (when possible to determine it). They read the Bible

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44 Amos Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective*. Ashgate New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology, and Biblical Studies (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2002), 28–48.

45 Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community*, 28–48.

46 Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1984), 49.

47 See also Robert P. Menzies. The Development of Early Christian Pneumatology with Special Reference to Luke-Acts. *JSNT Supp* 54. (Sheffield: JSOT, 1991); John M. Penney, *The Missionary Emphasis of Lukan Pneumatology* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 1997), 87.

48 Stephen Fogarty, "Toward a Pentecostal Hermeneutic" *Pentecostal Charismatic Bible Colleges* 5, no. 2 (2015), 5–6. [Online]. Available: <http://webjournals.ac.edu.au/journals/PCBC/vol5-no2/toward-a-pentecostalhermeneutic>

for another reason and goal, to replicate biblical characters' spiritual and extraordinary supernatural experiences as far as possible. Their reading of the biblical narratives feeds their faith to trust God to intervene in their lives and situations in the same way as in biblical times. Hence, Pentecostal hermeneutics always consider the Spirit's role and the impact of personal experience.

Another vital element that needs to be emphasised is most Pentecostals' experiential orientation that influences their epistemology and the doctrinal and experiential appropriation of this in the Spirit baptism, highlighting, among others, tongues speaking and the other spiritual gifts.<sup>49</sup> As a result of the emphasis on the experiential, Pentecostal doctrines are not abstract speculations but living facts experimentally known and described narratively in the form of testimonies. They do not base their beliefs primarily on cognition but on life-transforming comprehension. Doctrinal "truths" are not absolutely orthodox and unchangeable but can be challenged and may require to be overturned. The central emphasis is not on propositional statements of truth that one must accept but on a direct relationship based on encounters with God, encounters that may hold many surprises over time.<sup>50</sup> Kenneth Archer's focus on combining orthodoxy with ortho-praxis implies that the daily praxis should support beliefs and orthopathy.<sup>51</sup> Instead of theory proceeding to provide the foundational rationale for practice, underlying much of the Western philosophical tradition, Pentecostals see theory as the reflective moment in praxis, uniting them into the same activity.

Not all agree with the theses that Pentecostalism began with experience and that its essence can be found in its experiential angle in Bible reading practices. For instance, Lee Chang-Soung argues that the essence of Pentecostalism is not experience but theology.<sup>52</sup> He asserts that the Pentecostal movement starts with and is perpetuated by Bible study for

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49 Grey, *Three's a Crowd*, 15.

50 Scott A. Ellington, "Pentecostals and the Authority of Scriptures" *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 4, no. 9 (1996), 16–38 (17).

51 Kenneth J. Archer, "A Pentecostal Way of Doing Theology: Method and Manner" *International Journal of Systematic Theology* 9, no. 3 (2007), 301-314 (309).

52 Lee Chang-Soung, "In the Beginning There Was a Theology: The Precedence of Theology over Experience in Pentecostal Movement." The article was originally written

a specific theological theme, implying that Pentecostalism began with theology. Only from experience introduced and induced by the Bible study did early Pentecostals' experiences follow. In other words, a process consisting of theological Bible study (e.g., to answer the question, "What is the biblical evidence of Spirit baptism?") drives the movement. First, it led to the extraction of a theological hypothesis from the study (in this case, speaking in tongues). And only then did the experience follow (they spoke in tongues), confirming the hypothesis. In other words, Pentecostalism established its principles through the experiences of what the Bible teaches. His implication is clear: theology precedes experience; hence, theology has precedence or priority in the Pentecostal movement.

In response, it should be noted that Chang-Soung does not acknowledge the custom among Pentecostals to interpret the Bible in the light of their experience of the Spirit's presence and their past charismatic experiences. They are "prejudiced" by their experience and expectation of the Spirit's involvement in the process of interpreting the Bible. These two factors serve as the condition for Bible reading to qualify as Pentecostal. Their *Vorverständnis* determines what they see and understand in the Bible. Therefore, Chang-Soung's emphasis on the precedence of theology over experience in the movement is rejected. The lack of theological depth among many early and current Pentecostal church leaders proves Chang-Soung's supposition false.

The last observation is that Pentecostal praxis should be, and at least initially, was informed by empathy with the poor and marginalised, challenged, and rejected people of society that characterised Jesus' life. The early Pentecostal movement found its most significant growth point among these people. As a result, many of its earliest adherents, including the leaders, came from the ranks of drunkards, criminals, the poorest of the poor and society's rejected and marginalised. Therefore, orthopraxy-orthodoxy must be informed by critical reflections on other people's suffering in orthopathic manner, moving theology into the community-on-the-margins where poverty, famine, and suffering debilitate and ruin

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in the Korean language, printed in the *Journal of Yongsan Theology* 32 (2014), 71-96, and translated by the author himself

people's daily lives.<sup>53</sup> Pentecostalism would only then live up to its status as a resistance movement against what early Pentecostals perceived as a cold, creedal, and cerebral Christianity that left no room for poor and hurting people or marginalised sinners that characterised many (or some) (Western) Christian churches.

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53 Archer, "Pentecostal Way of Doing Theology," 310.



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