

**PENTECOSTAL AND POSTMODERN HERMENEUTICS:  
COMPARISONS AND CONTEMPORARY IMPACT**

**By**

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I declare that "PENTECOSTAL AND POSTMODERN HERMENEUTICS:  
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the sources I have used or quoted have been indicated and acknowledged by  
means of complete references.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Bradley Truman Noel". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'B'.

Bradley Truman Noel

30 November 2007

## KEY TERMS

Modern; Modernity; Modernism; Postmodern; Postmodernity; Postmodernism;  
Pentecostal; Pentecostalism; Evangelical; Evangelicalism; Hermeneutics;  
Hermeneutical; Holy Spirit; Theology; Supernatural; Spirituality; Experiential  
Verification; Transcendent; Generation X; Millennials; Charles F. Parham;  
William J. Seymour; George Floyd Taylor; David Wesley Myland; Donald Gee;  
Myer Pearlman; Carl Brumback; Latter Rain; Metanarrative; Jean-Francois  
Lyotard; Michel Foucault; Jacques Derrida; Richard Rorty; Foundationalism; Anti-  
foundationalism; Deconstruction; Absolute Truth; Community; Authorial  
Intentionality; Gordon D. Fee; Roger Stronstad; William W. Menzies; Robert P.  
Menzies; Rudolf Bultmann; The Jesus Seminar; Demythologization; Kenneth  
Archer; French Arrington; John Goldingay; Mark Cartledge; Clark Pinnock;  
Robert May; Roy Zuck; John Christopher Thomas; Howard Ervin; John MacKay;  
Arden Autry; Gordon Anderson.

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***Pastor and Mrs. Truman L. Robinson***

***and***

***Pastor and Mrs. Lorne S. Robinson***

These pastors came to my home church the year before my high school graduation. In their two years of ministry and subsequent friendship, they taught me to love the study of God's Word, and the importance of presenting the Gospel in a manner relevant to each new generation. For this I am eternally grateful.

## ABSTRACT

The focus of this practical theological study is Pentecostalism, and the relationship between the hermeneutics of Pentecostalism and Postmodernism. Through a literary search, we observe the points of congruency between the hermeneutics of early Pentecostals and the key tenets of Postmodernism. We note the unprecedented acceptance of Pentecostal scholars into the larger theological world and question whether this is a result of the increased Modernization of Pentecostal hermeneutics. The Postmodern world of youth is explored, and we observe their tremendous openness to spirituality. This thesis will show that Pentecostals may contribute to the Christian world a Pentecostal hermeneutic that will speak a relevant message to generations of youth.

Chapters two and three examine the convergent viewpoints of Pentecostalism with Postmodernity, in terms of rationalism, narratives, and the place of experience in life and theology. Chapter four highlights the hermeneutical debate between Gordon D. Fee and his Pentecostal responders, noting the Modern approach in the principles debated. Chapter five seeks to provide interaction with a giant of theology seldom engaged by Pentecostals – Rudolf Bultmann – and his modern followers, and explores the world of Postmodern youth. Chapter six explores the work of Kenneth Archer, who has proposed a specific Pentecostal hermeneutical approach, and chapter seven discusses the role of the Holy Spirit in hermeneutics, including whether Pentecostal experience may be considered an “edge” in hermeneutics. Chapter eight summarizes the findings of this study.

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

As a Postmodern paradigm increasingly illuminates the thinking of our culture in general, any hermeneutic which does not account for its loci of meanings within that Postmodern paradigm will become nonsensical and irrelevant. If for no other reason than that, we must move beyond the Fundamentalist-Modernist controversy to explore the possibilities of a Pentecostal hermeneutic in a Postmodern age.<sup>1</sup>

Timothy Cargal

A strict adherence to traditional evangelical/fundamentalist hermeneutic principles leads to a position which, in its most positive forms, suggests the distinctives of the twentieth century Pentecostal movement are perhaps nice but not necessary; important but not vital to the life of the Church in the twentieth century. In its more negative forms, it leads to a total rejection of Pentecostal phenomena.<sup>2</sup>

Mark McLean

Get your learning but keep your burning.

Bishop J.O. Patterson<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Timothy B. Cargal, "Beyond the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy: Pentecostals and Hermeneutics in Post-Modern Age," *Pneuma* 15.2 (1993): 187.

<sup>2</sup> Mark McLean, "Toward a Pentecostal Hermeneutic," *PNEUMA: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 6.2 (1984): 37.

<sup>3</sup> As noted in the endorsement of Rick M. Nañez, *Full Gospel, Fractured Minds* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), by Vinson Synan.

## 1.1 PROBLEM STATED

The preceding quotation by Timothy Cargal clearly expounds the importance of recognizing the prominence of Postmodernism/Postmodernity<sup>4</sup> in today's culture.<sup>5</sup> As is suggested, Postmodern<sup>6</sup> values are becoming increasingly tied to the values and attitudes of the citizens of the Western World, in particular. Scientific thinking and reason are no longer the ultimate arbiter of truth for increasing numbers of people, as was the case during the centuries proceeding the Enlightenment.<sup>7</sup>

The focus of this study is Pentecostalism, and in particular, the relationship between the hermeneutics of Pentecostalism, Postmodernity, and

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<sup>4</sup> Some scholars differentiate between Postmodernism and Postmodernity quite clearly; others do not. As Postmodernity is a peripheral and supporting concept to the main purposes of this paper, the terms will be used interchangeably. On those who differ see Daniel J. Adams, "Toward a Theological Understanding of Postmodernism", <http://www.crosscurrents.org/adams.html> (accessed November 14, 2006).

<sup>5</sup> For an excellent summary of Postmodernism, particularly as it intersects Christianity, see S. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); G.E. Veith, Jr. *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1994); J.R. Middleton and B.J. Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than it Used to Be* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1995); and D.S. Dockery, *The Challenge of Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995). Postmodernism is the subject of chapter two.

<sup>6</sup> Throughout this thesis, the terms postmodern, postmodernism, postmodernity, modern, modernism, and modernity will be capitalized. As this work refers to "modern" in two senses – one of being current, the other the thinking resulting from modernism – it became necessary to distinguish between the two. Thus, modern, modernity, and modernism were capitalized when referring to the philosophical approach known as "modernity". For the sake of consistency, postmodern, postmodernity and postmodernism were also capitalized.

<sup>7</sup> The Enlightenment was a period of great intellectual growth following the rediscovery of classical thought and art in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century. Human thought and intellect were elevated in many ways to the place of the divine, and science widely replaced religion as the determiner of truth. See S. Grenz and J. Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism: Shaping Theology in a Postmodern Context* (Louisville: John Knox, 2001), 29. See also Gertrude Himmelfarb, *The Roads to Modernity: The British, French, and American Enlightenments* (Colchester, UK: Vintage Publishing, 2005); and James C. Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought, vol.1: The Enlightenment and the Nineteenth Century* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1996).

the youngest generations of youth in the Western world. Changes to culture directly impact Pentecostalism, for it has been a spiritual movement of the people. Indeed, Pentecostalism's tremendous growth<sup>8</sup> can be attributed in no small part to its common touch. The Pentecostal message has been taken to the most common folk of society, and has spoken a word of truth sorely needed among the outcast and oppressed. The many histories of Pentecostalism testify to the fact that from its beginnings, the Pentecostal movement has thrived where other representations of Christianity have struggled, simply by meeting the everyday spiritual needs of the world's most ordinary people.<sup>9</sup>

The question of Postmodernism is an important topic for Pentecostals, for it represents a significant shift in the presuppositions of Western society.<sup>10</sup> The Modern era<sup>11</sup>, ushered in with the Enlightenment, promoted scientific rationalism, humanism, and in the first part of the twentieth century, logical positivism.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Barrett and Johnston count the total number of Pentecostals/Charismatic in the year 2000 as just over 523 million, some ninety-four years after the beginning of the modern Pentecostal movement in 1906. 1140 million Pentecostal/Charismatic believers worldwide are projected by the year 2025. See D.B.Barrett and T.M. Johnston, "Global Statistics" in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, rev. and exp. ed. eds. S.M Burgess and E.M.Van der Maas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 284-302.

<sup>9</sup> See, for example, Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Murray W. Dempster *et al.* *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made to Travel* (Irvine, CA: Regnum Books International, 1999); R.M. Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1979); and Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

<sup>10</sup> Gene Veith suggests "...Postmodernism pervades everything, and none of us can escape it." See Gene Edward Veith, Jr., *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway Books, 1994), 177.

<sup>11</sup> The Modern Era may be defined as the period of time beginning with the Enlightenment and continuing in part until present times.

<sup>12</sup> Logical Positivism is "A contemporary philosophical movement associated with the Vienna Circle (1920s), which sought to rid philosophy of all metaphysical statements and to

Modern thinking believed in human reason coupled with science as the final arbiter of truth, and with humanity elevated to the apex of the universe, felt unbridled optimism in the abilities of human reason and science to bring positive change to a world marked by decay and destruction. The children of Modernism often challenged the truth of Christianity based on those cherished presuppositions.<sup>13</sup>

As the twentieth century drew to a close, these assumptions of Modernism were increasingly abandoned. Postmodernism is taking its place. Although somewhat varied in scope and interpretation, it will be demonstrated that many scholars view the basic presuppositions of Postmodern thought as very sobering. For individuals soaked in the Modern mode of thought, the interpreted values of Postmodernism may be considered shocking: truth, meaning, and individual identity may not exist. These may simply be concepts created by humanity and celebrated in the Modern era. Human life may have no special significance, no more value than plant or animal life. In many Postmodern minds, Relativism<sup>14</sup> reigns supreme.<sup>15</sup> For Pentecostals, who uphold the revelation of God in sacred Scripture as absolute truth, complete with the gospel message of the worth of

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restrict it to only those statements which can be verified by empirical evidence.” See “Logical Positivism,” in Donald K. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville: John Knox, 1996), 163. Also see G.B. Madison, *The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity* (Indianapolis: University of Indianapolis Press, 1990), prologue, x.

<sup>13</sup> See Bernard Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, rev. ed. (Boston: W.A. Wilde Co., 1956.), 63-69.

<sup>14</sup> “Most generally, a philosophical term for the belief that no absolutes exist. It is also used for the view that all knowledge is relative to the knower.” See “relativism,” in McKim, ed., *Westminster Dictionary*, 235.

<sup>15</sup> These claims concerning Postmodern thought will be further expanded upon in chapter two.

humanity and the divine plan of salvation, the challenges associated with Postmodernity are many.

Essential aspects of Christianity are again being challenged, but on a different front. The Modern era may be said to have rejected the more supernatural<sup>16</sup> claims of Christianity (such as the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, miracle stories and bodily resurrection of Jesus Christ) because of the difficulty in validating these claims empirically. In many of its forms Postmodernism rejects the Christian claim to have *the* Truth. Both historical Christianity and modernists believe in absolute truth. From all indications, many Postmodern thinkers do not.<sup>17</sup>

## 1.2 DEFINITIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Before pressing further, it is first wise to pause and define the terms we will be using in this study. Although we will define each term as it is used, a framework for understanding the core concepts used herein is beneficial.

a) When we talk of *Pentecostals*, we are referring specifically to *Classical Pentecostals*. Classical Pentecostals are those that trace their roots to the turn of the century, and the Azusa Street revival. Essentially, Pentecostals believe that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the 120 at Pentecost as is recorded in

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<sup>16</sup> The reader will note that some authors believe the term “supernatural” to be relatively recent in usage, entering theological discussion only in the ninth century. “One could well argue that the construal of religion as supernatural is a result of a specific rationalizing theology, which was later adopted and inverted by rationalists who wanted to confine religion to the area of the extra-ordinary, while handing over the ordinary world to secular reasoning.” See F. Le Ron Shults, ed., *The Evolution of Rationality* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996), 318.

<sup>17</sup> Veith, Jr. *Postmodern Times*, 21. Again, this statement will be further evaluated in chapter two.

Acts 2 should be normative for all Christians. Further, the key sign associated with this Spirit-baptism is *glossolalia*, as it was in Acts.<sup>18</sup> “Classical” was added in about 1970 to distinguish Classical Pentecostals from *Charismatics*.

b) For the purposes of this study, *Charismatics* are those who have received the Pentecostal experience of Spirit-baptism, usually with *glossolalia*, but have remained in one of the mainline Protestant denominations, or Roman Catholicism.<sup>19</sup> *Charismatic* refers to “...all manifestations of Pentecostal-type Christianity that in some way differ from classical Pentecostalism in affiliation and/or doctrine.”<sup>20</sup>

c) The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology defines *Evangelicalism* as “The movement in modern Christianity, transcending denominational and confessional boundaries, that emphasizes conformity to the basic tenets of the faith and a missionary outreach of compassion and urgency. A person who identifies with it is an “Evangelical,” one who believes and proclaims the gospel of Jesus

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<sup>18</sup> For more on the history and impact of the Azusa Street revival and the subsequent Pentecostal movement see Cecil M. Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006); Harold D. Hunter and Cecil M. Robeck, *The Azusa Street Revival and Its Legacy* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 2006); Robert R. Owens, *The Azusa Street Revival: Its Roots and Its Message* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2005); Eddie Hyatt, ed., *Fire on the Earth: Eyewitness Reports from the Azusa Street Revival* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 2006); A.C. Valdez, Sr. *Fire on Azusa Street: An Eyewitness Account* (Costa Mesa, CA: Gift Publications, 1980); Donald W. Dayton, *The Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987); and V. Synan, “Pentecostalism,” in *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 836.

<sup>19</sup> P.D. Hocken, “Charismatic Movement,” in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, rev. and exp. ed. eds. S.M Burgess and E.M. Van der Maas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 477-519.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 477.

Christ.”<sup>21</sup> As such, it is important to note that while Pentecostals are themselves Evangelicals, most Evangelicals would not consider themselves Pentecostal.

d) The principles used to interpret Scripture properly are one’s *Hermeneutics*. All those who seek to interpret Holy Writ have some manner of hermeneutical principles, though they vary in presuppositions. This study will focus in particular on *Evangelical Hermeneutics*. In general<sup>22</sup>, Evangelicals interpret Scripture from the assumption that authorial intent is significant when determining the original meaning of the text. This intent may in part be determined by substantial study of both the grammatical content of the text itself, and the historical background of the text, author, and original audience. This process is termed the *grammatico-historical* approach to hermeneutics, or the *historical-critical* method of interpretation. Only when this process has been followed, and authorial intent determined, may one begin to offer an exposition of the text from the pulpit, seeking modern application for the people of God.<sup>23</sup>

e) *Postmodernism* is at best a very broad term, and as such, this study will focus on the facets of the movement which most directly impact Pentecostalism.

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<sup>21</sup> T.P. Weber, “Evangelicalism,” in *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 379.

<sup>22</sup> As with any movement of this size, nearly all statements concerning Evangelicalism run the risk of generalization. So too with the assumption that Evangelicals are beholden to the Historical-Critical method of hermeneutics. Indeed, Evangelicals employ other methods, such as the text-immanent approach, speech act theory, and socio-rhetorical criticism. Notwithstanding the variety of hermeneutical methods employed by the Evangelical community at large, one may safely state that the Historical-Critical method plays a key role in the majority of Evangelical hermeneutical efforts.

<sup>23</sup> Indeed, so convinced are many Evangelicals that theirs is the correct method of interpretation, one writer equates the term “hermeneutics” with the historical-critical method plus exposition. See F.F. Bruce, “Interpretation of the Bible,” in *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell, (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 565.

Although coined in the 1930's to denote a major cultural shift just beginning, it never gained prominence until the 1970's when it was first used to describe changes in architecture and English language theories. Today it is used to describe a broader cultural phenomenon that is essentially a rejection of the key tenets of *Modernism*. The Enlightenment brought the quest for absolute truth into the scientific laboratory. Believing that knowledge is always good, and attainable through proper scientific method coupled with reason, the Enlightenment thinkers strove to unlock the secrets of the universe through *Rationalism*. All knowledge gained elevated human freedom, and promoted the individual as the autonomous self, separate from any tradition or community.<sup>24</sup>

Postmoderns no longer believe in the supremacy of reason as the arbiter of truth. Other valid paths to knowledge include experience, the emotions, and even intuition. Contra the Modern view that knowledge is inherently good, and progress is inevitable, some trends within Postmodernism are pessimistic. Today's generations are no longer confident that humanity will be able to solve each problem that faces the human race. Individuality is dethroned in favour of the shared stories of communities and traditions; for it is within these that the truth may be found.<sup>25</sup>

f) For the purposes of this thesis, description will need to be given for the youngest generations of North American youth. Taken from Douglas Copeland's best-selling novel of the same name, *Generation X* is a moniker applied to the

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<sup>24</sup> Grenz, *A Primer*, 2-5.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 7

children of the Baby Boomers, born between approximately 1965 and 1984. This generation has commonly been viewed as having reacted to the financial and career success of their parents, in light of the devastating levels of divorce and family instability of the Boomer generation. Those born since 1985 are often referred to as the *Millennials*.<sup>26</sup> They have grown up in an era of unprecedented peace and prosperity, coupled with dramatic advances in technology. Unlike those of Generation X who resist change and seek stability, the Millennials seem to thrive where change occurs.<sup>27</sup>

### **1.3 PENTECOSTALISM AND POSTMODERNITY: A DESIRABLE PARTNERSHIP?**

With the Pentecostal penchant for abandoning rationalistic Modern principles, some Pentecostal scholars are debating whether Pentecostalism should somehow develop a distinctive hermeneutic in line with those Postmodern values.<sup>28</sup> The Postmodern way of liberating readers to see for themselves the meaning within a text has a certain ring of truth with Pentecostals who have often

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<sup>26</sup> See Neil Howe and William Strauss, *Millennials Rising: The Next Great Generation* (New York: Vintage, 2000).

<sup>27</sup> Reginald W. Bibby, *Canada's Teens: Today, Yesterday, and Tomorrow* (Toronto: Stoddart, 2001), 165-167. While there are other accepted descriptors for these generations, this work will follow Bibby in employing the two above.

<sup>28</sup> For the connection between Postmodernism and hermeneutics, see Madison, *The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity*; George Aichele, et al., *The Postmodern Bible: The Bible and Collective Culture* (London: Yale University Press, 1995); and Loren Wilkinson, "Hermeneutics and the Postmodern Reaction Against 'Truth'," in Gordon D. Fee, et al., *The Act of Bible Reading: A Multidisciplinary Approach to Biblical Interpretation* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1996).

been viewed as allowing their experience to help interpret the biblical text. While the role of experience within hermeneutics is shunned by those who follow a more Modern/Evangelical approach to biblical interpretation, many Postmodern thinkers have argued for increased recognition of the role presuppositions and life experiences of the individual play in textual interpretation.<sup>29</sup>

Pentecostalism began primarily as a missionary movement, and therefore must keep "in touch" with the values and philosophy of current culture. With the increased focus upon relationality within key segments of Postmodernity, Pentecostalism must realize that it cannot evangelize a culture it does not understand. Some may wonder if Pentecostalism ought not to embrace Postmodernity thoroughly in all its various forms as contemporary culture is increasingly inclined towards. Yet, there remains much about Postmodernity which directly contradicts Christian values and teachings. The Postmodern tendency to downplay the notion of absolute truth and reject overarching metanarratives such as the biblical account of human history is more than simply problematic for orthodox Christianity; it challenges the core of the Christian faith.

Is it possible to harmonize such a philosophical mindset as Postmodernism with Pentecostal hermeneutical principles? There appear to be four responses to this question.<sup>30</sup> 1) The first response is in the affirmative: we ought to build a distinctive Pentecostal hermeneutic based on Postmodern viewpoints, free from

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<sup>29</sup> This concept will be further developed in later chapters, as the impact of the choice of hermeneutics used by Pentecostals upon younger generations is explored.

<sup>30</sup> The following categories are from Malcolm Brubaker, "Postmodernism and Pentecostals: A Case Study of Evangelical Hermeneutics," *Evangelical Journal* 15.1 (1997): 39-44.

rationalistic Evangelicalism. Supporters of this view argue that Postmodernism is fast becoming the standard philosophical mindset of the Western world, and the Church cannot afford to remain entrapped within Modern hermeneutical principles. 2) The second response is in the negative: we should reject Postmodern influence and build upon the foundation of an Evangelical hermeneutic. Some Pentecostal scholars reject the assumption that Postmodern thought will replace the system of Modern thinking that has prevailed for over three hundred years. As such, joining Pentecostal concerns to this “trend” will not serve the movement well in the long run. 3) The third response suggests we should join Pentecostalism's concerns with traditional Evangelical hermeneutics. Supporters of this view believe that Pentecostalism has generally been well served by its affiliation with Evangelicalism, but should be cognizant of the essential differences between the two, and thus should fine-tune Evangelical hermeneutics to support traditional Pentecostal theology. 4) The final response concludes we should cautiously proceed to develop a Postmodern Pentecostal hermeneutic. Some Pentecostal scholars believe that while Pentecostalism cannot afford to embrace many of the more troubling aspects of Postmodern thought, there is the significant need for a distinctive Pentecostal hermeneutic, separate from the prevailing Evangelical hermeneutics, but still availing of what is best from Modern scholarship.

The question of whether there can ever be a union of Pentecostal hermeneutics and the Postmodern mindset is of utmost importance, and as such, will be given significant treatment throughout this thesis, with greater clarification

and discussion occurring throughout the remaining chapters. As will be demonstrated, Postmodern thought is here to stay. Pentecostalism must not only acknowledge this, but evaluate whether current approaches to evangelism are relevant on a going forward basis.

#### **1.4 THESIS DEFINED**

As Pentecostalism seeks to continue its expansion into the hearts and minds of the masses with the Gospel, truly it must acknowledge and contemplate the impact of Postmodern thought as it occupies increasing ground in the mindset of the culture. Further, it must ask what impact Postmodernity should have upon the Pentecostal approach to Scripture.

The aim of this work is to seek to do just that. The thesis will first explore Postmodern thought particularly as it relates to Pentecostalism and Pentecostal hermeneutics, and contemplate which of the four approaches to Postmodernism listed above is the most advantageous to Pentecostalism. Further it will seek to determine in what manner Postmodernity can – and should – be allowed to contribute to Pentecostal hermeneutics.

To accomplish this task, we shall first attempt to determine in what sense Pentecostal hermeneutics shared several key Postmodern values. In terms of methodology, this paper will employ a literary search, examining the early Pentecostal approach to Scripture, noting the many points of congruency between the hermeneutics of early Pentecostals, and the key tenets of today's Postmodernism. In terms of their rejection of the hegemony of reason, their

openness to narratives, the role of community, and the essential function of experience in epistemology, classical Pentecostal writers and theologians shared much with the Postmodern thinkers of today.

The goal of this study is to show that in the earliest days, the hermeneutics employed by Pentecostals shared many characteristics of today's Postmodern thought.<sup>31</sup> Pentecostals were thus roundly criticized by those dedicated to a more Modern approach to Scripture. Indeed, it is the view of this thesis that the lack of academic recognition for early Pentecostal theology stems directly from this fact. Modernism, as shall be seen, had been well entrenched in the thought patterns of theologians at the beginning of the twentieth century. The notion that theology could be determined from the narratives of Luke (as Pentecostals celebrated) was a concept to be derided as theological immaturity by theologians proclaiming that doctrine could be ascertained from the didactic portions of Scripture alone. Almost sixty years after the genesis of modern day Pentecostalism, John R.W. Stott wrote: "...this revelation of the purpose of God in Scripture should be sought in its *didactic*, rather than in its *historical* parts. More precisely, we should look for it in the teaching of Jesus, and in the sermons and writings of the apostles, and not in the purely narrative portions of the Acts."<sup>32</sup> Worse still was the Pentecostal claim that experience, and not reason alone, was an essential component in formulating a vibrant, living theology of the

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<sup>31</sup> Speaking of the traditional interpretive methods of Pentecostal pastors, Yongnan Joen Ahn notes, "Actually, these traditional forms of pre-critical biblical interpretation such as 'pragmatic' or 'pattern' hermeneutics have more in common with Postmodern modes of interpretation than do the 'critical' interpretation of Pentecostal scholars..." In "Various Debates in the Contemporary Pentecostal Hermeneutics," *The Spirit & Church* 2.1 (May 2000): 31.

<sup>32</sup> *The Baptism and Fullness of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1964), 8-9.

Holy Spirit and His work. To the mind soaked in the precepts of Modernism, here was poor theology at its worst. For many theologians, it seems, experience was irrelevant in determining true Christian theology. Reason, coupled with the proper study of the Scriptures, would yield the nuggets of truth deposited within its pages.

We are no longer living in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and Pentecostal academics are enjoying unprecedented acceptance into the larger theological world a hundred years later on. In part, the aim of this thesis is to determine exactly why this has occurred. Have Pentecostal scholars, in a desire to gain greater recognition from their Evangelical counterparts, become increasingly Modern in their approach to Biblical interpretation? A major concern of this study is to determine whether, at a time when increasing numbers of the youth and young adults of Western society are beginning to view truth in Postmodern terms, Pentecostals have begun to approach Scripture with a growing dependence on the Modern way of thinking. If so, a tremendous evangelistic opportunity may be hampered, or lost.

This thesis will show that Pentecostals must continue in the hermeneutical traditions of their early leaders if they are to remain relevant in the future. It is possible to hold to what was best of the early Pentecostal hermeneutics, without ignoring the tremendous hermeneutical advances of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This work will endeavour to point the way forward through a pneumatological hermeneutic which embraces significant values of both early Pentecostalism and Postmodernity. With the Spirit as the starting point, and speaking the language

of today's Postmodern generations, Pentecostals are in an excellent position to contribute to the Christian world a Pentecostal hermeneutic that will bring the masses of Postmoderns into contact with the one true God.

## 1.5 PRACTICAL THEOLOGY

### 1.5.1 Introduction to Practical Theology<sup>33</sup>

It is necessary at this juncture to pause and inquire as to the nature of Practical Theology, and the significance of this particular theological discipline as pertains to our current path of study. To be sure, Practical Theology has received a considerable amount of attention in recent years, and is a serious topic of debate among scholars. Randy Maddox writes, "It is hard to imagine a topic of theological methodology that is receiving more attention at the moment than that of the nature and task of the specialty-discipline, Practical Theology!"<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>33</sup> This survey is indebted to the description of Practical Theology in Matsobane J. Manala, "The Church's Ministry to the Sick in a Black South African Context" (Th.D. diss., University of South Africa, 2006); Johannes L. Susanto, "A Practical Theological Investigation of the Divine Healing Ministries Of Smith Wigglesworth and John G. Lake: A Continuationist Reformed Perspective" (Th.D. diss., University of South Africa, 2007); and Robert L. Bedard, "Emerging Models of Ministerial Training for the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada" (Th.D. diss., University of South Africa, forthcoming).

<sup>34</sup> R. Maddox, "Practical theology: a discipline in search of a definition," *Perspectives in Religious Studies*, 18 (1991); 159.

Much as theology was long known as the “Queen of the Sciences,” so Practical Theology is considered by some to be the pinnacle of the theologies.<sup>35</sup> Practical Theology, however, remains poorly understood.<sup>36</sup> For some, the name “Practical Theology” is misleading, for it suggests a discipline that is interested only in applying the insights of other theological disciplines to church life and work. This misunderstanding of Practical Theology as an applied theological discipline has persisted for many years, though is lessening in recent times through the endeavours of practical theologians to view their work more scientifically, speaking to theological theory formation and reflection on the communicative actions of the church in society.<sup>37</sup> Ballard writes, “...Practical

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<sup>35</sup> See G. Dingemans, “Practical Theology in the Academy: A Contemporary Overview,” *The Journal of Religion*, 76.1 (1996): 82; D. Browning, “Methods and Foundation for Pastoral Studies in the University,” in *Pastoral studies in the University Setting: Perspectives, Methods, and Praxis*, ed. A. Visscher (Ottawa: University of Ottawa Press, 1990), 51; and P. Ballard, “Practical theology as an academic discipline,” *Theology* XCVIII (1995): 119.

<sup>36</sup> In some senses, Practical Theology is better defined by what it is not. Charles Winquest addressed this sentiment when he suggested, “Practical theology is not an appendage to ministry, nor is it an appendage to foundational or systematic theology...” Rather, in his mind, practical ministry and theoretical theologies are of inexorably linked together. See C. Winquest, “Re-visioning Ministry: Postmodern Reflections by Charles E. Winquest,” <http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=586&C=850> (accessed November 20, 2007).

<sup>37</sup> For Practical Theologians who have endeavoured to shed light on their field of study, see M. Cowan, “Introduction to Practical Theology,” Institute for Ministry, Loyola <http://www.loyno.edu/~mcowan/PracticalTheology.html>. (accessed November 20, 2007); E. Farley, *Theologia: The Fragmentation and Unity of Theological Education*. (Philadelphia, PA: Fortress, 1983); idem, “Interpreting Situations: An Inquiry into the Nature of Practical Theology by Edward Farley,” <http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=586&C=847>. (accessed November 20, 2007); T. Groome, “Theology on our Feet: A Revisionist Pedagogy for Healing the Gap Between Academia and Ecclesia by Thomas H. Groome,” <http://www.religion-online.org/showchapter.asp?title=586&C=852>. (accessed November 20, 2007); G. Heitink, *Practical Theology: History, Theory, Action Domains* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1999); J. Perkins, “Practical Theology: What Will it Become?” *The Christian Century*. 1-7 February 1984, 116; J. Van der Ven, “Practical Theology: From Applied to Empirical Theology,” *Journal of Empirical Theology*. 1.1 (1988):7-27; and Vivian Msomi, “Recent Trends in Practical Theology,” <http://www.sorat.ukzn.ac.za/theology/bct/msomi.htm> (accessed November 20, 2007).

Theology understands itself as having to participate in the theoretical debate about the foundations and critical understanding of knowledge and practice. Practical Theology is no longer simply an applied Theology.”<sup>38</sup>

The three-fold pattern of Practical Theology as discussed by Ballard is useful for clarifying the proper role of this discipline in the larger theological world. According to Ballard, Practical Theology is first a practical discipline, second a recognizable field of study, and third a critical, reflective discipline.<sup>39</sup> Rather than find itself caught in one extreme or the other of the debate between praxis and theory, Practical Theology is able to give proper attention to the relationship between both the practical and theoretical. Heyns argues that Practical Theology is that theological discipline which has as its object of study the religious actions of individuals, and is thus concerned with both theology and practice.<sup>40</sup> Further, as these actions occur outside of the church building, as well as inside, it may be observed that Practical Theology is concerned with the religious actions of society as a whole.

One could argue that a significant breach has occurred between the traditions of the church, and the lives of those who are part of Christ’s Body. This disconnect is not recent, and can be traced back to the period of the

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<sup>38</sup> Ballard, “Practical Theology,” 113.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>40</sup> L.M. Heyns, and H.J.C. Pieterse, *A Primer in Practical Theology* (Pretoria: Gnosis, 1990), 6.

Enlightenment, if not beyond.<sup>41</sup> The University of South Africa's A.G. Van der Wyk insists that the tradition of the Church and the situation of her people "...must be in dialogue until some consensus is reached."<sup>42</sup> H. Pieterse suggests that the gap which exists between ecclesiastical tradition and the societal situations of its members is a significant challenge for theology, but one that Practical Theology is uniquely suited to address.<sup>43</sup>

In light of the above, it was determined that Practical Theology is indeed the proper theological discipline from which to discuss Pentecostal hermeneutics, Postmodernity, and the spiritual attitudes of today's Western youth. As with other denominations, the gap between the practices of the Pentecostal church and the life situations of those considered Pentecostal is sometimes considerable. In terms of Pentecostal hermeneutics, the impact of Evangelicalism, and experiences of those Pentecostals living and ministering in an increasingly Postmodern world, it will be shown that to date, the gap exists largely between the academy and the pulpit. This thesis in Practical Theology will endeavour to address this gap as it now exists, before it becomes more prevalent in the Pentecostal pew.

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<sup>41</sup> J. Van der Ven, "An Empirical Approach in Practical Theology," in *Practical Theology – International Perspectives*, eds. F. Schweitzer and J. van der Ven, (Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1999), 324.

<sup>42</sup> A.G. Van Wyk, "From 'Applied Theology' to 'Practical Theology.'" *Andrews University Seminary Studies*, Andrews University Press, 33.1 (Spring 1995): 85.

<sup>43</sup> H.J.C. Pieterse, "The Empirical Approach in Practical Theology: A Discussion with J A van der Ven," *Religion & Theology*, 1.1 (1994): 78.

### 1.5.2 Models of Practical Theology

In determining the particular method of Practical Theology used, this thesis will explore the framework provided by two scholars of Practical Theology, G. Hawkes, and J.A. Wolfaardt. Hawkes recognizes three approaches relating theology to practice: deductive, inductive, and dialogical.<sup>44</sup> Wolfaardt suggests three different but complementary descriptors: confessional, correlative, and contextual.<sup>45</sup>

The deductive approach to Practical Theology draws practical implications from an initial theological position that is “prescriptive” and “dogmatic.” This method of doing theology moves in a singular direction – from dogma to practice. The confessional model of Wolfaardt falls within this approach, for it maintains the priority of Scripture from which other knowledge is drawn. Many Pentecostals would agree with Wolfaardt’s definition of Practical Theology as “...the study of God’s word from the point of view of the church’s ministry.”<sup>46</sup> Most Pentecostals, even those who are not acquainted with the intricacies of Practical Theology, would appreciate this focus upon the Scriptures as the starting and focal point of any theologizing. Also known as the diaconological

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<sup>44</sup> Gerald Hawkes, “The Relationship Between Theology and Practice in Southern Africa,” *Journal of Theology for Southern Africa*, 68 (1989): 30-39.

<sup>45</sup> J.A. Wolfaardt, et al, *Introduction to Practical Theology*. Study Guide for PTA200-W (Pretoria: University of South Africa, 1992), 1-37. Different scholars offer other proposals. A. Van Wyk suggests five common approaches to Practical Theology universally are: 1) Empirical-analytical approach; 2) Critical Theory Approach; 3) Intermediate Approach; 4) Confessional Approach; and 5) Contextual Approach. See “From ‘Applied Theology’ to ‘Practical Theology’,” 86-88. Dr. J.P.J. Theron identifies three South African approaches: 1) Deductive Approach; 2) Inductive Approach, and 3) Correlational Approach. In Wolfaardt et al, *Introduction*.

<sup>46</sup> Wolfaardt, et al, *Introduction*, 6.

approach, this model attempts to best serve the church through the study of God's revelation within the Scriptures. Typically, all data regarding human experience is excluded as subjective.<sup>47</sup>

The inductive model is the reverse of the deductive model, according to Hawkes, in that it begins with actual pastoral actions taken as case studies, to which are applied the behavioural sciences. In this model, also unidirectional, practical theology is developed as one moves from practice to theology.<sup>48</sup>

Hawkes explains the dialogical model (and Wolfaardt's correlative approach) is actually an integration of the deductive and inductive models detailed above. In this model, theological statements are derived from the process of interpretation as humanity develops faith statements in the course of lived experience. There is therefore an intricate interaction between practice and theology. Dogma is tested by the experience of practice, and praxis is informed by the lessons of theology. Hawkes notes:

No formulations of theology and no programmes for practice can ever be final – each is continually being reviewed and revised by the other in the ongoing transformations of life. The practical theologian operates by deliberately bringing theology and practice into dialogue, again and again presenting provisional proposal for action and provisional reformulations of theology.<sup>49</sup>

Proponents of the correlative approach view Practical Theology as a study of the actions of the church or of Christians, which serve the communication of

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<sup>47</sup> Van Wyk, "From 'Applied Theology' to 'Practical Theology'," 91.

<sup>48</sup> Hawkes, "Theology and Practice," 30-31.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 31.

the Gospel to a lost world. Scripture, although highly regarded, serves an indirect rather than direct function in this model. Those of this persuasion study not only the Bible and ecclesiology but view matters from the perspective of the Kingdom of God as it intersects with society as a whole. The definition of Poling and Miller is impressive: "Practical theology is a creative and constructive reflection within a living community about human experience and interaction, involving a correlation of the Christian story and other perspectives, leading to an interpretation of meaning and value and resulting in everyday guidelines and skills for the formation of persons and communities."<sup>50</sup>

The final group of practical theologians in our summary follow the contextual approach delineated by Wolfaardt. This approach provides for the balancing of situational analysis and theological insights in the search for a transformative creativity, both of the situation or practice and theological insight. Proponents of this model are more likely to accept the living, creative God as normative to all theology, over and against the Word of God and religious action. Naturally, there is much common ground between this approach and the correlative approach as both seek to relate faith to the activities and context of the religious community.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> J.N. Poling and D.E. Miller, *Foundations for a Practical Theology of Ministry* (Nashville: Abingdon: 1985), 51.

<sup>51</sup> Wolfaardt, et al., *Introduction*, 11.

### 1.5.3 Definition of Practical Theology

Following the definition of G. Hawkes, this thesis maintains:

Practical Theology is the critical study of contemporary activities and an experience of Christians and of the church in relation to God's will and purpose for them. The study may also involve concepts, ideas, beliefs, convictions, attitudes and worldviews, as these affect experience and behaviour. The purpose is understanding, prediction and revision of practice with a view to enhancing Christian ministry to and by Christians and the church.<sup>52</sup>

As Burger notes, "Context plays a dominant role and in-depth knowledge of the situation in which Practical Theology is done is a prerequisite. The subject is practiced with a view to changing a situation or society."<sup>53</sup> Wolfaardt agrees: "The (religious) community assumes great importance in the practice of the subject, as opposed to the excessive individualism found among other groups. Here too, the prime objective is not clergy training, mainly as a result of the accent on the religious community."<sup>54</sup>

### 1.5.4 Practical Theology and the Present Study

This study aims to explore current Postmodern thought, and note similarities between it and the interpretive approach of early Pentecostals to Scripture. Further, it will examine recent trends in Pentecostalism, which suggest that Pentecostal scholars have embraced the hermeneutics of Evangelicalism as their own. Through our exploration of the Postmodern thought displayed by the

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<sup>52</sup> Hawkes, "Theology and Practice," 29.

<sup>53</sup> Wolfaardt, et al., *Introduction*, 12.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*

youngest generations of the Western world, this thesis will argue for a uniquely Pentecostal approach to hermeneutics which embraces the best of the early Pentecostal interpretive approach, and maintains important lessons learned from Evangelical scholarship. The goal of this thesis is to assist Pentecostals in maintaining their very high view of Scripture, and further develop their own approaches to interpretation which recognize both their unique understanding of the importance of experiencing the transcendent God and their ability to share the same with a generation looking for the experience of God himself.

As such, this thesis stands solidly in the Practical Theology tradition, for it is concerned to integrate both faith and practice. Focus on the Pentecostal appreciation of experience and their biblical support thereof would not fulfil the goals of this thesis. Further, sole focus upon Postmodern trends in our world today and the failure of the established churches to solidly connect with younger generations would be worthwhile, but not connect theory and praxis, as this thesis so intends.

#### **1.5.5 Evaluation of the Deductive and Inductive Models**

This author strongly holds to the primacy of Scripture delineated by those holding to the deductive model of Practical Theology. As demonstrated above, however, the goal of this thesis is not to explore the Pentecostal understanding of specific scriptural passages *per se*, but rather to note how their understanding of the scriptures and lived experiences impact their relationship with those to whom they are called to share their faith in Christ. Therefore the deductive model

(Hawkes) and confessional model (Wolfaardt) are not well-suited to the goals of this thesis.

Further, this thesis will not simply move unidirectionally from practice to theology, for our study of the Postmodern context will interact with Pentecostal theology in a multidirectional sense on varying levels. Pentecostal theology and hermeneutical presuppositions will act as one of two pillars of this study, the other being the mindset of a Postmodern society. Thus, the inductive model will not fully meet our needs. From the definitions offered above it is clear that both the correlative and contextual approaches to Practical Theology share as a goal transformation and emancipation, though the approach of the contextual model is the more radical.<sup>55</sup>

### **1.5.6 The Practical Theological Model Chosen**

For the purposes of this thesis, the dialogical (Hawkes) / correlative (Wolfaardt) approach to Practical Theology is viewed as the more beneficial, though we acknowledge the merit inherent in the other models. As is noted in our definition above, the dialogical / correlative approach enables the researcher to examine the theology of the church in light of the worldviews and practice of the world. This thesis wishes to emancipate Pentecostalism from a perceived need to follow Evangelical hermeneutics to the letter, encourage the development of uniquely Pentecostal interpretive approaches to Scripture, thus transforming the relationship between Pentecostalism and the Postmodern world.

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

As its goal is emancipatory and transformational, this thesis falls clearly within the dialogical/correlative model of Practical Theology. Further, as our desire is to explore the current impact of Postmodern thought on the societies of the Western world from which Pentecostalism originated and must continue to evangelize, the dialogical/correlative model is well suited.

## **1.6 SUMMARY**

The following summary of each chapter will provide the reader with the objectives pursued by this study, and the path our research will take as we explore crucial issues within Pentecostalism and Postmodernism.

Chapter two begins by introducing the reader to the basic tenets of Postmodernism. For the purposes of this study, we will examine in particular the philosophical underpinnings of Postmodernity, and note the Postmodern rejection of rationalism and the meta-narrative, and focus upon the role of experience and community. From their strong emphasis on the place of experience and rejection of individualism, Postmoderns greatly appreciate the narrative aspects of life and history. As the Modern mind was encouraged to learn through academics and scientific method, the Postmodern person learns through the stories and life experiences of others as well.

As Postmodern thinking moves through the various disciplines of the academic world, and works its way through popular culture, observers are often

amazed and sometimes incensed at the speed and propensity with which it is impacting society at large. Should Pentecostalism in its earliest, Classical form, be found to have much in common with this movement, the ramifications are substantial for this growing, missionary revival.

Chapter three begins a section which examines Pentecostal hermeneutics, past, present, and future. This chapter leads to the heart of the discussion: did Pentecostal hermeneutics share a number of Postmodern characteristics from the beginning? Was the Pentecostal reliance upon experience and narratives, and their rejection of hermeneutical rationalism actually a forerunner to the current Postmodern movement? If it can be determined that Pentecostals began with a hermeneutic reflective of current Postmodern thought, we may conclude that should Pentecostals continue in the hermeneutical traditions of their forbearers, they are in an excellent position to communicate the Gospel to the Postmodern thinkers of this generation. It is our conclusion that indeed, while early Pentecostalism was surely not “Postmodern”, however one may define that term today, Pentecostal hermeneutics bore many of the traits of current Postmodernity.

Chapter three will show that Pentecostals understood their very existence in terms of the narrative of the “early and latter rains” found so often in the Old Testament. Further, early Pentecostals were strongly attracted to a simple reading of the narratives of the book of Acts, and from there found their “distinctive doctrines” clearly taught and supported. For much of their early history, Pentecostals were derided by the majority of New Testament scholars

and theologians, for their heavy reliance on the narratives of Acts. Indeed, the Pentecostal doctrines of Subsequence and Initial Evidence are supported from five narratives in Acts 2, 8, 9, 10, and 19. Traditionally, biblical scholars have refrained from deriving too much of their theology from narratives, preferring instead to scour the didactic portions of Scripture. For the hermeneutically literal Pentecostals however, anything put in Holy Writ by the Spirit was put there for learning and instruction, stories included.

The first leaders of the fledgling Pentecostal movement acknowledged the important role of doctrine in their lives and faith, but clearly preferred their actual experience as teacher and guide. Rationalism was not given a warm welcome in early Pentecostalism. In both Postmodernity and Pentecostalism, the “Hegemony of Reason”<sup>56</sup> has been toppled by a strong appeal to the senses, the emotions, and dare we say, to faith. As Postmodernists are no longer content to allow reason to be the final arbiter of truth in their lives, so early Pentecostals were not content to allow only that which seemed reasonable to the cerebral cortex of the brain to pass for proper scriptural interpretation. Pentecostals were open to the “plain reading” of Scripture, no matter how “unreasonable” the intellect might perceive that which was discovered. Thus, the convergent viewpoints of Pentecostalism with Postmodernity, in terms of Rationalism, narratives, and the place of experience in life and theology are observed.

While the purveyors of Modernism often criticized Pentecostalism for its dependence upon experience, it is an important tool both for Pentecostals, and for those subscribing to Postmodernity. Indeed, some have argued that

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<sup>56</sup> This phrase is borrowed from Stanley Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*.

Pentecostal hermeneutics have benefited from the use of experience as a hermeneutical tool, and that for certain portions of Scripture in particular, Pentecostals have a sharper focus than might their Evangelical or Mainline Protestant counterparts.<sup>57</sup>

Chapter four continues this section on hermeneutical issues, the goal of which is to explore trends in Pentecostal hermeneutics. One question remains to be answered: Have current Pentecostal hermeneutics stayed true to the Postmodern tendencies of their forbearers? Chapter four explores recent trends in Pentecostal hermeneutics. By highlighting the hermeneutical debate between Gordon D. Fee and his Pentecostal responders it will be seen that some Pentecostals, in responding to Evangelical concerns over their hermeneutical practices, have become more Modern in their approach to the Scriptures. While it cannot be denied that Pentecostals have gained a remarkable acceptance into the larger Evangelical world, we must question whether it has come partially at the expense of their approach to Scripture. At a time when increasing numbers of the Western world are speaking the language of Pentecostal hermeneutics, an uncritical acceptance of Modern hermeneutics may prove negative to Pentecostal evangelistic efforts.

Chapter five seeks to provide interaction with a giant of theology seldom engaged by Pentecostals – Rudolf Bultmann. With his insistence upon the

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<sup>57</sup> See, for example, Clark H. Pinnock, "The Role of the Spirit in Interpretation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36 (1993): 491-497; idem, "The Work of the Holy Spirit in Hermeneutics." *Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 2 (1993): 3-23; Robert J. May, *The Role of the Holy Spirit in Biblical Hermeneutics*, [www.biblicalstudies.org.uk](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk) (accessed November 25, 2005); Roger Stronstad, "Pentecostal Experience and Hermeneutics," *Paraclete* 26.1 (1992): 15.

demythologization of the Gospel, though not so categorized in his time, Bultmann now represents the extreme of Modern thinking, rationalism gone awry. In the years since Bultmann's considerable theological contributions, scholars have further applied Modern principles to the scriptural accounts, culminating in the work of *The Jesus Seminar* in this day. By engaging Bultmann's thought as it pertains to the newest generations of truth-seekers, this chapter will show that at its core, a fully Modern approach to hermeneutics inevitably leads to conclusions that are antithetical to Pentecostalism, and detrimental to Pentecostal evangelism in this Postmodern age. It will be demonstrated that Bultmann's approach, the ultimate application of Modern hermeneutical principles, could hardly be more poorly suited as a platform upon which to present Christ's Gospel to the youngest Western generations.

Chapter six looks to the future of Pentecostal hermeneutics by exploring the work of Kenneth Archer, Associate Professor of Theology at the Church of God Theological Seminary in Cleveland, Tennessee. While much has been written on Pentecostal hermeneutics in the last thirty years, very few have dared put forth a proposal for a specific Pentecostal hermeneutical approach. Archer has done so, and thus is worth closer examination.

Archer begins by first defining Pentecostalism, in its many varieties, tracing the various social and theological influences on this revivalist movement. He defines early Pentecostalism as *Paramodern*, essentially describing a movement that emerged out of Modernity, but always existing on the fringes of Modernity, rejecting Modernity in terms of epistemology and sociology, but

employing Modern technology, language and inductive reasoning to advance their cause. He argues that in the hermeneutical debate between Fundamentalism and Liberalism, Pentecostals chose a third path, using the same pre-critical Bible Reading Method as other holiness believers. What made the Pentecostal approach to Scripture unique, however, was their understanding of the Pentecostal story – the place of this new movement in God’s economy. The Pentecostal tendency to view everything through an eschatological lens provided the urgency and immediacy needed to view all interpretation of Scripture in terms of the experience of God through His Word.

Archer presents the contemporary Pentecostal debate over whether Pentecostals must continue to use a modified version of traditional Evangelical historical-critical methods of interpretation<sup>58</sup>, or as an authentic movement whose identity cannot be “submerged” into Evangelicalism, needs its own hermeneutical approach. Archer chooses the latter position, as will this work. Finally, a contemporary hermeneutical strategy for Pentecostals is presented, which embraces the Pentecostal Story, and derives meaning from a “dialectical process based upon an interdependent dialogical relationship between Scripture, Spirit, and community.”<sup>59</sup>

Chapter seven contains practical suggestions for Pentecostals. We begin by exploring the role of the Holy Spirit in hermeneutics. To be sure, the Spirit’s role in the inspiration and preservation of Scripture is widely accepted. Apart

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<sup>58</sup> As observed in fn.22 above, Evangelicalism as a whole has employed a number of approaches to hermeneutics. Pentecostalism, however, when following Evangelical hermeneutical approaches, tend to follow most closely their use of the Historical-Critical method.

<sup>59</sup> Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 5.

from a few words in theological texts about illumination, however, there remains no firm understanding in the wider Christian world about His role in hermeneutics. Pentecostals have the opportunity to play a key role in developing a proper pneumatological approach to hermeneutics. This study will show that the role of the Spirit in hermeneutics is essential to the proper interpretation of the Word of God. Without the Holy Spirit working in the hearts and minds of the reader, one cannot hope to gain a truly spiritual understanding of Scripture.

We will strive toward a more concrete understanding of how the Spirit assists us in understanding the Scriptures, through a survey of various proposals put forward by scholars. Further, we will examine four possible responses to the possibility of joining Pentecostal hermeneutical concerns with Postmodern trends. We will ask whether it is possible that Pentecostals, by virtue of their experiences in the Spirit, may have a hermeneutical edge regarding passages of Scripture that speak to the very experiences Pentecostals have enjoyed? Debate surrounds this concept, and some consideration will be given to both viewpoints.

Chapter eight summarizes the findings of this study. Folk of retirement age typically do not win young adults to Christ; each generation wins their own peers. As Christians who believe strongly in the present-day working and moving of the Holy Spirit, Pentecostals are in an excellent position to reach Generation X, the emergent generation, and others with the Gospel, should they not abandon that which was best in early Pentecostal hermeneutics. As the newest generations upon the world scene are increasingly influenced by

Postmodernity, these young men and women will also be more open to the “supernatural” and spiritual than the generations since the Enlightenment. If Pentecostals wish to fulfil their missional mandate, however, they must first reach those in their own homes – the youth and young adults of Pentecostalism. As history has demonstrated, each generation of believers ultimately succeeds or fails in the relevance of its Gospel presentation to its peers.

It is our contention that Pentecostals must preserve their hermeneutical emphasis upon the three tenets of Postmodernity discussed above, if they wish to continue to interpret Scripture in a manner that connects most readily with the newest generations. The evangelistic benefits of maintaining a Postmodern approach to hermeneutics by Pentecostals are many. To the introduction of Postmodern thought and areas of similarity and incongruence with conservative Christianity, we now turn in chapter two.

## Chapter II

### POSTMODERNITY - A BRIEF SUMMARY

A massive intellectual revolution is taking place that is perhaps as great as that which marked off the modern world from the Middle Ages.<sup>60</sup>

Diogenes Allen

There is now a consensus that consensus is impossible, that we are having authoritative announcements of the disappearance of authority, that scholars are writing comprehensive narratives on how comprehensive narratives are unthinkable.<sup>61</sup>

Jaichandran and Madhav

Pentecostalism is more an impetus for than a consequence of an emerging dominant worldview. Pentecostalism should then be viewed as a part of the mainstream that is forging the postmodern era.<sup>62</sup>

Jackie David Johns

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<sup>60</sup> Diogenes Allen, *Christian Belief in a Postmodern World* (Louisville: Westminster / John Knox, 1989).

<sup>61</sup> Rebecca Jaichandran and B.C. Madhav, "Pentecostal Spirituality in a Postmodern World," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 6.1 (2003): 44.

<sup>62</sup> Jackie David Johns, "Pentecostalism and the Postmodern Worldview," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 7 (1995): 85.

## 2.1 INTRODUCTION

Postmodernism. The very word suggests a myriad of possible definitions. Even those writers considered Postmodern intone: “I have the impression that [the term Postmodernism] is applied today to anything the users of the term happen to like.”<sup>63</sup> This should perhaps not be surprising, as it is a trend in philosophy and culture defined largely by what it is not and what it has moved past. Postmodernity<sup>64</sup> first appeared in the arts and architecture and has now spread to almost every sector of society, its impact growing more substantial by the day. In perhaps no area will the impact of Postmodern thinking be more substantial than in Christian life and thought, particularly as it applies to the theology and methods of evangelism. This chapter will limit itself to the discussion of Postmodernity as it interacts with Christian theology in particular.

At its core Postmodern thinking contains a vast array of thoughts, ideas, and concepts. Several of these are antithetical to traditional Christian thought, particularly among Western Christian groups whom the Enlightenment has profoundly impacted. In particular, the Postmodern rejection of rationalism as the arbiter of truth, openness to the role of experience in determining truth, and recognition of the importance of narratives in communication, stand in stark contrast to many of the cherished values of Evangelicalism. At the same time, however, the student of Postmodernity is struck by some of the more intense similarities between the Postmodern way of thought and the thought patterns of

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<sup>63</sup> Umberto Eco, *Postscript to the Name of the Rose*, trans. William Weaver (San Diego/New York/London: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1989), 65.

<sup>64</sup> As was noted in fn.3, above, *Postmodernism* and *Postmodernity* will be used interchangeably throughout this paper.

the earliest Pentecostals. For the purposes of this chapter, we will explore five facets of Postmodern thought, noting the themes of community and narratives, importance of experience, and rejection of rationalism as they intersect early Pentecostal thought and hermeneutics. It is to these congruencies and contradictions we now turn.

## 2.2 POSTMODERNISM - AN OVERVIEW

At its essence, Postmodernism<sup>65</sup> is a worldview consisting of anti-foundationalism<sup>66</sup>, disbelief in pure objectivity, and deconstruction of “certain” knowledge, primarily characterized by a reaction to the prevailing worldview of Modernism. It therefore behoves us to first briefly examine the chief tenets of pre-Modernity, and then Modernity and the current reaction to it. Although it does encapsulate some thinking of the early Greek philosophers, Postmodernity is not a return to the pre-modern mindset. Rather, it seeks to modify the best from the

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<sup>65</sup> For a sample of sources attempting to define Postmodernity, see T. Finger, “Modernity, Postmodernity – What in the World Are They?” *Transformation* 10 (October – December 1993): 353-368; T. Gitlin, “The Postmodern Predicament,” *Wilson Quarterly* 13 (Summer 1989): 67-76; G. J. Percesepe, “The Unbearable Lightness of Being Postmodern,” *Christian Scholar’s Review* 20 (1990): 118-135; and C. Van Gelder, “Postmodernism as an Emerging Worldview,” *Calvin Theological Journal* 26 (1991): 412-417.

<sup>66</sup> *Foundationalism* may be defined as “Philosophical or theological approaches affirming specific truths as bases and criteria for all others truths.” See Donald K. McKim, *Westminster Dictionary of Theological Terms* (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1996). For the Christian, the belief in the God who created humanity and the universe, and who revealed himself in Jesus Christ and through his Word, is foundational.

premodern mind without falling prey to the dry rationalism and restrictive epistemological foundationalism of Modernity.<sup>67</sup>

### 2.2.1 Premodernity

In many ways, though certainly not all<sup>68</sup>, the premodern era resembles the current sphere of thinking. The Ancient Greeks struggled with a variety of worldviews, from the spiritual overtones of their pagan religions, to the rational philosophy of some of the greatest intellectual giants the world has seen – Plato, Aristotle, and Socrates. Although surrounded by a culture bred in mythological paganism, inherited from the animistic religions of nature, these ancient Greek philosophers had begun to reject the world of the myth, arguing instead that all causes must have a First Cause, which itself is uncaused. This First Cause could be compared with the transcendent God of Judaism, of whom there was only one, and was like no other. As God had put into place the key absolute principles, which guide every aspect of creation and human life, the world could be better understood and controlled. Through sheer force of will and reasoning,

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<sup>67</sup> “The Enlightenment project...took it as axiomatic that there was only one possible answer to any question. From this it followed that the world could be controlled and rationally ordered if we could only picture and represent it rightly. But this presumed that there existed a single correct mode of representation which, if we could uncover it (and this was what scientific and mathematical endeavours were all about), would provide the means to Enlightenment ends.” See David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Cambridge, MA: Basil Blackwell, 1989), 27.

<sup>68</sup> For example, the Postmodern approach would not accept the foundationalism inherent within the premodern belief in “absolute principles” guiding every aspect of creation.

these ancient philosophers pushed the value and contribution of human reason to new heights.<sup>69</sup>

As has been well established, the Greek world was ready for the gospel of the Christians. As Veith observes,

Already those nourished by Greek culture had an inkling of the immortality of the soul, the reality of a spiritual realm, and the existence of only one transcendent God. Paul discovered in Athens an altar 'to an unknown God.' The Greeks had come to realize that there is a God, but they did not know Him. Their reason, highly developed as it was, had to give way to revelation. 'Now what you worship as something unknown I am going to proclaim to you' (Acts 17:23).<sup>70</sup>

With the introduction of the Christian message, the ancient world now had three competing worldviews – pagan mythology, philosophical rationalism, and biblical revelation. While the biblical and classical worldviews did not agree, there were points of commonality in their belief systems, particularly in their acceptance of a transcendent reality to which this world owed its meaning. From various points of contact, Augustine drew upon Plato as he formulated his version of Western theology, (just as Aquinas synthesized the Bible with Aristotle some 800 years later) - much of which would guide the church into the Modern era.

For over a thousand years, Western civilization was dominated by an uneasy mingling of worldviews ... During the Middle Ages (A.D. 1000-1500), Christian piety, classical rationalism, and folk-paganism of European culture achieved something of a synthesis. Although medieval civilization was impressive in its own terms,

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<sup>69</sup> Gene Edward Veith, Jr, *Postmodern Times: A Christian Guide to Contemporary Thought and Culture* (Wheaton, IL.: Crossway Books, 1994), 30. The following section owes much to Veith's succinct, yet thorough appraisal of the periods in question.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.

scholastic theology subordinated the Bible to Aristotelian logic and human institutions, sacrificing the purity of the Biblical revelation. Medieval popular culture further obscured the gospel message, often keeping much of the old paganism under a veneer of Christianity, retaining the old gods but renaming them after Christian saints.<sup>71</sup>

The Renaissance period of the 1500s and 1600s sought a return to the classical roots of both Greek philosophers and biblical revelation. Renaissance scholars such as Niccolò de' Niccoli (1363-1437) and Poggio Bracciolini (1380-1459) sought a return to the ancient texts of Greek philosophy in much the same manner as the leaders of the Protestant Reformation, such as Martin Luther, John Calvin, and Ulrich Zwingli sought a return to biblical authority. Pagan mythology was now viewed as outdated and unworthy of the Renaissance thinker. This return meant the end of the uneasy partnership between the three dominant worldviews that had managed to coexist thus far in a muddled tension. The 1600s brought the Enlightenment, and the beginning of the Modern world<sup>72</sup>.

### 2.2.2 Modernity

The foundations of the Modern era may be witnessed as early as the late 1500s. Renaissance thinker Francis Bacon (1561-1626) had begun to extol the

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 31.

<sup>72</sup> In a sense, the choice of dates for the beginning of the Modern era is an arbitrary one. A thorough analysis of the historical significance of particular dates is beyond the scope of this work. Therefore, this thesis will align the end of the pre-Modern era and beginnings of Modernity with the early stages of the Enlightenment and Age of Reason. In many ways, the elevation of human reason by thinkers such as Francis Bacon and René Decartes heralded the arrival of the Modern age. Though scholars have not reached a consensus on the dating of the Enlightenment and early years of the Modern era, many historians associate the beginning of the Enlightenment with the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 and its ending with the publication of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1781. As Grenz suggests, "The Age of Reason inaugurated the Modern era, which only now seems to be in its twilight state." See Grenz, *A Primer*, 60-62.

virtues of human knowledge gained through scientific experimentation. Bacon believed that expanded scientific knowledge would give humans the power they needed over the circumstances of life, altering them to our benefit.<sup>73</sup>

Often considered the father of modern philosophy, René Decartes (1596-1650) attempted to devise a scientific method of investigation by which one could determine which truths could be identified as veracious. Though a sceptic in many areas, Decartes allowed that one could doubt everything except one's own existence. Borrowing from Augustine, he made popular the phrase *Cogito ergo sum* – "I think, therefore I am." Decartes' definition of the human person as a thinking substance and rational subject established the centrality of human mind in epistemology, and thus set the agenda for the next three hundred years of scientific and philosophical inquiry. Grenz notes:

Decartes exercised immense influence on all subsequent thinking. Throughout the modern era, intellectuals in many disciplines have turned to the reasoning subject rather than divine revelation as the starting point for knowledge and reflection. Even modern theologians felt constrained to build on the foundation of rationalistic philosophy.<sup>74</sup>

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804), responding to widespread scepticism that the empirical model could ever lead to certain truth, published his *Critique of Pure Reason* in 1751.<sup>75</sup> In this work, Kant's elevation of the active human mind in the process of knowing encouraged subsequent philosophers to focus on the

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<sup>73</sup> See Nicholas Wolterstorff, *Reason with the Bounds of Religion*, 2d.ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 123-124.

<sup>74</sup> Grenz, *A Primer*, 65.

<sup>75</sup> Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* (New York: Prometheus Books, 1998).

centrality of the autonomous self. Moving beyond Decartes' self as the focus of philosophical attention, Kant raised the subjective self to become the entire subject matter in philosophy. This focus on the subjective self has become one of the chief identifying characteristics (and lingering problems) of the Modern era.<sup>76</sup>

Building upon the work of these men and others, the expansion of the scientific realm in the 18<sup>th</sup> century was swift and impressive. Never before had scientific discovery achieved such startling levels, with such alacrity. This age of scientific prowess, exaltation of human reason, and greater human autonomy is variously termed the Enlightenment, and Age of Reason. Classical rationalism was now raised to such levels that biblical revelation was viewed with the same lens of suspicion and critique as had given place to the demise of pagan mythology. For many Enlightenment thinkers such as John Locke (1632 – 1704), and David Hume (1711 – 1776), the stories of the Bible and the stories of ancient Greek gods were of the one sort – mythological superstitions, beneath the dignity of the modern mind.<sup>77</sup>

Enlightenment thinkers such as Locke and Hume did not discard belief in God entirely, however. Rather, they developed a rational religion, one that essentially worshipped human reason. Based on the inherent order of the universe, Deism is one aberration which proclaimed the existence of a rational deity, albeit one that had little to do with creation; all was set running in the

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 79.

<sup>77</sup> For further reading, see Stuart Hampshire, *The Age of Reason: Seventeenth Century Philosophers* (New York: New American Library of World Literature, 1956).

beginning and then left to function precisely as a machine. This by necessity excluded miracles, and other supernatural aspects of biblical revelation such as the Incarnation and Redemption. Eventually, however, an “uninvolved” Creator was not needed, and thus some came to see the universe as a closed system, a system of cause and effect, all from within, based on principles accessible by human reason. Darwin’s removal of God from the category of First Cause completed the transformation of a society now sustained by scientific explanations and the manner of proof achieved in laboratories.

Moral absolutes, once the purview of the deity in Christian theology, were preserved only as they served an utilitarian purpose. That which served the functioning of society was considered good, and that which hindered the growth and development of humanity was evil. Humanity, and in particular, human individualism, became sovereign; the value of the collective was sacrificed at the altar of the individual. As Erickson notes, “In the premodern era the church’s traditional authorities, the philosopher and the Bible, had prevailed, but in the modern period, the flight from these external authorities led to a focus on the individual as the basis for authority...[T]he individual has priority over the collective.”<sup>78</sup> As rationalism peaked, optimism soared in Modern thinkers who felt they could remake society into a veritable utopia, with the assumption that were reason applied properly and the principles of the universe discovered, all

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<sup>78</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Truth or Consequences: The Promise and Perils of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2001), 28.

problems could be solved by human planning. Hence Bacon's famous dictum: "Knowledge is power."<sup>79</sup>

As Modernity moved from victory to victory, several smaller movements arose in reaction to it, and formed the basis for Postmodernism. Early nineteenth century Romanticism reversed the cold rationalism of the Enlightenment and instead saw the universe as a living organism, with feeling at the pinnacle of our humanity. With God close at hand and intimately involved in the physical world, some taught a new Pantheism, as God became as close as the self, one with humanity and the universe, transcendent no longer. Thus, Romanticism cultivated irrationalism, encouraged introspection, and raised subjectivity and personal experience to new levels of influence.<sup>80</sup>

Existentialism arose in the early twentieth century as thinkers pondered the increasing failure of both Enlightenment rationalism and romantic emotionalism to offer meaning for the individual. For the existentialist, meaning is a purely human phenomenon, discovered quite apart from the objective world. As Veith astutely observes, "While there is no ready-made meaning in life, individuals can create meaning for themselves... This meaning, however, has no validity for anyone else. No one can provide a meaning for someone else. Everyone must determine his or her own meaning...."<sup>81</sup> Existentialism thereby provides the rationale for contemporary relativism; religion is a personal affair, as

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<sup>79</sup> Grenz, *A Primer*, 58-59. See also Wolterstorff, *Reason with the Bounds*, esp. 123-135.

<sup>80</sup> Veith, Jr., *Postmodern Times*, 35-37.

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid.*

is morality. No one can decide religious affiliation or moral belief for another – what is right for one may not be right for another. By the mid-twentieth century, the foundation was well in place for Postmodern thought. Jaichandran and Madhav conclude:

Modernity is characterized by the triumph of Enlightenment, exaltation of right of humans and the supremacy of reason. Modernism assumed that human reason was the only reliable way of making sense of the universe. Anything that could not be understood in scientific terms was either not true or not worth knowing. Human beings, by means of scientific reason, could make sense of the world and even manipulate it for their own benefit with or without reference to God (who or whatever he/she/it might be)...this ability to understand and manipulate the natural world...held out the promise of unlimited progress.

As the twentieth century progressed, some of the first cracks began to appear in the modernist worldview and the myth of progress. Two world wars showed that the same scientific technological progress that promised great hope to mankind could also be used to inflict untold suffering on men, women, and children and could even destroy the whole world....Hope was shattered. Thus, modernism and the myth of scientific progress is dead or at least in its final stages, but there is nothing to take its place. We do not know what is coming, only that it will be the worldview that replaced modernism. Until we know exactly what form it will take, we might as well call it postmodernism for the time being.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> Jaichandran and Madhav, "Pentecostal Spirituality", 45. See also Peter Stephenson, *Christian Mission in a Postmodern World* <http://www.postmission.com> (accessed: November 13, 2006.)

## 2.3 POSTMODERN PHILOSOPHERS:

### LYOTARD, FOUCAULT, DERRIDA, RORTY

Before one delves into the philosophical underpinnings of Postmodern thought, it is first beneficial to briefly examine the writings of the key philosophers behind this new worldview.<sup>83</sup> New modes of thinking do not develop in a vacuum; those before and after the scholars of each generation have an impact upon them. Several significant personalities have emerged in the development of Postmodern thought, and a fuller understanding of Postmodernism will be obtained through some passing familiarity with their thought and writings.

#### 2.3.1 Jean-Francois Lyotard

According to Albert Mohler, Jr., Lyotard (1924-1998)<sup>84</sup>, professor of philosophy at the University of Paris, at Vincennes, "...emerged as the most formative defining force in the Postmodern movement."<sup>85</sup> His defining work, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, was commissioned in 1979 by the government of Québec (Canada) as a report on knowledge in highly developed societies. According to Grenz:

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<sup>83</sup> Grenz gives an excellent, and readable, overview of the work of Foucault, Derrida, and Rorty. See Grenz, *A Primer*, chapter 6. See also Erickson, *Truth or Consequences*, chapters 4 - 5 for the major intellectual voices immediately preceding Postmodernity, and chapters 6 - 9 for an overview of Foucault, Derrida, Rorty, and Fish.

<sup>84</sup> See in particular his work *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge*, trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi, in *Theory and History of Literature*, vol. 10 (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984).

<sup>85</sup> Albert Mohler, Jr. "The Evangelical Tradition," in *The Challenge of Postmodernism: An Evangelical Engagement*, 2d. ed., ed. David S. Dockery (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2001), 56.

The publication of *The Postmodern Condition* put postmodernism on the intellectual map. The book did not so much initiate the discussion as describe in an accessible manner the revolution in outlook that lay beneath the cultural phenomenon occurring throughout the Western world and the theoretical and philosophical basis of the Postmodern view.<sup>86</sup>

In this work, Lyotard sets the context of Postmodernism within the cultural and ideological crisis of Western civilization, involving all cognitive issues, from ontology to epistemology. This crisis is foundationally a “crisis of narratives”; which of necessity is a religious crisis as well. The Modern age is one marked by grand meta-narratives, which have sought to explain the most significant questions of life such as the nature of the universe, and the origin of meaning.<sup>87</sup>

In responding to the question “what is modernism?” Lyotard replies:

I will use the term *modern* to designate any science that legitimates itself with reference to a metadiscourse of this kind, making an explicit appeal to some grand narrative, such as the dialectic of the Spirit, the hermeneutics of meaning, the emancipation of the rational or working subject, or the creation of wealth.<sup>88</sup>

From this viewpoint, all grand narratives, from the unified field theory, to the Christian Gospel, are considered Modern, and are therefore dead, as Postmodern thought views such metanarratives as untenable. More to the point, Lyotard suggests, “Simplifying to the extreme, I define *postmodern* as incredulity towards metanarratives.”<sup>89</sup> For those who wonder just how society found itself in

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<sup>86</sup> Grenz, *A Primer*, 39.

<sup>87</sup> Mohler, Jr. “The Evangelical Tradition,” in *The Challenge of Postmodernism*, 56.

<sup>88</sup> Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*, xxiii.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, xxiv. That is, metanarratives justified by modernistic universal rationalism.

a place of such incredulity, Lyotard gives a classic defining statement of

Postmodernism:

The narrative function is losing its great functors, its great heros, its great dangers, its great voyages, its great goals. It is being disbursed in clouds of narrative language elements – narrative, but also denotative, prescriptive, and so on. Conveyed with each cloud are pragmatic valencies specific to each kind. Each of us lives at the intersection of many of these. However, we do not necessarily establish stable language combinations, and the properties of the ones we do establish are not necessarily communicable.<sup>90</sup>

As Mohler notes, Lyotard asks the right question: “Where, after the demise of metanarratives, does legitimacy reside?” Following Lyotard’s lead, the grand narratives of Modernity and those that precede it, such as Christianity, are fragmented into truncated mini-narratives, which function as “language games” for local communities and interest groups.<sup>91</sup> For the Christian, whose faith is based upon the grand narrative of God’s dealing with humanity as represented in the scriptures, the supposed demise of all metanarratives leads to a faith without foundation, and should be considered one of the more troubling aspects of Postmodern thought.

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<sup>90</sup> Ibid.

<sup>91</sup> Mohler, Jr. “The Evangelical Tradition,” in *The Challenge of Postmodernism*, 57-58.

### 2.3.2 Michel Foucault

For many Michel Foucault (1926-1984)<sup>92</sup> is the epitome of the Postmodern scholar. Often classified as a cultural historian, Foucault referred to himself as an “archaeologist of knowledge” and at times, a philosopher. No truer disciple of Friedrich Nietzsche<sup>93</sup> has emerged in the twentieth century; he has been called the “greatest of Nietzsche’s modern disciples.”<sup>94</sup> In 1969 Foucault obtained the chair at the College de France, the pinnacle of the French academic system, and thus found the platform he needed to write, as well as lecture abroad.

Foucault’s rejection of the Enlightenment worldview was thorough, and his

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<sup>92</sup> For a sample of Foucault’s work see “The Minimalist Self,” in *Politics, Philosophy, Culture: Interviews and Other Writings, 1977-1984*, ed. Lawrence D. Kritzman, trans. Alan Sheridan et al. (New York: Routledge, 1988); idem, *The Use of Pleasure*, vol. 2 of *The History of Sexuality*, trans. Robert Hurley (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985); idem, *The Archaeology of Knowledge and Language*, 1969, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (London: Tavistock Press, 1972); idem, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences*, trans. A.M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Random House – Pantheon, 1971); idem, “Truth and Power,” in *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977*, trans. Colin Gordon et al. (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

<sup>93</sup> Often mischaracterized by his followers for exclusively promoting “God is dead” theology, Nietzsche is widely regarded as one of the earlier philosophical forerunners of Postmodernism. Through his often very complex writings Nietzsche argued against morality as commonly understood, believing it to be infected by the controlling influence of the Christian Church. He mounted sustained attacks on Christianity as he promoted his idea of the value of power in a man; the Christian faith, he felt, taught men to submit in weakness. To his credit, however, he differentiated between Christ and Christianity: “Precisely that which is Christian in the ecclesiastical sense is anti-Christian, in essence: things and people instead of symbols; history instead of external facts; forms, rites, dogmas instead of a way of life. Utter indifference to dogmas, cults, priests, church, theology is Christian.” See Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, ed. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Random House, 1967), 98. For a more complete understanding of the thought of Nietzsche see Friedrich Nietzsche, *Antichrist* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus, 2000); also see Stephen N. Williams, *The Shadow of the Antichrist: Nietzsche’s Critique of Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2006); Gilles Deleuze, *Nietzsche and Philosophy* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2006); Arthur Coleman Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher: Expanded Edition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005); and David B. Allison, *New Nietzsche: Contemporary Styles of Interpretation* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1985).

<sup>94</sup> Edward W. Said, “Michael Foucault, 1926-1984,” in *After Foucault: Humanist Knowledge, Postmodern Challenges*, ed. Jonathan Arac (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 1988): 1.

rejection of long-cherished moral absolutes was displayed both in his work and through his homosexual lifestyle.<sup>95</sup>

Rejecting the Modern focus on the autonomous self, he instead focused upon the subjective self, arguing that our subjective experience is shaped entirely by external factors that we unconsciously internalize. Total objectivity in terms of discovering truth is impossible. Grenz notes that:

According to Foucault, Western society has for three centuries made a number of fundamental errors. He argues that scholars have erroneously believed (1) that an objective body of knowledge exists and is waiting to be discovered, (2) that they actually possess such knowledge and that it is neutral or value-free, and (3) that the pursuit of knowledge benefits all humankind rather than just a specific class.

Foucault rejects these Enlightenment assumptions. He denies the modern ideal of the disinterested knower. He denies that we can ever stand beyond history and human society, that there is any vantage point that offers certain and universal knowledge. And hence, he denies the old understanding of truth as theoretical and objective, the belief that truth is a claim to knowledge that can be validated by procedures devised by the appropriate scholarly committee.<sup>96</sup>

Foucault's approach undermines not only any conception of objective science, but also what many consider the foundation of Christianity – God as Trinity, standing objectively over humanity, revealing truth both through general and specific revelation. This rejection of objectivity and absolute truth characterized by Foucault betrays one of the more serious challenges presented by Postmodern thought to Christianity.

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<sup>95</sup> See James Miller, *The Passion of Michel Foucault* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1993).

<sup>96</sup> Grenz, *A Primer*, 131. See also Paul Rabinow's introduction to *The Foucault Reader*, ed. Paul Rabinow (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984).

### 2.3.3 Jacques Derrida

Another significant philosopher in the Postmodern world is Jacques Derrida.<sup>97</sup> Born in 1930, and educated in France, Derrida had begun, by the early 1970's, to divide his teaching time between lecturing in Paris and in various American universities, including Johns Hopkins and Yale. Derrida is most widely known for his championing of the movement of deconstruction. Though his writings are extremely complex to decipher, as he writes 'otherwise' forging new approaches and concepts in language, not according to the traditional use of language. Deconstruction is exceedingly difficult to characterize or describe, as an explanation of it "...involves the use of certain philosophical or philological assumptions to launch an assault on logocentrism, understood as the assumption that something lies beyond our system of linguistic signs to which a written work can refer to substantiate its claim to be an authentic statement."<sup>98</sup> At their core, Derrida's writings endeavour to dissuade the Western world of its notion that we can assume there is a meaning inherent in a text, and that it may be discovered. Grenz notes:

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<sup>97</sup> See Derrida's works: *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976); idem, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982); idem, *Of Spirit: Heidegger and the Question*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1989); idem, *A Derrida Reader: Between the Blinds*, ed. Peggy Kamuf (New York: Columbia University Press, 1991); idem, *Acts of Religion*, trans. Gil Anidjar (New York: Routledge, 2002); idem, *The Gift of Death*, Religion and Postmodernity Series. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996). On Derrida and religion, also see John Caputo, *The Prayers and Tears of Jacques Derrida: Religion Without Religion*, Indiana Series in the Philosophy of Religion (Indianapolis: University of Indiana Press, 1997).

<sup>98</sup> Grenz, *A Primer*, 148. See also Walter Truett Anderson, *Reality Isn't What It Used to Be: Theatrical Politics, Ready-to-Wear Religion, Global Myths, Primitive Chic, and Other Wonders of the Postmodern World* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 90.

In the wake of Derrida's work, avant-garde postmoderns conclude that we can no longer assume an ontological ground for certain knowledge. Derrida's attack on the "center," they declare, has forever shattered traditional appeals to the author's intention. In fact, it has undermined appeals to anything located beyond the text.

What should we do in this situation? Derrida's followers counsel us simply to learn to live with the anxiety that results from his deconstruction of logocentrism and the demise of the metaphysics of presence. We must abandon the old understanding of reading as an attempt to gain entrance into the text in order to understand its meaning and embrace instead the idea that reading is a violent act of mastery over the text.<sup>99</sup>

Though never intending to create a specific theory to be applied in different situations, Derrida's strategy to dismantle logocentrism is profoundly troubling for Christian theology. Removing all possibility of unmediated truth in the written word, Derrida denies that language has a fixed meaning connected to a fixed reality, or that it unveils definitive truth. Those who choose to believe in the Christian scriptures as God's word, in any possible sense, believe there is an ontological ground for certain knowledge. For the Christian, the words of Scripture do in fact point to a reality beyond the text – God himself.

### 2.3.4 Richard Rorty

Another scholar providing philosophical underpinnings for the Postmodern is the American philosopher Richard Rorty<sup>100</sup>, who has aligned himself with many

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<sup>99</sup> Grenz, *A Primer*, 150. See also Frank Lentricchia, *After the New Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980), 179.

<sup>100</sup> For further reading on Rorty's ideas see *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982); idem, *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991); idem, *The Consequences of Pragmatism* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1982); and idem, *Essays on Heidegger and Others* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

of the pragmatic ideas of John Dewey. In his pragmatist tradition, the specific nature of truth varies from that held in philosophy since the Enlightenment. Rather than embracing the correspondence theory of truth – statements are valuable and are either true or false, the veracity of which can be checked against the reality they describe – Rorty opts for a type of coherence theory. He declares that statements are “true” insofar as they cohere with the entire system of beliefs we hold. Essentially, pragmatists understand truth as what works pragmatically rather than which is correct in theory only.<sup>101</sup>

Following the Postmodern assault on the Modern concept of the self, Rorty encourages us to view our lives as episodes within community narratives. “Everything one can say about truth or rationality is embedded in the understanding and concepts unique to the society in which one lives.”<sup>102</sup> He argues that it is impossible to find a starting point for our discourse that is outside of our own temporal context; impossible for us to rise above human communities. Therefore, we ought not to claim any interpretation has universal, transcendent authority. Rorty sees this as a positive, however, for although we lose our perceived vantage point outside of ourselves, we gain a new appreciation for our community. Rorty states:

If we give up this hope [to become a properly programmed machine], we shall lose what Nietzsche called “metaphysical comfort,” but we may gain a renewed sense of community. Our identification with our community – our society, our political

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<sup>101</sup> Grenz, *A Primer*, 154.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 156. See also Richard Rorty, “Science as Solidarity,” in *Objectivity, Relativism, and Truth*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 11.

tradition, our intellectual heritage – is heightened when we see this community as *ours* rather than *nature's*, *shaped* rather than *found*, one among many which men have made. In the end, the pragmatists tell us, what matters is our loyalty to other human beings clinging together against the dark, not our hope of getting things right.<sup>103</sup>

For scholars exploring points of congruency between Postmodern thought and the Christian faith, Rorty's ideas are a double-edged sword. To be sure, Christian theologians must reject Rorty's insistence that an objective authority transcendent above humanity cannot be found. Christianity is predicated upon belief in a transcendent God and the metanarrative of God's dealings with humanity. In his proclamation of the importance of community, however, Christians may find common ground. The impact of individualism which has arisen from the tenets of Modernity has been especially negative within Western Christianity. Rorty's call to recognize that humanity exists primarily in community is closely aligned with scriptural teaching on believers as the Body of Christ. Rorty's work serves as a strong correction to the unscriptural individualistic tendencies that today run unfettered through the Western Church.

### **2.3.5 Summary**

Through the writings of these various representatives of the philosophical underpinnings of Postmodernity, we can see the beginnings of the Postmodern movement. Lyotard brought clarity to the definition of postmodernity, and suggested that Postmoderns will never accept metanarratives justified by way of

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<sup>103</sup> Richard Rorty, "Pragmatism," in *The Consequences of Pragmatism*, 166.

modernistic rationalistic principles. Foucault challenged the notion of the disinterested knower, and brought the subjectivism associated with existentialism to a new level. Derrida took aim at the long-held assumptions of logocentrism, and left many wondering as to the point of reading at all if authorial intent is discarded entirely as a signpost for truth. Rorty has assaulted the recent Western focus on the individual with his emphasis on the place of the person within the community, and the importance of the individual story. Each of these writers has contributed to the current trends of thought common within Postmodernism.

## 2.4 VARIETIES OF POSTMODERNISM

Some scholars have surveyed the vast array of ideas and concepts associated with Postmodernity and have isolated the differing approaches based on the degree of change from Modernity. David Ray Griffin has proposed four varieties of Postmodernism: Deconstructive, Liberationist, Constructive, and Conservative or Restorationist.<sup>104</sup>

a) Deconstructive Postmodernism, also referred to as Ultramodernism, holds that an objective approach to the facts of experience is not possible. All experience is by nature, subjective. It therefore denies the objectivity of foundationalism, and refuses to acknowledge the presence of certain basic or foundational truths upon which humanity can objectively base reasoning.

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<sup>104</sup> David Ray Griffin, William A. Beardslee, and Joe Holland. *Varieties of Postmodern Theology* (Albany: State Univ. of New York Press, 1989), 1-7. See also Thomas C. Oden, *After Modernity...What? An Agenda for Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990); and David S. Dockery, "The Challenge of Postmodernism," in *The Challenge of Postmodernism*, David S. Dockery, ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001).

Language is not based upon, nor does it refer to objective facts; it can refer only to other writings. “Essentially, deconstructive postmodernism overcomes the Modern worldview through an anti-worldview: it deconstructs or eliminates the ingredients necessary for a worldview, such as God, self, purpose, meaning, a real world, and truth as correspondence.”<sup>105</sup>

b) Liberationist Postmodernism focuses more upon the social and political form of Modernism rather than the philosophical foundation. In terms of social structures formed under Modernist thought, it is reactionary, and seeks transformation. The liberation motif is found through a variety of modern struggles, and may be described as gay, black, feminist, or third world. Although not as insistent in its rejection of the search for absolute truth as the supporters of deconstruction, it does not value consistency or normative truth as did Modernism. According to Griffin, supporters of liberationist Postmodernism may not debate “whether an objective analysis of the facts undermines the modern worldview. But [they do] argue that theologians should not be constrained by the cultural mind-set that has been shaped by this worldview.”<sup>106</sup>

c) Constructive Postmodernism seeks to reconstruct the Modern worldview, largely via process thought, seeking to integrate and reconcile the diverse facets of human experience (i.e. ethical, religious, aesthetic, and

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<sup>105</sup> Griffin, et al, *Varieties of Postmodern Theology*, xii.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

scientific intuitions) into one coherent explanatory scheme.<sup>107</sup> It calls for comprehensive thinking in the face of Modernity's inability to bring intelligible understanding of the world. Though rejecting metaphysics as a valid building block, constructive postmodernists still strive for the construction of a new worldview. "We disagree that the breakdown of the Enlightenment conceptuality displays the limits of conceptual thought in general. Before abandoning the wider quest for intelligibility and understanding, we propose that we should test the usefulness of other conceptualities."<sup>108</sup>

d) Conservative or Restorationist Postmodernism holds that there is much in the premodern and Modern worldviews worth preserving. Perhaps more pragmatic than the other streams of Postmodernity, the conservatives recognize that Modernity has changed aspects of our worldview that are difficult to ignore or move beyond. It often seeks to reconstruct theology by blending what is viewed as best in Modernity with the promise of Postmodern thought. While recognizing the importance of the individual and place of reason with society as trumpeted by modernism, conservative Postmodernism seeks to move beyond the abstract individual to the real human being, vested not only with reason, but with the full sensory experience of life itself.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> "What is Process Thought?" *The Centre for Process Studies*. <http://www.ctr4process.org/about/process/> (accessed September 5, 2007).

<sup>108</sup> John B. Cobb, Jr., "Constructive Postmodernism," <http://www.religion-online.org/showarticle.asp?title=2220> (accessed September 5, 2007).

<sup>109</sup> Peter Augustine Lawler, "Conservative Postmodernism, Postmodern Conservatism," *The Intercollegiate Review*, Fall 2002, [http://www.mmisi.org/ir/38\\_01/lawler.pdf](http://www.mmisi.org/ir/38_01/lawler.pdf) (accessed September 5, 2007).

As is apparent, the Christian approach to Postmodernity depends somewhat on the variety of the worldview in discussion. Despite the varying reactions to Modernity discernable within Postmodernity, however, there are a number of key themes present within almost all Postmodern conversation. We will now succinctly examine five of these, and then move towards a more detailed appraisal of Postmodernity from a Christian perspective.

## **2.5 POSTMODERNITY – THE KEY TENETS**

There are many facets of Postmodern thought, and not all erudite authors on Postmodernity agree on what comprises this stimulating worldview. For the purposes of this chapter we will first provide a cursory look at five common Postmodern themes: Anti-foundationalism, Deconstruction of Language, Denial of Absolute Truth, Virtual Reality, and Decimation of Individuality/Promotion of Community.<sup>110</sup>

### **2.5.1 The Anti-foundationalism of Postmodernism<sup>111</sup>**

In the Postmodern mind, knowledge is uncertain. It, therefore, it abandons foundationalism – the idea that knowledge can be built upon the basis of irrefutable first principles and basic truths which lead ultimately to God Himself,

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<sup>110</sup> We are indebted in part for the breakdown of categories to Jaichandran and Madhav, “Pentecostal Spirituality,” 45-49.

<sup>111</sup> Carl F.H. Henry considered this “the one epistemic premise shared by all postmodernists”. See “Postmodernism: The New Spectre?” in *The Challenge of Postmodernism*, ed. David S. Dockery (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001), 42.

and upon which rational thought and progress can be based.<sup>112</sup> The Moderns assume that values are not merely a product of the human intellect but rather they were embedded in a reality that transcends us. This transcendent reality guarantees that truth exists; humanity does not create truth but rather discovers it through reason. Postmoderns discard the Enlightenment assumption that truth is certain and therefore entirely rational.<sup>113</sup> Grenz observes, “The postmodern mind refuses to limit truth to its rational dimension and thus dethrones the human intellect as the arbiter of truth. There are other valid paths to knowledge besides reason, say the Postmoderns, including the emotions, experience, and the intuition.”<sup>114</sup>

### 2.5.2 Deconstruction of Language

For the Postmodern, metanarratives are inherently suspect. As Jaichandran and Madhav note, “This is the essence of Deconstructionism – the knocking down of would-be big stories (worldviews with universalistic pretensions), often through listening to the local understandings of truth of

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<sup>112</sup> See Erickson, *Truth and Consequences*, 252-272, for an excellent discussion on foundationalism, Postmodernity, and Christianity. Also see Michael R. Depaul, *Resurrecting Old-Fashioned Foundationalism* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Pub. Inc., 2000).

<sup>113</sup> Stan Wallace asserts, “Concerning reason, postmodernists shun modernist views which inflate reason to the status of an entirely dependent, neutral, unbiased and objective instrument with which truth can and will be found.” See “The Real Issue: Discerning and Defining the Essentials of Postmodernism.” <http://www.leaderu.com/real/ri9802/wallace.html>. (accessed November 22, 2007).

<sup>114</sup> Grenz, *A Primer*, 7.

minority communities.”<sup>115</sup> Overarching universal narratives which connect with all of humankind (such as the biblical story of creation) are discarded out of hand. For the supporter of deconstruction, all meaning is created by the individual; the reality of one is as real as the reality of another, for we create our own realities. Though rejecting metanarratives as the universal stories of humanity, many Postmoderns accentuate the place of oral traditions, narratives, and stories within the community as essential to ongoing human communication.<sup>116</sup>

In terms of communication, deconstruction declares that contradictions are inherent in all discourse; the “true” meaning cannot be discovered. Readers must take an active role in determining subjective meaning. “Postmodernist theories begin with the assumption that language cannot render truths about the world in an objective way. Language, by its very nature, shapes what we think. Since language is a cultural creation, meaning is ultimately (again) a social construction.”<sup>117</sup>

Inherent in the practice of deconstruction is a hermeneutic of suspicion.

Thomas Oden explains:

By deconstruction, we mean the dogged application of a hermeneutic of suspicion to any given text, where one finds oneself

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<sup>115</sup> Jaichandran and Madhav, “Pentecostal Spirituality”, 46. See also Grenz, *A Primer*, 168, who states: “The community of participation is crucial to identity formation. A sense of personal identity develops through the telling of a personal narrative, which is always embedded in the story of the communities in which we participate.”

<sup>116</sup> Erickson, *Truth and Consequence*, 202. Another author suggests that “...postmodernism [is] not a rejection of metanarrative itself, but [is] a *transitional phase rejecting the metanarratives of an integrated Western worldview for the emergence of new integrations in the global/local culture.*” See Viv Grigg, “The Spirit of Church and the Postmodern City” (Ph.D. diss., University of Auckland, 2005), chapter fourteen, 7.

<sup>117</sup> Veith, Jr. *Postmodern Times*, 51. See also Daniel J. Adams, “A Theological Understanding.”

always over against the text, always asking the sceptical question about the text, asking what self-deception or bad faith might be unconsciously motivating a particular conceptuality.<sup>118</sup>

### 2.5.3 The Denial of Absolute Truth – the Importance of Experience

In the Modern mind, absolute truth is simply “out there”, available for discovery by the persistent truth-seeker. For the Postmodern, truth does not exist outside of subjective experience; therefore, no version of truth is greater than any other. Some forms of Postmodernism are inherently pluralistic – some postmodernists believe absolute truth does not exist. The Postmodern mind rejects the Enlightenment notion that knowledge is objective. Grenz views Postmodern reality as, “relative, indeterminate, and participatory.”<sup>119</sup>

### 2.5.4 Virtual Reality

Reflecting on the Postmodern view of human existence, Francis Schaeffer laments, “Since our existence has no meaning and we are not connected to history or its values by any binding truths, no one can be quite certain where reality and non-reality start and stop.”<sup>120</sup> A key ingredient here is the blurring of fact with fiction, often through the participation by the individual in the virtual world via technology - all reality is virtual reality. Veith wryly observes:

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<sup>118</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *Two Worlds: Notes on the Death of Modernity in America and Russia* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1992), 79.

<sup>119</sup> Grenz, *A Primer*, 7.

<sup>120</sup> Francis Schaeffer, *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1994), 50; and Veith, Jr., *Postmodern Times*, 61.

Thus the life of the mind has a new model – not Socrates searching for truth through dialogues in the marketplace, not Augustine contemplating his own life in light of Scripture, not Newton scrutinizing nature with mathematical rigor, not the scientist working in the lab or the historian shifting through archival evidence. The new model for intellectual achievement is a dazed couch potato watching TV.<sup>121</sup>

### 2.5.5 Decimation of Individuality / Promotion of Community

For Rorty in particular, the self is created by external forces such as cultural and social factors, to the extent that searching for one's inner self is pointless – it does not exist. Postmoderns have decreased the prominence of the individual in favour of the importance of community. Rorty's strong emphasis on community and society denies humanity its traditional place within Modernism as the centre of the universe. Veith notes that in many cases,

The postmodern worldview operates with a community-based understanding of truth. It affirms that whatever we accept as truth and even the way we envision truth are dependent on the community in which we participate. Further, and far more radically, the postmodern worldview affirms that this relativity extends beyond our *perceptions* of truth to its essence: there is no absolute truth; rather truth is relative to the community in which we participate.

On the basis of this assumption, postmodern thinkers have given up the Enlightenment quest for any one universal, supracultural, timeless truth. They focus instead on what is held to be true within a specific community. They maintain that truth consists in the ground rules that facilitate the well-being of the community in which one participates. In keeping with this emphasis, postmodern society tends to be a communal society.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>121</sup> Veith, Jr. *Postmodern Times*, 61. See also Kenneth Myers, *All God's Children and Blue Suede Shoes: Christians and Popular Culture* (Wheaton: IL: Crossway Books, 1989), who demonstrates the impact of television culture on all aspects of society – even academia.

<sup>122</sup> Grenz, *A Primer*, 7-8.

As the mass culture becomes more and more impersonal, individuals lose themselves in the mass mind or in highly segmented groups. The human is lost. ...The anti-humanism of the postmodernists cannot sustain any of the so-called 'human values.' Freedom, individuality, self-worth, altruism, love – these are masks for oppression. The individual human being is swallowed up by culture; cultures are swallowed up by nature.<sup>123</sup>

With this philosophical presupposition, we may conclude that humanity becomes no more important than any other living thing – plant or animal. Naturally, the theological implications of human life without special significance are enormous.

## 2.6 POSTMODERNISM AND EVANGELICALISM - A CRITIQUE<sup>124</sup>

As one might expect, Evangelicalism (including Pentecostalism) has not responded with great enthusiasm to several of the basic tenets of Postmodernity.<sup>125</sup> At its core, Postmodern thought contradicts key Evangelical beliefs at crucial points. Some Postmodern individuals, for example, will likely believe that all truth is relative and subjective; the foundation of the Evangelical gospel is that absolute truth may be found in God Himself, revealed through the

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<sup>123</sup> Veith, Jr. *Postmodern Times*, 72, 79.

<sup>124</sup> Before delving into the more particular issues between Pentecostalism and Postmodernism, this section will first explore the areas of compatibility and contrast between Postmodernism and conservative Christianity, of which Pentecostalism is a part. While not addressing concerns specific to Pentecostalism, much of this discussion will resonate with students of Pentecostalism.

<sup>125</sup> On Postmodernism as a whole, some Evangelical scholars are more accepting. See, for example, Carl Raschke, *The Next Reformation: Why Evangelicals Must Embrace Postmodernity* (Grand Rapids: Baker: 2004). Raschke argues that "...Evangelical Christianity made its own unholy alliance with Cartesian rationalism and British evidentialism as far back as the seventeenth century, taking the wrong turn at a decisive juncture and thereby compromising the original spirit of the Reformation... the postmodern turn in Western thought widens the prospects for Evangelical Christianity to flourish once again as a progressive rather than reactionary force in the present-day world." 9.

life of Christ and the Scriptures. A key text here for many is John 14:6: “Jesus said, ‘I am the way, the truth and the life...’”

On other issues, such as the rejection of rationalism, Postmodern thought has something of significance to contribute to segments of Evangelicalism largely overrun with rationalist tendencies. Given the prevalence of Postmodern thought within Western society and the tremendous impact of Christian values upon the same, it is inevitable that these two movements should intersect (and collide) at key junctures.

One may well ask, as Erickson has, whether Postmodern influence has pervaded Evangelical thought to the extent that an evaluation of the former by the latter is necessitated.<sup>126</sup> Quite apart from substantial anecdotal evidence, a variety of studies conducted by the Barna Research Group concludes that Postmodern thinking has made tremendous inroads into Evangelical thought. For example, a 1991 survey in which the Barna organization presented the statement, “There is no such thing as absolute truth; different people can define truth in conflicting ways and still be correct,” found that a majority of those who identified themselves as Evangelical Christians either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement. As Erickson suggests, this reveals the striking impact of Postmodernity upon Evangelicalism.<sup>127</sup>

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<sup>126</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *The Postmodern World* (Wheaton.: Crossway Books, 2002), 59.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid.*, 62. See George Barna, *The Barna Report: What Americans Believe* (Ventura, CA.: Regal, 1991), esp. 84-85.

### 2.6.1 Postmodernism and Evangelicalism: Areas of Beneficial

#### Interaction<sup>128</sup>

To be sure, the impact of Postmodernity upon Evangelical Christianity is neither entirely positive nor negative. Despite calls in some Christian circles for a wholesale rejection of Postmodern thought, a number of Evangelical scholars believe there is much we can learn from the Postmodern critique of the modernist thought so prevalent in much of Western Christianity. We now turn to the areas of beneficial interaction between Evangelicalism and Postmodernism.

a) The Conditioned Nature of Knowledge. The supporters of deconstruction within Postmodernity have correctly observed that time, place, culture, and past experience each influence our perception of truth and our interpretive conclusions. Many Christians, however, continue to pursue the Modern concept of truly objective knowledge. These individuals, often unaware of their own presuppositions formed by culture and experience, read into the text that which they are attempting to interpret objectively. The end result can be anything but truly objective.<sup>129</sup>

b) The Limitations of Foundationalism. Practically, Postmoderns are also correct in their rejection of foundationalism as a common ground for

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<sup>128</sup> This section is loosely based on the observations by Millard Erickson in *Truth or Consequences*, chapter 10.

<sup>129</sup> On this point Erickson suggests that we should “be willing to allow ourselves to feel the full force of the postmodernists’ contention. This includes the contention that there are alternative logics.” See Erickson, *Truth or Consequences*, 189.

communication about issues of faith and truth. Concepts that might be considered intuitive and self-evident by Evangelicals are in many cases no longer viewed as such by society as a whole. Christians must discover new means of finding common ground with others; natural theology based on a rational demonstration of God's existence will no longer suffice.

c) The Necessity of a Hermeneutic of Suspicion. Postmodernists often employ a hermeneutic of suspicion, asking whether persons have vested interest in the position they propose. Erickson suggests that in our interpretive methods we must apply a hermeneutic of suspicion to our own beliefs and doctrines, recognizing that we are far more likely to believe statements that concur with our belief systems than those that do not.<sup>130</sup> Postmodern thought, especially that of Derrida, is valuable as it helps us to recognize the inherent contradictions in many cherished arguments. While Modernity was often content to present summaries of debated issues as if there were no possible objections, an awareness of apparent contradictions within any argument or interpretation may be viewed as healthy, particularly in terms of academic integrity.

d) The Role of the Community. Postmodern thought has truly made a significant contribution to Church life in particular through its emphasis on the importance of community. Reacting to the Modern exaltation of the individual, Postmodernists have once again placed the individual back in significant

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<sup>130</sup> Erickson, *Truth or Consequences*, 200.

connection with others. A writer for the *Sydney Morning Herald* describes this trend among Australian youth:

[Today's youth] are members of a generation who spend all day together at school, then get on the bus to go home and ring each other up on the mobile phone, or send a stream of text messages to each other. 'Where are you now? Who are you with?' they inquire solicitously, while their parents pay the bill for this flow of continuous contact. Then, when they arrive home, they hop on the internet to link up again in a chat room, or via email ... 'They are a generation that beeps and hums,' one of their fathers recently remarked, and so they are. They are the generation who, having grown up in an era of unprecedentedly rapid change, have intuitively understood that they are each other's most precious resource for coping with the inherent uncertainties of life. Their desire to connect, and to stay connected, will reshape this society. They are the harbingers of a new sense of community, a new tribalism, that will change everything from our old-fashioned respect for privacy to the way we conduct our relationships and build our homes. The era of individualism is not dead yet, but the intimations of its mortality are clear.<sup>131</sup>

Postmodernity strives to be aware of the impact of the community and our experiences with others on our own interpretation of issues and events. For the Christian, this concurs with the New Testament emphasis on the individual as a part of the body of Christ, and acknowledges the significant fact that the majority of Scripture was written not to individual believers, but to Christians who are a part of a larger body of believers.

e) The Importance of Narratives. For Pentecostals in particular, the Postmodern emphasis on the value of narratives rings true with what has historically been a Pentecostal focus. As Erickson notes, a majority of the

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<sup>131</sup> H. Mackay, "One for all and all or one: it's a tribe thing." *Sydney Morning Herald*, 13 July, 2002.

world's cultures still prefer oral rather than written communication, and find it easier to remember key pieces of information in story form, rather than rational, well-argued discourse.<sup>132</sup> Having gleaned the “distinctive doctrines” of Subsequence and Initial Evidence from the narratives of Acts, Pentecostals as a whole will benefit from the Postmodern focus upon the importance of the story.

### **2.6.2 Postmodernism and Evangelicalism - Areas of Incongruity<sup>133</sup>**

As one might expect with a system of thought as challenging as that of Postmodernity, there are numerous points of contention with traditional Evangelical thought. Though the ideas presented below are seemingly contradictory to key aspects of Evangelical dogma, each presents an opportunity for a fresh Evangelical look at the concept in question.

a) Deconstruction. Taken to their logical conclusion, many varieties of deconstruction pose significant challenges for Christians. Based on the premise that there is contradiction inherent in each system of thought, this approach often presupposes that a logically consistent presentation of the system of truth embodied by the Christian faith is impossible. Through its efforts to make the reader aware of the inherent contradictions in final and absolute statements based on rationalism, all systems of thought are thusly deconstructed, and

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid., 202.

<sup>133</sup> See Erickson, *Truth or Consequences*, chapter 11. Also, see Richard B. Davis, “Can There Be an ‘Orthodox’ Postmodern Theology?” in *Journal of the Evangelical Theology Society* 45.1 (2002): 111-123; and Robert McQuilkin and Bradford Mullen, “The Impact of Postmodern Thinking on Evangelical Hermeneutics,” in *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 40.1 (1997): 69-82.

collapse into the sum of their contradictions, rendering each meaningless. The challenge for the Postmodern thinker is deconstructing the approach of deconstruction; this approach, like many others, must crumble beneath the weight of its apparent contradictions if it is believed to be credible.<sup>134</sup>

b) Linguistic Challenges and Relativism. According to McQuilkin and Mullen, Postmodern thought, as it interacts with literary criticism, linguistics, and communications theory, has argued as follows:

Language cannot accurately communicate thought to another person's mind, and with time and cultural distance the attempt becomes ever more futile...The inadequacy of language is not necessarily bad because meaning is constituted of a combination of what is out there (objects and events, including the words of others) and what is in here (my own subjective sense.) Though the words of others play a formative role, the controlling element is what I bring to the text. And the outcome of that mix is all the reality there is. Thus meaning is relative, particularly relative to my present subjective perceptions.<sup>135</sup>

Evangelicals take exception to the Postmodern emphasis on the weakness of language to communicate, and the resultant rampant subjectivism. While the renewed recognition of the significant role our presuppositions play in our hermeneutics has been beneficial, many Christians are not comfortable identifying our personal version of "meaning" with reality, which we believe exists independently of our perceptions.<sup>136</sup> Stanley Grenz notes:

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<sup>134</sup> Erickson, *Truth or Consequences*, 205. Erickson insists that the approach of deconstruction should itself be subject to deconstruction. He notes that Derrida disagrees, equating deconstruction with justice, which can never be deconstructed. "Justice in itself, if such a thing exists, outside or beyond law, is not deconstructable. No more than deconstruction itself, if such a thing exists. Deconstruction is justice." See Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The Mystical Foundations of Authority," in *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice*, ed. Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfield, and David Gray Carlson (New York: Routledge, 1992), 14-15.

<sup>135</sup> McQuilkin and Mullen, "The Impact", 71.

As Christians, we can go only so far with Derrida, for example, in his unrelenting attack on the “metaphysics of presence” and “logocentrism.” In contrast to postmodern thought, we believe that there is a unifying centre to reality. More specifically, we acknowledge that this centre has appeared in Jesus of Nazareth, who is the eternal Word present among us.

Therefore, we agree that in this world we will witness the struggle among conflicting narratives and interpretations of reality. But we add that although all interpretations are in some sense invalid, they cannot all be *equally* valid. We believe that conflicting interpretations can be evaluated according to a criterion that in some sense transcends them all.<sup>137</sup>

c) Rejection of Absolute Truth. With subjectivism raised to a new level, absolute truth is the logical casualty of the Postmodern system of thinking. A solid belief in absolute truth depends, in part, upon the presupposition that objectivity is possible in determining what is true. Contrary to the Modern perception of truth as static, objective, and waiting to be discovered, in the Postmodern mindset, truth is subjective. For the Evangelical, whose system of beliefs is based on the acceptance of God himself as Truth, as revealed both in Christ and through the Scriptures, the rejection of absolute truth by postmoderns could not be more significant. Without joining themselves to the subjectivity of truth promoted by those of the Postmodern mindset, believers must nonetheless learn to present the absolute truth of the Gospel in a manner easily comprehended by those living with a more subjective frame of mind.

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

<sup>137</sup> Grenz, *A Primer*, 165.

d) Rejection of the Metanarrative. The Bible presents the story of God and his interaction with creation and humanity. This universal story, or metanarrative, has been carefully recorded in the Bible, and is proclaimed to be relevant to all of humanity, at all times, in all locations. Evangelicals believe this story is the revelation of God himself, and he has thus inspired the writers of Scripture to record his thoughts. For Christians, there is an objective reality above all others – God himself. It is this reality, informed by the scriptural record of God’s metanarrative, which informs our ethics, morality, and understanding of truth. For some postmodernists, however, no such metanarrative exists. Truth exists only as found subjectively by individuals within community. Again, the challenges of this Postmodern way of thinking are significant for Evangelicals who wish to promote the Gospel in a language relevant to postmoderns, while not subscribing to all tenets of Postmodern thought. For scholars such as Millard Erickson, the Postmodern rejection of the Christian metanarrative is the most compelling of all reasons to view the two as incompatible.

I would contend that the universal element in the Christian message, the claim that there is one God, one creator, one rule of the human race, is so deeply imbedded in the testimony of the biblical documents that it cannot be wrenched from Christianity without destroying the very organism. While postmodern Evangelical Christians may think the marriage with postmodernism is possible, most non-Christian postmodernists do not share that sanguine understanding of the interrelationship.<sup>138</sup>

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<sup>138</sup> Erickson, *The Postmodern World*, 78. This thesis argues that Postmodern thought need not be accepted as a whole; indeed many of those who consider themselves Postmodern do not subscribe to the entire variety of Postmodern thought as outlined herein. One may well embrace the Postmodern tendency to value experience and community without surrendering the entire Christian metanarrative.

## 2.7 CONCLUSION

It has been shown that Postmodernity is the natural philosophical outcome of a generation of thinkers disillusioned by the empty promises of optimistic liberalism. By carefully tracing the development of Postmodern thought from premodernity, through Modernity, and into Postmodernity, the philosophical underpinnings of this movement have been clearly observed.

The impact of several key philosophers on Postmodern thought has been explored. Lyotard's rejection of metanarratives based on the Modern principles of rationalism has been influential, just as Foucault's belief in the power of the subjective self and the impossibility of objectively discovering truth has been instrumental in shaping the Postmodern mindset. Derrida's objection to the use of language as has been traditionally understood, led to his promotion of deconstruction, with which all theologians must contend, specifically in the practice of hermeneutics. Rorty's insistence that truth is simply based on what works, and not on any type of belief in absolutes, has begun to permeate western society. Christian theologians who hold to absolute truth as found in the revelation of Jesus Christ must be prepared to contend with this pragmatic theory of truth, or be deemed irrelevant to the thinking of this culture.

The key tenets of Postmodernity have been delineated. These include the rejection of foundationalism, the concept that all knowledge and truth is founded upon key first principles ultimately leading to God Himself. Metanarratives are

inherently suspect, though smaller stories of life within community are applauded. The concept of absolute truth as attainable has been discarded; truth is purely subjective. The exalted place of the self so prevalent within Modernity has been replaced by the devaluing of the autonomous self in favour of both the human community and biological life as a whole.

Evangelical Christians have found much to celebrate within Postmodern thought, but also have observed areas that cause grave concern. The Postmodern tendency to highly view the role of existing presuppositions in our ultimate determination of meaning is instructive for believers, as is their inherent hermeneutic of suspicion. The insistence that language cannot be used to convey truth from one to another must be resisted, for the authority of Scripture as the guide for the life and faith of the believer thus hangs in the balance. Postmoderns speak the language of anti-foundationalism; Christians must learn new approaches to find common ground with others, while still holding to the Foundation that has been laid in Jesus Christ.

The important place of community within Postmodernity is a valuable reminder to Evangelicals that the individualism so rampant in western culture was never biblical; the value placed upon individual stories and narratives speak to the essential oral traditions of Christianity itself. Evangelical believers must persist in their belief in absolute truth, as found in God himself, and revealed in Christ and the Scriptures. Similarly, Christians cannot abandon their confidence in the story of God and humanity as presented in the scriptures, despite the

Postmodern rejection of metanarratives. It is upon the story of God and his plan for humanity that our understanding of both soteriology and eschatology rest.

Holding similar core doctrinal values as Evangelicals, Pentecostals would generally agree with the above assessment. For Pentecostals however, Postmodern thought presents unique challenges and opportunities. In many regards, Pentecostalism may be observed holding to several key Postmodern concepts – well before they were characterized and described by prominent Postmodern thinkers. While disregarding many of the more offensive Postmodern claims as they have an impact on Christianity, Pentecostalism may still find within its roots key elements of Postmodern thought. In as much as Pentecostalism arose out of reaction to Modernity, early Pentecostal hermeneutics typically eschewed Modern hermeneutics. Did early Pentecostal hermeneutics share approaches similar in focus to what is known today as Postmodern thought? Can Postmodern thought be found in early Pentecostalism? To these issues and others chapter three is addressed.

### CHAPTER III

#### THE ROLE OF EXPERIENCE, RATIONALISM, AND NARRATIVES IN EARLY PENTECOSTAL HERMENEUTICS

An ounce of testimony is often more helpful to hungry hearts than a pound of doctrinal teaching.<sup>139</sup>

A.S. Copley

God, the church, and the world are tired of listening to these modern preachers while they whittle intellectual shavings and theological chips. They want REALITY, a message from under the Throne, delivered by one who opens his mouth to be filled by God, with burning, clinching truth. This message is now going forth.<sup>140</sup>

Charles Fox Parham

The strength of Pentecostal traditioning lies in its powerful narratives. Through their “testimonies” of God’s great work Pentecostals have quite successfully spread their experience to the masses...Unfortunately, for much of their history Pentecostals have been better at telling their story than explaining it to their children.<sup>141</sup>

Simon Chan

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<sup>139</sup> A.S. Copley, in *Way of Faith* (n.p. July 23, 1908), 5; quoted in Grant Wacker, *Heaven Below: Early Pentecostals and American Culture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2001), 85.

<sup>140</sup> Charles Fox Parham, *The Everlasting Gospel*, (n.p. 1911; reprint, Baxter Springs, KS: Robert Parham, 1944), 75-76.

<sup>141</sup> Simon Chan, *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 20.

### 3.1 INTRODUCTION

This thesis has now explored several of the key attributes of Postmodernism, particularly as it relates to Christianity. In describing Postmodernity as a philosophical movement which has rejected rationalism, placed high value on the role of experience, as well as narratives as means of communicating that experience, we have necessarily begun the process of noting the convergent viewpoints between Postmodernity and Pentecostalism.

Without doubt, all of human life is built upon experience, as we encounter the world in which we live, react to what we discover, and interact with those around us. Modernism has downplayed the importance of experience, particularly in terms of an epistemological approach to defining truth. Through Modernism, reason became King; truth could not be discovered except through the cerebral cortex of the brain. Pentecostalism was born in part out of a reaction against Modernist trends within the Christian community<sup>142</sup>, and as such, placed high value upon the role of experience in the Christian life, and rejected the exaltation of reason as the arbiter of truth in the Christian context. Writing of the predecessors of Pentecostalism, Rick Nañez notes:

...The giants of nineteenth-century evangelicalism preached to the masses, witnessing the rebirth of hundreds of thousands of souls. As the lost were wooed down sawdust trail, they deposited their sins – *and often their intellects* – at the foot of the altar, returning to

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<sup>142</sup> That Pentecostalism arose from within a larger reaction by the Holiness movement to the excessive rationalism found in Protestant circles of the late 1800's is well-documented. See for example, Donald W. Dayton, *The Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987); Rick Nañez, *Full Gospel, Fractured Minds: A Call to Use God's Gift of the Intellect* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), especially 89-123; Mark A. Noll, *The Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), Richard Hofstadter, *Anti-intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1963); and George Marsden, *Fundamentalism and American Culture* (New York: Oxford, 1980).

their seats with the two commodities most prized among American believers – *Jesus* and their *feelings*.”<sup>143</sup>

As will be further demonstrated, contra the Postmodernist, early Pentecostals did employ the use of a metanarrative to bring coherence to their self-understanding, but like Postmoderns also relied heavily upon community-based sharing of personal “stories” or “testimonies.”

### 3.2 EARLY PENTECOSTAL EXPERIENCE AND REJECTION OF RATIONALISM

The late Eighteenth century witnessed a dramatic increase of interest in the person and work of the Holy Spirit among Christians who had heretofore expressed little interest in the third person of the Trinity. Indeed, as C.I. Scofield was to point out:

We are in the midst of a marked revival of interest in the Person and work of the Holy Spirit. More books, booklets, and tracts upon that subject have been used from the press during the last eighty years than all the previous time since the invention of printing. Indeed, within the last twenty years more has been written and said upon the doctrine of the Holy Spirit than in the preceding eighteen hundred years.<sup>144</sup>

Early Pentecostals were not necessarily known as great theologians. In fact, many early Pentecostals were anti-intellectual,<sup>145</sup> and were not shy about

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<sup>143</sup> Nañez, *Full Gospel, Fractured Minds*, 97.

<sup>144</sup> C.I. Scofield, *Plain Papers on the Doctrine of the Holy Spirit* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1899), preface, 9.

<sup>145</sup> Pentecostal author Rick Nañez has penned an excellent book on Pentecostalism and the life of the mind, in which he convincingly argues that an anti-intellectual bias continues in Pentecostalism today. See *Full Gospel, Fractured Minds: A Call to Use God's Gift of the Intellect*

asserting the fact. However, some observers are surprised to note just how prolific these early Pentecostals were in terms of the various newspapers, magazines, and books, which were produced with the express purpose of explaining this new outpouring of the Holy Spirit.<sup>146</sup> In the years following Azusa, Pentecostals were very concerned to try and make some sense out of their new experience, and were thoughtful in their responses to the question asked of them, as it was of Peter at Pentecost: “What does this mean?” (Acts 2:12). Significantly, there is therefore an abundance of primary literature available. For example, from 1906-1908 William J. Seymour edited a newsprint publication entitled, “The Apostolic Faith.” This monthly offering included articles by several Pentecostal leaders of the time, as well as testimonies of what God was doing at Azusa, and throughout the world. In 1915, Seymour published “The Doctrines and Discipline of the Azusa Street Apostolic Mission of Los Angeles, Cal. with Scripture Readings,” a compendium of the theology and practices of the Azusa mission to that point in history.<sup>147</sup>

Charles F. Parham was equally prolific, publishing *Kol Kare Bomidar: A Voice Crying in the Wilderness* (1902) and *The Everlasting Gospel* (1911), to explain his views on Christian doctrine, including the Pentecostal experience.

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(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005). While this thesis will argue that Pentecostals must abandon the wholesale acceptance of Evangelical hermeneutics as their own, it will not contend that they must return to a pre-scholarly hermeneutic, nor will it support the latent anti-intellectualism still prevalent in the movement. Rather, this author believes that one can reject the hegemony of reason as the determinant of truth and still develop with appreciation God’s gift of the intellect.

<sup>146</sup> Wacker, *Heaven Below*, ix.

<sup>147</sup> William J. Seymour, ed., *The Apostolic Faith* (Los Angeles: The Pacific Apostolic Faith Movement, 1906-1908); *idem*, *The Doctrines and Discipline of the Azusa Street Apostolic Mission of Los Angeles, Cal. with Scripture Readings* (Los Angeles: William J. Seymour, 1915).

Others such as George Floyd Taylor, David Wesley Myland, Ambrose Jessup Tomilson, and Joseph Hillary King each published works in the ten years following the initial Azusa outpouring, outlining his own beliefs and practices associated with this new movement.<sup>148</sup>

Douglas Jacobson, in his work *Thinking in the Spirit*, argues that early Pentecostals, while attempting to follow the predominant model of Protestant systematic theology in their explanations, recognized the need to bring experience and words together in a manner that was uniquely Pentecostal.

Most leaders of the early Pentecostal movement were, of course, suspicious of theology done in the traditional way. Too often, they thought, theology had lost touch with the Spirit and had become dry and brittle, incapable of conveying the living truth of God's love to anyone. William Seymour, for example, cautioned the members of his Azusa Street Mission against getting caught up in merely "talking thought" lest the power of God decline in their midst....At the same time, each [leader] was convinced that thought was a necessary part of Pentecostal faith – theology was necessary and unavoidable.<sup>149</sup>

These authors never implied that they had to give up part of their Pentecostal faith to write in a systematic and logical manner, and there is no evidence that their relatively systematic style of writing forced them to set aside certain Pentecostal topics simply because they didn't fit logically with everything else. They were writing as Pentecostals to Pentecostals for Pentecostal theological purposes

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<sup>148</sup> See Charles Fox Parham, *Kol Kare Bomidbar: A Voice Crying in the Wilderness* (n.p. 1902; reprint, Baxter Springs, KS: Robert L. Parham, 1944); *idem*, *The Everlasting Gospel*, (n.p. 1911; reprint, Baxter Springs, KS: Robert Parham, 1944); George F. Taylor, *The Spirit and the Bride: A Scriptural Presentation of the Operations, Manifestations, Gifts and Fruit of the Holy Spirit in His Relation to the Bride, with Special References to the "Latter Rain" Revival* (Dunn, NC: George F. Taylor, 1907); D.W. Myland, *The Latter Rain Covenant with Pentecostal Power and Testimonies of Healings and Baptism* (Chicago: Evangel Publishing House, 1910); A.J. Tomilson, *The Last Great Conflict* (Cleveland, TN: Press of Walter R. Rodgers, 1913); and J.H. King, *From Passover to Pentecost* (Senath, MO: F.E. Short, 1914).

<sup>149</sup> Douglas Jacobson, *Thinking in the Spirit* (Bloomington, IN: University of Indiana Press, 2003), 2.

while trying to be just as thorough and systematic as their non-Pentecostal peers.<sup>150</sup>

From this early literature, we are able to determine the attitudes of early Pentecostal leadership towards the role of experience in the newest outpouring of the Holy Spirit, and the place of reason in determining truth from error, as differing doctrines and explanations swirled around the new movement. This chapter will survey the writings of some of the earliest Pentecostal leaders, and present their views on the place of experience and reason within Pentecostalism.

### 3.2.1 Charles Fox Parham

Charles Parham may rightly be called the Founder of Pentecostal theology, for it was he who first developed the distinctive Pentecostal doctrine of glossolalia as the initial evidence of Spirit-baptism<sup>151</sup>. For Parham, tongues-speaking was the necessary evidence that one had been baptized in the Holy Spirit; without this evidence, one could not consider the experience valid.<sup>152</sup> He states that, "Speaking in other tongues is an inseparable part of the Baptism of

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<sup>150</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>151</sup> Ibid., 18. Harry Letson disagrees, suggesting that it was Seymour's "vision, leadership, teaching and drive," which "kept the whole thing on track." Letson concludes that while Seymour is the founder of modern Pentecostalism, it was Parham who initiated a new paradigm shift within Christianity known as Pentecostalism. See Harry Letson, "Pentecostalism as a Paradigm Shift," in *The Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association XXVII* (2007): 104-117.

<sup>152</sup> Jacobson, *Thinking in the Spirit*, 18-19. On Parham, see also James R. Goff, Jr. *Fields White Unto Harvest: Charles F. Parham and the Missionary Origins of Pentecostalism* (Fayetteville, AK: University of Arkansas Press, 1988).

the Holy Spirit distinguishing it from all previous works; and no one has received the Baptism of the Holy Spirit who has not a Bible evidence to show for it.”<sup>153</sup>

Parham was born on June 4, 1873 in Muscatine, Iowa, and encountered numerous health problems very early in life. He contracted a virus as an infant, which left his growth permanently stunted, and at the age of nine was stricken with rheumatic fever, a condition which left him weakened for the rest of his life. Following several brief pastorates, Parham founded a Bible School in Topeka, Kansas, concerning which he states:

Its unique features and teachings became subjects of the daily papers throughout the land. Its only textbook was the Bible; its only object utter abandonment in obedience to the commandments of Jesus, however unconventional and impractical this might seem to the world today.<sup>154</sup>

Having been influenced by various Holiness teachers concerning the doctrine of Spirit-baptism, Parham directed his students to Acts 2, in search of a verifiable proof for the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. “The purpose of this study was to discover the real Bible evidence of this Baptism so that we might know and obtain it, instead of being confused by the chaotic claims of modern Holy Ghost teachers”.<sup>155</sup> On January 1, 1901, one of his female students, Anges Ozman, experienced the expected glossolalia as the “Bible sign” of the Baptism in the

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<sup>153</sup> Parham, *Kol Kare Bomidbar*, 35.

<sup>154</sup> *Ibid.*, 32. The reader will note the sense of pride in referring to the Bible as the “only textbook,” and impracticality of this choice in the eyes of the world.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid.*, 34.

Holy Spirit.<sup>156</sup> Shortly thereafter, Parham and 34 of his other students had a similar experience. By 1905 Parham had launched another Bible school in Houston, Texas, as an outlet for his preaching of the Pentecostal message. Among his notable students during this period was William J. Seymour, who was to become the leader of the Azusa Street outpouring in Los Angeles one year hence.<sup>157</sup>

Parham's thoughts on the place of experience within Pentecostalism and his own rejection of rationalism are woven throughout his published works. Having been raised in a home with few books, Parham considered himself fortunate, for he grew up "with no preconceived ideas, with no knowledge of what creeds and doctrines meant, not having any traditional spectacles upon the eyes to see through."<sup>158</sup> Jacobson notes:

He was convinced that he, unlike many of his peers, brought no interpretive scheme to the Bible at all. He simply believed what the scriptures actually said and later in life he mused that his naïve ability to read the Bible fairly and accurately without any warped preconceptions had helped him 'weather the theological gales' that had driven so many others into error.<sup>159</sup>

One of Parham's contributions to Pentecostal theology, which speaks of his rejection of rationalism, was his strong belief in *xenolalia*. God would speak

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<sup>156</sup> Ms. Ozman is commonly referred to as the first person to speak with tongues in the modern Pentecostal revival. Her testimony concerning these events can be found in James R. Goff, JR. *The Topeka Outpouring of 1901: 100<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Edition* (Joplin, MO:: Christian Life Books, 2000), 103-152.

<sup>157</sup> J.R. Goff, Jr. "Parham, Charles Fox," in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, 2<sup>d</sup> ed., rev. and enl., ed. S.M. Burgess and Eduard M. van der Maas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 955-957.

<sup>158</sup> Parham, *Kol Kare Bomidbar*, 12-13.

<sup>159</sup> Jacobson, *Thinking in the Spirit*, 21.

through believers, via tongues, in whatever human language was needed to complete the missionary thrust of God before Christ's soon return. All believers who were properly Spirit-baptized received this ability in small measure, although only those who were called to foreign places of service would develop the full gift of a foreign language. Missionaries could cease wasting time with language courses, and minister directly to those in need:

How much better it would be for our modern missionaries to obey the injunction of Jesus to tarry for the same power; instead of wasting thousands of dollars, and often their lives in the vain attempt to become conversant in almost impossible tongues which the Holy Ghost could so freely speak. Knowing all languages, He could as easily speak through us one language as another were our tongues and vocal chords fully surrendered to His domination.<sup>160</sup>

Although subsequent Pentecostal missionary experience proved Parham's theory of *xenolalia* to be misguided, his views on the subject show the extent to which early Pentecostal leaders had shaken off the shackles of Modernity, and embraced new forms of thought and doctrine entirely unsupported by scientific evidence.

In the years following the Azusa Street outpouring, Parham continued his work as a tireless promoter of the Baptism in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of tongues. Very often, he was challenged by those he described as well educated, belonging to established and respected congregations. Parham's description of such challenges is telling:

A Baptist preacher said to a friend of mine: "Now don't become crazy about this. I have been through college, and I know it is

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<sup>160</sup> Parham, *Kol Kare Bomidbar*, 28.

impossible for anybody to speak in other or foreign languages unless he has learned them.” This preacher had a Ph.D., D.D., and L.L.D., on the rear end of his name and a Rev. in front of it. My friend came to me in trouble and said: “What shall I do about this?”

I challenged that preacher to come to my school for just one week. I promised him a post-graduate course that would enable him to put another degree on the end of his name. I would have gotten him so humble before God, and so willing to let God use him, that he would have come out of the post-graduate course with A.S.S. on the end of his name. Could I have gotten him to become as humble as was Balaam’s mule, God would have talked through him in tongues.<sup>161</sup>

Parham felt little need to debate correct hermeneutical approaches when discussing his “Bible evidence” for the Baptism of the Holy Spirit. Nor did Parham wring his hands because support for Spirit-baptism was found not in the didactic teaching of St. Paul, but in the narratives of Luke alone. For this early Pentecostal leader, the proof that tongues was the sign of Spirit-baptism could not have been more plainly defended than Scripture had already recorded. “Remember, that it is an incontrovertible fact in Scripture that the Holy Ghost of promise was, and is today, accompanied with speaking in other tongues.”<sup>162</sup> While scholars today might smile at such a strong assertion with little or no theological support, such was the norm for early Pentecostal leaders. After all, the Holy Spirit was given as a glorious tool of witness, not to provide scholars a new topic of debate:

The present Pentecost is not only given as the sign of a believer, the sign to unbelievers, the power to witness (prophecy) only in your own language, but in other tongues as the Spirit giveth

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<sup>161</sup> Parham, *The Everlasting Gospel*, 67.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid.*, 75.

utterance, but in those last days the Holy Spirit is sealing in the forehead and bestowing the power so that we can sing, pray, and preach “in the Spirit” as a “gift of tongues,” not a “gift of brains.”

God, the church, and the world are tired of listening to these modern preachers while they whittle intellectual shavings and theological chips. They want REALITY, a message from under the Throne, delivered by one who opens his mouth to be filled by God, with burning, clinching truth. This message is now going forth.<sup>163</sup>

### 3.2.2 William J. Seymour

William J. Seymour was born on May 2, 1870 in Centerville, LA, the eldest son of Simon and Phillis Seymour. Raised in poverty during his childhood, by the time of his father’s death in 1891 he had left Louisiana for work up North, in cities such as Memphis and Indianapolis. Seymour worked at various jobs during this period, including as a porter, and bartender. It was during his stint as a waiter in Indianapolis that Seymour was converted and joined the local Methodist-Episcopal church.<sup>164</sup> Following this, Seymour appears to have spent a brief period in Chicago, where it is hard to imagine that he did not come into contact with the racially progressive teachings of the great faith healer John Alexander Dowie.<sup>165</sup>

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<sup>163</sup> Parham, *The Everlasting Gospel*, 75-76.

<sup>164</sup> Larry E. Martin, *The Life and Ministry of William J. Seymour*. The Complete Azusa Street Library 1 (Joplin, MO: Christian Life Books, 1999), 68-70. This is one of the best books available on the life of Seymour. Also see Craig Borlase, *William Seymour: A Biography* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2006). The interested reader may also consult Charles William Shumway, “A Critical Study of ‘The Gift of Tongues’” (diss., U of Southern California, 1914).

<sup>165</sup> Martin, *Life and Ministry*, 74-75.

By 1905, after several years of evangelistic and other Christian ministry, Seymour connected with Charles Fox Parham, who accepted him as a student in his Houston Bible School. Due to local segregation laws, Seymour was only permitted to listen to the lectures from the hallway outside the classroom. In February, 1906, Seymour received an invitation to pastor a small Holiness Mission in Los Angeles, and armed with Parham's Spirit-baptism theology, arrived in Los Angeles shortly thereafter. Finding himself quickly locked out of the new church by its Holiness founder who was not enthusiastic about his new teachings, Seymour began a series of Bible studies at the home of Richard and Ruth Asbury at 214 Bonnie Bray Street. Within weeks, several of the participants, including Seymour, had experienced the Baptism of the Holy Spirit with the "Bible evidence" of speaking in tongues.<sup>166</sup>

Soon, Seymour was forced to look for more spacious accommodations, and quickly settled upon the former sanctuary of an African Methodist Episcopal Church at 312 Azusa Street. The revival at the Azusa Street Mission burned brightly until mid-1908, and arose once again in 1911, but thereafter ceased forever. At its peak, the small Mission would be packed to capacity by the faithful, those seeking their own Pentecostal baptism, and critics who had come to solidify their opposition to this noisy and undignified movement. From Azusa Street, the Pentecostal message and experience spread rapidly throughout the

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<sup>166</sup> C.M. Robeck, Jr., "Seymour, William Joseph," in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, 1053-1057.

earth.<sup>167</sup> As the pastor of the Azusa Street Revival, Seymour effectively oversaw the revival that spawned the Pentecostal movement today. As such, his thoughts on the role of experience and place of reason within the Christian faith are extremely important.

In general, leaders of the Azusa revival such as Seymour were not enamoured with theology; indeed, the official publication of Azusa Street, *The Apostolic Faith*, explained that the new Pentecostal message had clearly not been given to the outstanding academics of the time, but was accessible to the most ordinary and uneducated seeker.

There have been those who have sought for the baptism and could not get it, because they did not come humbly as a little babe. They did not give up their doctrines and opinions; they did not empty out so they could get the filling. This is not revealed to our great theologians.<sup>168</sup>

For his part, Seymour recognized that sound Biblical doctrine was essential to the preservation of the revival, but struggled with those who attempted to explain theologically something which, in his mind, was an experience given by God to whosoever will. This barely-educated preacher was

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<sup>167</sup> For more on the history and impact of the Azusa Street revival and the subsequent Pentecostal movement, see Cecil M. Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival: The Birth of the Global Pentecostal Movement* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 2006); Harold D. Hunter and Cecil M. Robeck, *The Azusa Street Revival and Its Legacy* (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 2006); Robert R. Owens, *The Azusa Street Revival: Its Roots and Its Message* (Longwood, FL: Xulon Press, 2005); Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Eddie Hyatt, ed., *Fire on the Earth: Eyewitness Reports from the Azusa Street Revival* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 2006); Murray W. Dempster et al. *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made to Travel* (Irvine, CA: Regnum Books International, 1999); A.C. Valdez, Sr. *Fire on Azusa Street: An Eyewitness Account* (Costa Mesa, CA: Gift Publications, 1980); and Donald W. Dayton, *The Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987).

<sup>168</sup> Untitled, *The Apostolic Faith* 1, no. 10 (Los Angeles, CA: The Pacific Apostolic Faith Movement, September, 1907): 3.

unwilling to join those who wished to abandon doctrinal purity, and simply experience unity through the experiences of the Holy Spirit. “They say, ‘Let us all come together; if we cannot be one in doctrine, we can be one in spirit.’ But, dear ones, we cannot all be one except through the Word of God.”<sup>169</sup> Again, Seymour contends: “We are measuring everything by the Word, every experience must measure up with the Bible. Some say that is going too far, but if we have lived too close to the Word, we will settle that with the Lord when we meet Him in the air.”<sup>170</sup>

While striving for doctrinal purity Seymour nonetheless realized that the Pentecostal Baptism was not a matter of knowledge or education, but ultimately of hunger and faith. Theology had its purpose, chief of which was to ensure doctrinal purity. When it came to the precious Baptism of the Holy Spirit, however, Seymour and the leaders of Azusa saw little need to analyze theologically what was taking place. Again, one can quickly see that discussions concerning the validity of supporting this new experience from the narratives of Acts were never entertained. In fact, many leaders were of the impression that too much analysis would actually hinder the Spirit from moving as he desired. Seymour, writing in *The Apostolic Faith* paper, declared:

When we received the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, the power came down in such a mighty way, and after a time people began to consider and got us to talking thought. But what are we that will put straps and bands on the Holy Ghost, when the Lord comes and

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<sup>169</sup> “Christ’s Messages to the Church,” *The Apostolic Faith* 1, no. 11 (Los Angeles, CA: The Pacific Apostolic Faith Movement, January, 1908): 3.

<sup>170</sup> Untitled, *The Apostolic Faith* 1, no. 9 (Los Angeles, CA: The Pacific Apostolic Faith Movement, June- September, 1907): 1.

finds and thrills us with the Holy Ghost? Just because it is not our power shall we quench it and hold it down? Let us be free in the Holy Ghost and let Him have right of way.<sup>171</sup>

Seymour's personal preaching style betrayed a simple man with a hunger for God. An eyewitness described the preacher and his message: "He was meek and plain spoken and no orator. He spoke the common language of the uneducated class...The only way to explain the results is this: that his teachings were so simple that people who were opposed to organized religion fell for it. It was the simplicity that attracted them."<sup>172</sup> Commenting in one of his sermons on those preachers who boasted of their credentials and new places of worship, Seymour declared:

...the main credential is to be baptized with the Holy Ghost. Instead of new preachers from theological schools and academies, the same old preachers, baptized with the Holy Ghost and fire, the same old deacons, the same old plain church buildings will do. When the Holy Ghost comes in He will cleanse out dead forms and ceremonies, and will give life and power to His ministers and preachers, in the same old church buildings. But without the Holy Ghost they are simply tombstones.<sup>173</sup>

### 3.2.3 George Floyd Taylor

George Floyd Taylor (1881-1934),<sup>174</sup> was also a passionate spokesperson for the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, with the special evidence of *glossolalia*. Originally a preacher in the Holiness movement, Talyor came into contact with

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<sup>171</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>172</sup> Quoted in Martin, *Life and Ministry*, 185.

<sup>173</sup> Larry E. Martin, ed., *The Words that Changed the World: The Azusa Street Sermons. The Complete Azusa Street Library 5*. (Joplin, MO: Christian Life Books, 1999), 70.

<sup>174</sup> See H.V. Synan, "Taylor, G.F.," in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, 1115-1116.

G.B. Cashwell,<sup>175</sup> and accepted the testimony of his personal experience of Spirit-baptism at Azusa. Becoming heavily involved in the Pentecostal Holiness Church, Taylor continued to preach and teach Pentecostal Spirit-baptism, with a certainty amid a clear lack of concrete proofs that would elicit shock from those of a rationalistic mindset. Again, in Taylor's writings, one does not read detailed expositions and exegesis from key Acts' passages to support the doctrine of *glossolalia* as Initial Evidence.

In a passage describing what he believed were seven key operations of the Holy Spirit and the manifestation that accompanied each, Taylor admits that errors might be found in his description of the first six manifestations; individual experiences may vary with his stated view. Readers should feel at "liberty to rearrange these manifestations if they choose." However, "When we come to the manifestation following the Baptism of the Spirit, we have a 'thus saith the Lord.'" In the view of this early Pentecostal leader, the Scriptures were clear, the testimony of the earliest believers was clear, and he had the correct interpretation: "The manifestation following the Baptism is speaking with tongues!"<sup>176</sup> In his discussion on Taylor, Jacobson concludes:

Taylor asserted, perhaps more unconditionally than any other Pentecostal theologian, that everyone who received the Baptism of the Holy Ghost would speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. He allowed no room for dialogue on this matter,

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<sup>175</sup> See H.V. Synan, "Cashwell, G.B.," in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, 457-458.

<sup>176</sup> Taylor, *The Spirit and the Bride*, 138. This example is included as a clear testimony to the reliance upon experience and lack of rationalism present among early Pentecostals. Indeed, one is hard-pressed to find the "thus saith the Lord" Taylor refers to regarding glossolalia as initial evidence. For the earliest Pentecostals, however, their experience with the Spirit amounted to clear proof of God's will for Spirit-baptism.

and he rejected the idea that any other corroborating criterion should be added to the mix.<sup>177</sup>

### 3.2.4 David Wesley Myland

David Wesley Myland (1858-1943)<sup>178</sup> never visited the Azusa mission personally; his connection to Pentecostalism was quite independent of anyone at the mission. However, his understanding and articulation of Pentecostal theology in the wake of the Azusa outpouring is worth examining, for it bears the marks of the influence of experience, and rejection of rationalism so prevalent among his Pentecostal peers.

Myland's *The Latter Rain Covenant with Pentecostal Power and Testimonies of Healings and Baptism* (1910)<sup>179</sup> provides an excellent introduction to this theology. "For Myland, theology was ultimately about life, not about logic. While he believed that Christian faith could be systematically analyzed to some degree, the more important goal was to experience God in one's life."<sup>180</sup> This was the core of Myland's teaching: God must be experienced in his fullness, and he was likely to be very unpredictable in his approach. Myland typically disagreed with those who approached the experience of Spirit-baptism systematically. The real reason so few people truly understood the workings of Pentecost he wrote "[was] because they [were] trying to work it out

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<sup>177</sup> Jacobson, *Thinking in the Spirit*, 96.

<sup>178</sup> See E.B. Robinson, "Myland, D.W.," in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, 920-921.

<sup>179</sup> D.W. Myland, *The Latter Rain Covenant with Pentecostal Power and Testimonies of Healings and Baptism* (Chicago: Evangel Publishing House, 1910).

<sup>180</sup> Jacobson, *Thinking in the Spirit*, 112.

intellectually.”<sup>181</sup> Those still caught in the debate over didactic versus narrative portions of Scripture would surely fall into this category.

Although David Myland was perhaps more balanced in his approach to reason and emotionalism than many of his peers, his writing nonetheless shows the Pentecostal tendency to submit the mind to the experience of God. Myland clearly believed that the mind ought to be involved in Pentecostal faith and experience. To enter fully into the experience of Pentecostal fullness, he suggested:

...you have to have your imagination subdued, your reason adjusted, your perceptions clarified, and your judgment and will sanctified; otherwise you will be governed, not by knowledge, but by emotion and will...No other ground is so dangerous. This is where warning is needed, because the enemy everlastingly seeks to play all kinds of tunes on our emotions and feelings and then laughs at us while we try to dance to his ‘piping,’ but cannot.<sup>182</sup>

Having warned his readers about the dangers of excess emotionalism, Myland then turned his attention to intellectual issues. From his observations, those that had the most trouble acquiring the fullness of God did so because of the “intellectual nature”. This so troubled him that he suggested “hard-headed fellows” may need to be “crucified at the place of a skull and then have [their] heads put to soak” under the influence of the Holy Spirit. He stated,

Brains are good in their place, but they count for nothing unless the heart is set on fire with the sacrificing love of God...If our service is only in the spiritual it leads to fanaticism; if it is in the physical only, the result is formalism. God save us from either of these awful

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<sup>181</sup> Myland, *Latter Rain*, 13-14, 64, 211.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid.*, 14-16, 29-30.

extremes and enable us to worship Him with both the heart and mind.<sup>183</sup>

Another telling example of Myland's rejection of the characteristic tendencies of Modernity is found in his belief that Pentecostal missionaries should distinguish themselves on the mission field by their extraordinary faith. Unlike Parham and Taylor, however, this faith did not take the form of *xenolalia*, but a rejection of modern medical help. In fact, Myland often stated his reluctance to send persons into the mission field who required medical supplies to go with them. Trust in medicine and trust in God were mutually incompatible for this early Pentecostal. When asked about those who might die on the mission field without appropriate medical assistance, Myland replied,

Well, suppose they do die. I want to tell you this, that where one has died trusting God for healing, a half a dozen have died who were trusting in medicine. The missionaries who have trusted God the fullest come through the best... If God has a purpose in a life over in Africa, He will keep that life until His work is done, if there is real trust. Let us pray for those who cannot fully trust.<sup>184</sup>

### 3.2.5 Donald Gee

Donald Gee (1891-1966), a British Pentecostal leader known to many as the "Apostle of Balance," was one of the most influential early Pentecostal

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<sup>183</sup> Myland, *Latter Rain*, 13-16, 24. See also Jacobson, *Thinking in the Spirit*, 122.

<sup>184</sup> *Ibid.*, 86-87.

writers.<sup>185</sup> His most lasting influence came from his early books, written during the 1930's, which strongly articulated and defended the largely misunderstood Pentecostal experience to both adherents and interested observers. Evidence of anti-rationalism is witnessed in the refusal to engage in clear hermeneutics; this doctrine should be evident to those with faith. Although Gee does seem to be aware of the importance of correct doctrine, and was therefore not against the study of theology itself, his solid preference is for experience over reason.

Concerning the Baptism in the Holy Spirit, he firmly states,

To most of us, this has been a perfectly distinct experience from our conversion, and to this agrees the clear testimony of the Scriptures - Acts 8:16; 9:17; 19:2; etc... When you are baptized in the Holy Ghost, you know it, and need no one acquaint you with the fact... In the final analysis, the Baptism in the Spirit it is not a doctrine but an experience, and the test of whether I have received is not a cleverly woven doctrine that will include me within its borders, but whether I know the experience in burning fact in heart and life.<sup>186</sup>

His preference for experience over doctrine is further evidenced:

"Doctrines about the Spirit are necessary and inevitable, but the all-important question is not what we believe, but what we experientially enjoy."<sup>187</sup> Not one to mince words, Gee clearly stated:

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<sup>185</sup> D.D. Bundy, "Gee, Donald," in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, 662-663. Gee wrote more than 30 books and contributed over 500 articles to *Redemption Tidings*, the official organ of the British Assemblies of God. Also see William K. Kay, "Donald Gee: An Important Voice of the Pentecostal Movement," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 16.1 (2007): 133-153.

<sup>186</sup> Donald Gee, *Pentecost* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1932), 19-20. Also see David A. Womack, ed., *Pentecostal Experience: The Writings of Donald Gee* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1993).

<sup>187</sup> Donald Gee, *God's Grace and Power for Today* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1936), 41.

You may stumble at first over the teaching that the scriptural evidence of the baptism in the Holy Spirit is speaking with other tongues and that it should be expected in every case as an initial sign. I firmly believe that if you ponder this with an open mind before the Lord, you will come to see from the examples of the recorded cases in the New Testament . . . that it is really so. This sign unquestionably marks the divine choice for a simple, universal, and supernatural evidence to seal the baptism with the Holy Spirit.<sup>188</sup>

He does not feel it necessary to debate the passages Pentecostals use to support their theology. Rather, he confidently states that the Pentecostal position agrees with the "clear testimony of Scripture" - a telling insight into the mentality of this early Pentecostal teacher. The reader will not read of any consternation of the part of Gee that his choice doctrine comes only from the narrative portions of Acts; indeed, it is his uncritical acceptance of the narratives of Acts 2, 8, 9, 10, and 19 that signifies his clean break with the Moderns who would look for theology only in the didactic portions of Scripture.

### 3.2.6 Myer Pearlman

The American Myer Pearlman (1898-1943) was another very influential figure in early Pentecostal theology.<sup>189</sup> As a convinced Pentecostal, he undertook in 1937 to write a doctrinal summary called *Knowing the Doctrines of the Bible*.<sup>190</sup> This work provided his classes with a text which until then did not exist. No other Pentecostal work has matched the circulation or longevity of his

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<sup>188</sup> Gee, *Pentecost*, 16-17.

<sup>189</sup> See G.W. Gohr, "Pearlman, Myer," in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, 959.

<sup>190</sup> Myer Pearlman, *Knowing the Doctrines of the Bible* (Springfield MI: Gospel Publishing House, 1937).

work. Since its appearance in 1938, this single volume text of less than 300 pages has been in continuous print. More than 125,000 copies have been sold in English alone, and served for many years as the standard Pentecostal theology text in their Bible colleges.<sup>191</sup> His lack of training considered, Pearlman wrote a very thorough summary of the work of the Spirit. He notes the nature of the Spirit; the Spirit in the Old Testament; the Spirit in Christ; the Spirit in human experience; the gifts of the Spirit; the Spirit in the Church.<sup>192</sup>

In his section on the Spirit in human experience, he discusses the role of the Spirit in empowering believers for service. "In addition and subsequent to conversion, a believer may experience an enduement of power whose initial oncoming is signaled by a miraculous utterance in a language never learned by the speaker."<sup>193</sup> Pearlman acknowledges that those who correctly observe that Christians know the Holy Spirit in regeneration and sanctification, yet fail to speak in tongues, or otherwise demonstrate His presence, have challenged the above conclusion. He replies honestly, and is worth quoting at length, for here we see classical Pentecostalism at its best:

It cannot be successfully denied that there is a real sense in which all truly regenerated persons have the Spirit. But the question naturally follows: What is there different and additional in the experience described as the baptism in the Holy Spirit? We answer as follows:

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<sup>191</sup> Russel P. Spittler, "Theological Style Among Pentecostals and Charismatics." In *Doing Theology in Today's World*, ed. J.D. Woodbridge and T.E. McComiskey (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 296-7.

<sup>192</sup> Pearlman, *Knowing the Doctrines*, 6.

<sup>193</sup> Ibid., 310. For an interesting study of the Initial Evidence doctrine, see Gary McGee, ed., *Initial Evidence* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991); and P.H. Wiebe, "The Pentecostal Initial Evidence Doctrine," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 27 (1984): 465-472.

There is one Holy Spirit, but many operations of that Spirit, just as there is one electricity but many operations of that electricity. The same electricity propels streetcars, light our houses, operates refrigerators, and performs many other tasks. In the same manner, the one Spirit regenerates, sanctifies, energizes, illumines, and imparts special gifts.

The Spirit regenerates human nature in the crisis of conversion, and then, as the Spirit of holiness within, produces the "fruit of the Spirit," the distinctive feature of Christian character.

But in addition to these operations of the Holy Spirit, there is another, having for its special purpose the energizing of human nature for special service for God, and issuing in an outward expression of a supernatural character. In the New Testament this experience is designated by such expressions as falling upon, coming upon, being poured out, being filled with, which expressions convey the thought of suddenness and supernaturalness. All these terms are connected with the experience known as the Baptism with the Holy Spirit.

Now while freely admitting that Christians have been born of the Spirit, and workers anointed with the Spirit, we maintain that not all Christians have experienced the charismatic operation of the Spirit.<sup>194</sup>

Though not expounding in detail the Acts passages so cherished by later Pentecostals, he seems content to refer the reader to Acts 2, 8, 10, and 19, where the truth of his teaching should be apparent.<sup>195</sup> In this statement, Pearlman has expounded the traditional Pentecostal theology on Spirit baptism, corresponding closely to the second blessing doctrine taught by both Moody and Torrey. In his view, Pentecostals do not dismiss the role of the Spirit in conversion. They do, however, point to an additional empowering for service available by the Spirit, which is witnessed by obvious physical signs.

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<sup>194</sup> Pearlman, *Knowing the Doctrines*, 311-313.

<sup>195</sup> Ibid.

### 3.2.7 Carl Brumback

Carl Brumback (1917-87),<sup>196</sup> another early Pentecostal pastor and speaker, expanded a series of radio sermons from 1942 to 1944 into his significant defence of Pentecostalism, *What Meaneth This?: A Pentecostal Answer to a Pentecostal Question*.<sup>197</sup> A telling insight into the Pentecostal mentality at this time is seen in Donald Dayton's suggestion that "Carl Brumback's classic *apologia* for Pentecostalism is basically a defence of *glossolalia*."<sup>198</sup> The importance of this observation should not be missed. At the time Brumback wrote, Pentecostals continued to defend forcefully their understanding of tongues as evidence, while almost assuming the validity of subsequence.

Brumback provides an excellent example of the continuity Pentecostalism maintained in placing experience above rationalism throughout the first five or six decades of the movement. He examines five key passages from the book of Acts to support his position: Pentecost (ch 2); the Samaritans (8); the Disciple at Damascus (9); Cornelius' household (10); and the Ephesians (19). Brumback's "exegesis" of the passages is, to the modern hermeneutical mind, somewhat incredible. Though space will not permit an analysis of each of the five passages (further exploration will be conducted in chapter four), sufficient insight will be

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<sup>196</sup> See D.J. Wilson, "Brumback, Carl," in *The New International Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, 447.

<sup>197</sup> Carl Brumback, *What Meaneth This? A Pentecostal Answer to a Pentecostal Question* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1947).

<sup>198</sup> Donald Dayton, "The Limits of Evangelicalism: The Pentecostal Tradition," in *The Variety of American Evangelicalism* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1991), 38.

gained from an examination of the passage detailing Paul's conversion in Acts 9. Brumback refers neither to the Greek, nor the historical-critical questions concerning this passage. He notes simply that although Paul has been sent to receive his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit, no record is made of his receiving the Spirit, but only of the return of his sight. His continued explanation is worth reading verbatim:

Of course, we all conclude that the will of God was accomplished in this respect as well as in the restoration of his sight. However, if our non-Pentecostal friends insist on emphasizing the absence in the record of Paul's speaking in tongues, we can say, just as logically, that he was not filled with the Holy Ghost at that hour. How could there be any mention of tongues in the narrative, when there is a complete absence of mention of the experience of which the speaking with tongues is such a part?

At the time that Paul was writing the First Epistle to the Corinthians it is certain that he possessed the gift of tongues (I Cor. 14:18). This being so, there must have been a first time when he was given this miracle of utterance. The logical place for this primary experience would have been, as in the case for all the other apostles, at the hour when he was filled with the Spirit.<sup>199</sup>

The manner by which Brumback explicates proof of initial evidence from this passage is an excellent example of the pre-scholarly hermeneutic so often employed by classical Pentecostals.

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<sup>199</sup> *What Meaneth This?*, 216-217.

### 3.3 THE PENTECOSTAL STORY: THE LATTER RAIN METANARRATIVE

As Eduard Schweizer has noted, Pentecostals were not first in their passion to begin with an experience of the Holy Spirit as priority: “Long before the Spirit was a theme of doctrine, He was a fact in the experience of the community.”<sup>200</sup> Kärkkäinen agrees: “It might well be the case that, in the first two centuries, charismatic, “enthusiastic” spiritual life was a norm rather than a barely tolerated minority voice in the Church.”<sup>201</sup> Pentecostals simply sought to “get back” to those early years of Christianity, complete with the expectation of a powerful experience of the Holy Spirit in the everyday lives of believers.

Kenneth Archer argues that it was this restorationist desire within early Pentecostalism that defined the Pentecostal “story”. Further, the story Pentecostals so enjoyed telling was the benchmark of their hermeneutics:

What distinguished the early Pentecostal exegetical method from the Holiness folk was not a different interpretive method, but a ‘distinct narrative’ which held the similar methods together in a coherent and cohesive interpretive manner...the Pentecostal hermeneutical strategy at the foundational interpretive level was a unique story.<sup>202</sup>

As Archer highlights, Alasdair MacIntyre has demonstrated that a community’s narrative tradition will considerably impact their interpretive

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<sup>200</sup> Eduard Schweizer, “pneuma,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 6, ed. G. Friedrich, trans. G.W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968): 396.

<sup>201</sup> Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in ecumenical, international, and contextual perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 39. See also James D. G. Dunn, *Unity and Diversity in the New Testament: An Inquiry into the Character of Earliest Christianity* (London: SCM Press; Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1991), esp. chapter 9.

<sup>202</sup> Kenneth J. Archer, “Pentecostal Story as the Hermeneutical Filter” (paper presented at the 30<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Lakeland Florida, 8-10 March 2001), 154.

practices. “The narrative tradition provides the context in which moral reason, along with its interpretive practices can be understood.”<sup>203</sup> For Pentecostals, this narrative tradition attempts to embody the larger Christian story of a created world without sin, the Fall, redemption through Christ, the subsequent Christian community and final restoration of believers in the end of time. Specifically, however, the story of Pentecostals is one of restoration, for they see themselves as an “authentic continuation of New Testament Christianity and...a faithful representation of New Testament Christianity in the present societies in which it exists.”<sup>204</sup>

The importance of the story to Pentecostals can hardly be overestimated, as Harvey Cox indicates in *Fire From Heaven*:

As a theologian I had grown accustomed to studying religious movements by reading what their theologians wrote and trying to grasp their central ideas and most salient doctrines. But I soon found out that with Pentecostalism this approach does not help much. As one Pentecostal scholar puts it, in his faith ‘the experience of God has absolute primacy over dogma and doctrine.’ Therefore the only theology that can give an account of this experience, he says, is ‘a narrative theology whose central expression is the testimony.’ I think he is right...<sup>205</sup>

Archer argues that “The Pentecostal community’s identity is forged from its reading of the Biblical narratives of Acts and the Gospels. Pentecostals desire

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<sup>203</sup> Archer, *Pentecostal Story*, 3. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2d ed. (Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Norte Dame Press, 1984), 193.

<sup>204</sup> Archer, *Pentecostal Story*, 5.

<sup>205</sup> Harvey Cox, *Fire From Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century* (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press edition, 2001), 17.

to live as the eschatological people of God.”<sup>206</sup> As Pentecostals participate in the great story of God’s redemption, they have seen themselves clearly as the restoration of the early Church in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, awaiting the final redemption of God’s people. Among the Christians of the world, many Pentecostals believe only they truly recaptured the essence of life in the Spirit, as portrayed so clearly in the narratives of Acts.

Notable Pentecostal scholars such as Edith Blumhofer, William D. Faupel, Kenneth J. Archer, and others, have observed that the key narrative for early Pentecostals was the “Latter Rain” motif, found in scriptures such as Deut. 11:10-15; Job 29:29; Prov. 16:15; Jeremiah 3:3, 5:24; Hosea 6:3; Joel 2:23; Zechariah 10:1; and James 5:7.<sup>207</sup> This is confirmed in the writings of early Pentecostals such as George Floyd Taylor, who dedicated an entire chapter of his c.1907 work *The Spirit and the Bride* to explaining the early and latter rains.<sup>208</sup> A.B. Simpson,

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<sup>206</sup> Archer, *Pentecostal Story*, 6.

<sup>207</sup> Essentially, these verses speak of the weather cycle in Palestine, and God’s promise to provide sufficient rain for a successful harvest, as Israel remained faithful to her covenant. Note the following:

Deut 11:13’And it shall be that if you earnestly obey My commandments which I command you today, to love the LORD your God and serve Him with all your heart and with all your soul, 14 then I will give you the rain for your land in its season, *the early rain and the latter rain*, that you may gather in your grain, your new wine, and your oil. 15 And I will send grass in your fields for your livestock, that you may eat and be filled.’ 16 Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and worship them, 17 lest the LORD’s anger be aroused against you, and He shut up the heavens so that there be no rain, and the land yield no produce, and you perish quickly from the good land which the LORD is giving you. NKJV

<sup>208</sup> George Floyd Taylor, *The Spirit and the Bride* (n.p. n.d.) c.1907. Taylor wrote “God fashioned the land of Palestine to be the model land of all lands, to contain the produces of all zones and climes, to be a miniature world in itself, and so He arranged the coming and going of its rain clouds on a spiritual pattern, to beautifully adumbrate the movements of the Holy Spirit. So just what the rain is to the earth, the Holy Spirit is to the soul. God arranged the showers of rain in the Land of Canaan, as a type of the operations of grace. Many scriptures allude to the early and Latter Rain, and these are used as types of the Holy Spirit.” p.90.

in a 1907 editorial for *Christian and Missionary Alliance* magazine, encouraged his reader to expect a 'Latter Rain' outpouring.<sup>209</sup> Charles Fox Parham also discussed this motif as early as 1911:

A careful study of the subject in the Old Testament proves that the early rain fell upon newly sown seed, to sprout it and to grow it; and that the latter rain fell on the fields at the time the grain was in the milk state to full it for the harvest. This is true of the Pentecostal work today. Christianity was in the milk state.

...At Topeka, God baptized his true ones with the real Pentecost...whereafter the Holy Spirit fell in Pentecostal power...[Captain Tuttle] saw above the building a great lake of fresh water. It overflowed until the whole earth was refreshed by its floods. This has been true of this Latter Rain. Wherever it has gone it has been like "rain upon new mown grass," filling the wheat for His "Glorious Harvest."

The purpose of this Latter Rain is two-fold: The preaching of this "gospel of the Kingdom" to all the world "as a witness," and the fulling of the grain for the harvest."<sup>210</sup>

William Faupel argues that Pentecostals seized upon the motif of the Latter Rain, and used it as a narrative to explain the importance of their movement in the Christian world. If Pentecost signified the early rain of the Holy Spirit upon the earth, how the world had longed for the Latter Rain during the drought caused by the "apostasy" of the Roman Catholic Church during the Dark and Middle Ages. The Azusa Street revival was that for which the world had prayed. According to Faupel, "...the Pentecostals became the people of the prophetically promised 'Latter Rain' which meant that they had fully recovered

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<sup>209</sup> "We may ... conclude that we are to expect a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit in connection with the second coming of Christ and one as much greater than the Pentecostal effusion of the Spirit as the rains of autumn were greater than the showers of spring...We are in the time...when we may expect this latter rain." in "What is meant by the Latter Rain?" *Christian and Missionary Alliance*, 19 October 1907, 38.

<sup>210</sup> Parham, *The Everlasting Gospel*, 31.

not only the Apostolic faith, but also the Apostolic power, authority and practice.”<sup>211</sup>

Early Pentecostals believed strongly that they were the restoration of the New Testament church, the clearest expression of that which God intended the Church to be since the days of the Apostles. As proof Pentecostals often looked towards the occurrence of miracles within their ranks. In their view, signs and wonders had been a regular occurrence during the days of the Apostles, but as one would expect, had ceased during the apostate reign of the Roman Catholic Church. God had withdrawn the manifestation of miracles not permanently, as taught by Cessationists, but temporarily to show his displeasure with the lack of faith and unbelief of the Church. Once the ‘true church’ was again formed on the earth, miracles would again flow from the hand of the Almighty. Wesleyan Holiness leader John P. Brooks (1891) and early Pentecostal leader Bennett F. Lawrence (1916) clearly outline the rationale for this Pentecostal belief and are worth quoting verbatim:

The truth is that the marks of supernaturalism with which the Church was originally clothed were intended to abide with it, and to accredit its doctrine as Divine, just as Christ’s own doctrine was accredited as Divine; because as already observed, the ministry of the church was to be a continuation of the ministry of Christ, and in his design, no doubt, was to be accompanied with the same phenomena of supernaturalism that verified his own ministry....And as in the future that Church (the true Church) shall more and more emerge into notice from amidst the confusions and carnalities of sectarian Christendom, it cannot be doubted that there will be a reassertion of all the original gifts of which it was in the beginning

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<sup>211</sup> William D. Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplementary Series, eds. John Christopher Thomas, Rickie D. Moore, and Steven J. Land, no. 10 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), 39.

made the possessor by its divine Lord, the gift of miracle included.<sup>212</sup>

The honest-hearted thinking men and women of this great movement, have made it their endeavour to return to the faith and practice of our brethren who serve God prior to the apostasy. They have made the New Testament their rule of life. This effort, which is so general throughout the movement, has had a particular effect upon those who were exercised thereby...The Pentecostal movement has no such history; it leaps the intervening years crying '*Back to Pentecost*'. In the minds of these honest-hearted, thinking men and women, this work of God is immediately connected with the work of God in the New Testament days. Built by the same hand, upon the same foundation of the apostles and prophets, after the same pattern, according to the same covenant, they too are a habitation of God through the Spirit. They do not recognize a doctrine or custom as authoritative unless it can be traced to that primal source of church instructions, the Lord and his apostles.<sup>213</sup>

For these earliest Pentecostals, their manner and method of scriptural interpretation was not only correct, it was consistently witnessed by God himself as the 'signs followed' the correct preaching of His Word. One need not wonder whether Pentecostals had correctly interpreted their place in Christendom as recipients of the greater 'Latter Rain' outpouring of the Holy Spirit; one need only witness the many miracles occurring within Pentecostalism to recognize the Divine stamp of approval on this 'Full Gospel' message. As one early Pentecostal noted, all miracles referred to in Mark 16:16-18 had occurred except the raising of the dead, and they expected that should also happen shortly:

The signs are following in Los Angeles. The eyes of the blind have been opened, the lame have been made to walk, and those who have accidentally drunk poison have been healed. One came

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<sup>212</sup> John P. Brooks, *The Divine Church* (Columbia, MO: Herald Publishing House, 1891), 21, as quoted by Archer, *Pentecostal Story*, 12.

<sup>213</sup> B.F. Lawrence, *The Apostolic Faith Restored* (St. Louis, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1916), 11-12, as quoted by Archer, *Pentecostal Story*, 13.

suffering from poison and was healed instantly. Devils are cast out, and many speak in new tongues. All of the signs in Mark 16:16-18 have followed except the raising of the dead, and we believe God will have someone to receive that power. We want all the signs that it may prove God is true. It will result in the salvation of many souls.<sup>214</sup>

The importance of the Pentecostal story can hardly be overestimated.

These earliest participants in this new movement saw themselves as the restoration of the presence of God as manifested through the Holy Spirit in New Testament days. The sign that their interpretation was correct came as God worked miracles among them, as testimony to the correct preaching of his Word.

In sum, the 'Latter Rain' motif provided the Pentecostals with a persuasive apologetic account for the existence of their community. The 'Latter Rain' motif provided the basic structure for the Pentecostal story. The Pentecostal story brought together the Full Gospel message and extended the past biblical 'Latter Rain' covenant of promise into the present Pentecostal movement. The Pentecostals, then, understood themselves as the prophetically promised eschatological movement, which would bring about the unity of Christianity and usher in the Second Coming of Christ.<sup>215</sup>

### 3.4 THE PENTECOSTAL STORY: THE IMPORTANCE OF THE TESTIMONY

As was noted in the introduction, while Pentecostals employ the decidedly non-Postmodern use of the metanarrative to inform their self-understanding and

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<sup>214</sup> Untitled, *The Apostolic Faith* 1, no. 3 (Los Angeles, CA: The Pacific Apostolic Faith Movement, October 1906), 4.

<sup>215</sup> Archer, *Pentecostal Story*, 10. For further study on the importance of narratives to Pentecostals, the reader may refer to Kenneth J. Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic for the Twenty-first Century: Spirit, Scripture and Community*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplementary Series, eds. John Christopher Thomas, Rickie D. Moore, and Steven J. Land, no. 28 (New York: T&T Clark International, 2004), especially chapter four, "Pentecostal Story: The Hermeneutical Filter", an update of his earlier article presented to the 2001 Society for Pentecostal Studies conference.

biblical interpretation, they have also relied heavily upon the personal stories of those within the congregation. Early Pentecostals were known for their “testimonies” declaring the work of God in their lives to whoever might attend a particular meeting.

Descriptions of the early Pentecostal movement almost always include the mention of testimonies within Pentecostal worship services. Noting that services at the Azusa Street Mission took place continuously, seven days a week, for the three years between 1906 and 1909, Gastón Espinosa observed, “Despite the lack of an official liturgy, one could regularly expect to see enthusiastic prayer, song, testimony and preaching at almost every service.”<sup>216</sup> Frank Bartleman, a participant in the Azusa Street revival, noted:

No subjects or sermons were announced ahead of time, and no special speakers for such an hour. No one knew what might be coming, what God would do. All was spontaneous, ordered by the Spirit. We wanted to hear from God, through whomever He might speak....The meetings started themselves, spontaneously in the Spirit, in testimony, praise, and worship. The testimonies were never hurried by a call for “popcorn.”<sup>217</sup>

Steven Land, President of the Church of God Theological Seminary in Cleveland, TN, and author of *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom*, observes:

Like the New Testament days, communication and instruction were carried on through letters, tracts, testimonies, and most importantly,

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<sup>216</sup> Gastón Espinosa, “Ordinary Prophet: William J. Seymour and the Azusa Street Revival,” in *The Azusa Street Revival and Its Legacy*, eds. Harold D. Hunter and Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. (Cleveland, TN: Pathway Press, 2006), 39-40.

<sup>217</sup> Frank Bartleman, *Another Wave of Revival*, rev.ed. (Springdale, PA: Whitaker House, 1982), 59.

through an ethos growing out of and centered in revivalistic, participatory, populist-oriented worship. All those who had ‘gotten their Pentecost’ were witnesses, tellers of good news. So there were no systematic treaties; that would be a kind of second-order activity removed from the atmosphere of prayer, praise and witness. Though most of the people were literate – some at Azusa even ‘highly educated’ – they were overwhelmingly oral in their worship, witness, and work.<sup>218</sup>

Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., perhaps the leading Pentecostal historian of our time, supports the notion that Pentecostals placed tremendous importance on the role of individual testimonies in building the community of faith. Concerning the Azusa Street meeting, he notes, “[Seymour] had created a climate in which anyone able to lead in a prayer, give a personal testimony, sing a song, manifest some charism, or exhort the saints was allowed to do so.”<sup>219</sup> Further, testimonies were so valued that Clara Lum, secretary to Pastor Seymour, spent considerable time recording oral testimonies for use in *The Apostolic Faith* newspaper. In addition, she was responsible for selecting testimonies from among the thousands of letters coming back to Azusa from those who had travelled abroad as missionaries, to be read aloud at the Azusa services.<sup>220</sup>

According to Robeck, the testimonies of Azusa became a “remarkable feature” of the worship during the revival.

The testimonies of the faithful were not time-worn, tired retreads of something that had happened twenty or thirty years ago. They

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<sup>218</sup> Steven J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplementary Series, eds. John Christopher Thomas, Rickie D. Moore, and Steven J. Land, no. 1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 19.

<sup>219</sup> Cecil M. Robeck, Jr. *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2006), 115.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid.*, 105.

were new, vital vignettes – glimpses into the lives of people who came to the mission. Many visitors found themselves impressed enough with what they heard in these times of testimony that they called them the highlight of the meetings. People stood at the windows outside the mission just to hear the latest tale of God’s working. People stood in line for an hour or more, eagerly waiting their turn. Many jumped to their feet, one right after the other, for the privilege of telling the crowd what God had just done in their lives. Their stories breathed excitement, and their voices rang with vitality. Sometimes testifiers could be heard for blocks in every direction.<sup>221</sup>

Walter Hollenweger, often referred to as the “Dean of Pentecostal Studies,” was one of the first to recognize that the oral nature of Pentecostalism has contributed strongly to its worldwide growth. Hollenweger believes its universal appeal can be largely explained by the contribution of black spirituality to Pentecostalism, including the following:

- the narrative nature of theology and witness
- the orality of liturgy
- maximum participation by the community in reflection, prayer and decision-making, thereby creating a community that is reconciliatory
- inclusion of dreams and visions into personal and public forms of worship via the testimony<sup>222</sup>

Reflecting on Pentecostalism’s propensity towards oral communication, Hollenweger considers whether the movement might have something to

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<sup>221</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>222</sup> Hollenweger’s works on Pentecostalism are considered standard reading for those wishing to be educated on the Pentecostal movement. See Walter J. Hollenweger, *The Pentecostals*, trans. R.A. Wilson (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1972); *idem*, *Pentecostalism* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1997). Indeed, Hollenweger considers the black oral root of Pentecostalism to be the essence of the movement, over and against the various peculiar doctrinal positions. See Walter J. Hollenweger, “The Black Roots of Pentecostalism,” in *Pentecostals After a Century: Global Perspectives on a Movement in Transition*, eds. Allan Anderson and Walter Hollenweger, *Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplementary Series*, eds. John Christopher Thomas, Rickie D. Moore, and Steven J. Land, no. 15 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 42-3.

contribute to the larger Christian church in terms of theological method.

Referring to the basis of Pentecostalism as the shared experience of the Holy Spirit, he notes:

Taken seriously this offers a real possibility of discovering a methodology of theology in an *oral* culture where the medium of communication is – just as in biblical times – not the definition, but the description; not the statement, but the story; not the doctrine, but the testimony...Whoever denies that one can do proper theology in these categories will have to prove that the Bible is not a theological book. Our way of doing theology is a culturally biased form (yet necessarily so, in our culture!). There are other equally relevant forms of doing theology. Pentecostalism offers raw materials and elements for such an alternative methodology.<sup>223</sup>

### 3.5 SUMMARY

From the early days of Azusa, Pentecostals were people of “the story” and viewed themselves through the decidedly non-Postmodern vantage point of the Christian metanarrative. Their existence was explained through their understanding of God’s Latter Rain outpouring, which would restore to the true Church, the miracles and power of the Holy Spirit as first evidenced in the book of Acts. Pentecostals viewed themselves and their movement as God’s last great outpouring of his Spirit upon the earth, and so interpreted their movement in general, and Scripture in particular, through the lens of this great narrative. In several other areas, however, the similarities between early Pentecostalism and current Postmodern thought are striking.

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<sup>223</sup> Walter J. Hollenweger, “Charisma and Oikumene: The Pentecostal Contribution to the Church Universal,” *One in Christ* 7 (1971): 332-33, quoted in Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen, *Pneumatology: The Holy Spirit in Ecumenical, International, and Contextual Perspective* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002.)

From the earliest times, as evidenced by her initial leaders, Pentecostalism has not taken the Modern approach to faith and the Scriptures. From Seymour and Parham, to Taylor, Gee, and Brumback, these Pentecostal thinkers and writers each disavowed the reign of rationalism in favour of a faith lived as a partnership between the Word and one's experience. Like the Postmodernist reacting to the tenets of Modernism, so Pentecostals could no longer apply a rationalistic outlook to their new experience with the Holy Spirit. The early Pentecostals did not engage in debates over whether one portion of Scripture had more "instructional value" than others: the terms "narrative" and "didactic" were hardly in the vocabulary of most. As Frank Macchia observes, even today, "Pentecostals are...wary of critical approaches to the biblical text that alienate the readers from a life-transforming participation in the world of the Scriptures. Hence, Pentecostal theology has tended to be oral, narrative, and devotional in nature rather than academic or philosophical...The narrative world of the Bible in the context of the community of faith has formed the primary context for Pentecostal biblical interpretation."<sup>224</sup>

With the Bible in one hand, and their "Baptism in the Holy Spirit" in the other, the earliest Pentecostals set out to win others for Christ, teach them about the necessity of Spirit-baptism, but more importantly, to assist in the reception of this exciting experience. Key to this process was the Pentecostal story on the individual level – the sharing of God's work in the lives of individual believers was an integral component of almost every early Pentecostal gathering. Pentecostals

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<sup>224</sup> Frank Macchia, "The Spirit and the Text: Recent Trends in Pentecostal Hermeneutics," *The Spirit & Church* 2.1 (May 2000): 54.

instinctively recognized the power of individual story as a means of connecting communities and communicating truth, much as Postmoderns today value the same. For Pentecostals, however, the truth communicated was that of their place within the larger narrative of God's redemptive plan. Steven Jack Land notes:

Thus, the point of Pentecostal spirituality was not to have an experience or several experiences, though they spoke of discrete experiences. The point was to experience life as part of a biblical drama of participation in God's history...Whether it was couched in terms of biblical dispensations, discrete personal experiences, or missionary travels, all of this language was meant to speak of the mighty acts of God's story of redemption in Scripture, in their lives and in the world...The narrative of salvation provided the structure for formation within the missionary movement.

The whole congregation was involved in the process of formation. The singing, preaching, witnessing, testifying, ordinances...altar calls, prayer meetings, gifts of the Spirit, all the elements of corporate worship prepared people for and called them to new birth, sanctification, Spirit baptism and a life of missionary witness.<sup>225</sup>

As the decades passed and Pentecostalism interacted on an increasing level with scholars of other backgrounds, a significant challenge arose. How were Pentecostals, with their pre-critical methods of biblical interpretation, to engage other theologians in scholarly debate, without appearing naïve and unlearned? How were Pentecostals to gain acceptance as equals into organizations such as the National Association of Evangelicals while still refusing to interpret Scripture according to generally accepted principles of interpretation, such as the historical-critical method? How were Pentecostals to achieve

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<sup>225</sup> Steven Jack Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplementary Series, eds. John Christopher Thomas, Rickie D. Moore, and Steven J. Land, no. 1 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), 62.

academic respectability while still holding true to their cherished distinctive doctrines?

As Pentecostalism came of age, it became apparent that the approach of Pentecostal scholars would begin to mirror that of their Evangelical comrades as they began to employ the traditional Evangelical hermeneutics of Modernity to the core of Pentecostal theology.<sup>226</sup> While this “coming of age” academically was significant and a positive step for Pentecostalism, the cost in terms of maintaining the essence of this revival movement must be counted. While those in the pew may not have significantly moved from their early Pentecostal roots, change of this sort in any movement begins with the scholars, who in turn educate the pastors. Have Pentecostal scholars begun to move away from some of the foundational precepts of the movement? In their drive for academic and denominational acceptability have they surrounded hermeneutical presuppositions which would today assist them greatly in speaking the language of Western youth? Have Pentecostals become wholly Evangelical in their approach to the Scriptures, and in doing so hindered their abilities to present the One “supernatural” God to generations of youth desperately looking for such a Deity?

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<sup>226</sup> Yongnan Jeon Ahn notes, “Pentecostal theologians are no longer in the defensive position, rather they enthusiastically enter into meaningful dialogue with other traditions of Christianity, while they seek to re-evaluate their traditional hermeneutic. In fact, with a great appreciation for the early Pentecostal spirituality, contemporary Pentecostal scholars attempt to articulate Pentecostal experience and theology with various analytical methodologies in more sophisticated ways.” In “Various Debates in the Contemporary Pentecostal Hermeneutics,” *The Spirit and Church* 2.1 (May 2000): 21.

Chapter four examines these questions and others by focusing upon what is perhaps the premier debate within Pentecostalism concerning Pentecostal distinctives: that of Gordon Fee and his Pentecostal detractors.

## CHAPTER IV

### LATE TWENTIETH-CENTURY PENTECOSTAL HERMENEUTICS: MORE “EVANGELICAL” THAN “PENTECOSTAL”?

#### THE TEST CASE OF GORDON FEE.

I do not throw out initial evidence, I throw out the language, because it is not biblical, and therefore irrelevant. From a reading of Luke and Paul I would expect people to speak in tongues when they are empowered by the Spirit. For most people this will be a subsequent experience, because they will have become Christians without realizing that this is for them.<sup>227</sup>

I would not want to say that Luke did *not* intend us to understand the baptism of the Spirit to be distinct from and subsequent to conversion, intended for empowering, and always evidenced by speaking in tongues; I am simply less convinced than my Pentecostal forebears that Luke did so intend.<sup>228</sup>

Gordon D. Fee

The obvious result of this reductionism is a willingness to permit *repeatability* of patterns, but not *normativity*. Hence, speaking in tongues associated with Spirit baptism may be *normal*, and even desirable, possibly, but it cannot be proclaimed as a *normative* model. This reductionist point of view . . . is somewhat short of a thoroughgoing Pentecostal theology [and] is apparently a position held today by a number of evangelicals.<sup>229</sup>

William W. Menzies

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<sup>227</sup> Interview by author, December, 1997.

<sup>228</sup> Gordon D. Fee, *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 103-104.

<sup>229</sup> Wm. Menzies, "Methodology of Pentecostal Theology," in *Essays on Apostolic Themes: Studies in Honour of Howard M. Ervin*, ed. Paul Elbert (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1985), 9. Italics Menzies.

#### 4.1 INTRODUCTION

When one thinks of Gordon Fee, hermeneutics may come to mind as easily as New Testament studies *per se*, for throughout his career he has engaged the problems of interpretation and exegesis as readily as he has specific issues of biblical theology. For Pentecostals, most significant have been his efforts to spark discussion on the hermeneutics behind two of Pentecostalism's most cherished doctrines; subsequence and initial evidence. This debate, essentially begun by Fee with a 1972<sup>230</sup> presentation on historical precedent, marks a clear turning point in Pentecostal hermeneutics, from the older Bible Reading Method to a more academically accepted approach. This chapter seeks to first examine Fee's contribution to the discussion, and then survey the Pentecostal response.

It will be shown that Fee's challenge of traditional Pentecostal interpretations of Luke-Acts that has spawned the doctrines of subsequence and initial evidence, stems from his usage of some very Modern hermeneutical tools, the historical-critical method among them. Following the hermeneutics of Hirsch and others, Fee (as a Pentecostal himself) brought the standard hermeneutical methods of the Evangelical Protestant world of the time to bear upon the Pentecostal issues of the day. The response was one of fighting fire with fire, for

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<sup>230</sup> "The Hermeneutics of Historical Precedent" was originally written for the 1972 annual meeting of the Society of Pentecostal Studies. It was later published in Russell P. Spittler, ed. *Perspectives on the New Pentecostalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976.)

the Pentecostals who responded did so with Modern Evangelical hermeneutics. This debate thus begins the shift in Pentecostal hermeneutics away from the Bible Reading Method to a more “accepted” Evangelical hermeneutic.

#### 4.2 GENERAL HERMENEUTICAL PRINCIPLES OF GORDON FEE

When assessing Fee’s understanding of a given subject, we must first delve into the hermeneutical guidelines he has set for himself. It will become apparent that with Fee, it is somewhat impossible to separate his theology from his hermeneutics, for in each instance, his theological stance has come from following his own interpretive principles.

Gordon Fee has been influenced by many of the recent trends in hermeneutics, from the work of Ricoeur<sup>231</sup> to Thiselton<sup>232</sup>. While preferring the approach of the older historical-critical method, and the focus on authorial intent by Hirsch<sup>233</sup>, his work nonetheless shows an awareness of the variety of Modern approaches to hermeneutics, such as the emphasis on relevance in the New Hermeneutic. His willingness and ability to apply these hermeneutical approaches to Pentecostalism has been a hallmark of his work. He declares that

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<sup>231</sup> Paul Ricoeur, *Interpretation Theory*, English trans. (Fort Worth, TX: Texas Christian University Press, 1976).

<sup>232</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Bible Reading* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997); *idem*, *The Two Horizons* (Exeter: The Paternoster Press, 1980).

<sup>233</sup> E.D. Hirsch, Jr., *Validity in Interpretation* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1967).

"one does nothing more important in the formal training for Christian ministry than to wrestle with hermeneutics: the meaning and application of Scripture."<sup>234</sup>

#### 4.2.1 The Inherent Ambiguity of Scripture - A Hermeneutical

##### Challenge

Fee maintains that the specific hermeneutical issues faced by evangelicalism lie within its doctrine of Inspiration. He notes that the Evangelical commitment to see Scripture as *both* divine and human creates its own set of tensions. The intersection of the divine with the human produces far more ambiguities than some feel comfortable with.

The buck stops there, at the text and its intent, as to what is infallible. God did not choose to give us a series of timeless, non-culture-bound theological propositions to be believed and imperatives to be obeyed. Rather he chose to speak His eternal Word *this* way, in historically particular circumstances and in every kind of literary genre. God Himself, by the very way he gave us this Word, locked in the ambiguity.<sup>235</sup>

In the debate between the natural unity and diversity of the text, Fee opts for what he terms the "radical middle". Our doctrine of Inspiration suggests that Scripture inherently contains ambiguity, accommodation, and diversity, each to varying degrees. Since God chose to give us his Word in this manner, our task is to hold each end of the spectrum - historical particularity and eternity - with equal vigour. While we cannot generate the absolute certainty, so sought by the

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<sup>234</sup> Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 25.

<sup>235</sup> *Ibid.*, 33. In quotations of Fee, all italics are by Fee. See also George Eldon Ladd, *The New Testament and Criticism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967), 12.

fundamentalists, we can nonetheless move towards a higher level of commonality. The way towards this higher level is found at the crucial point of authorial intentionality - both human and divine. The task of the exegete and theologian is to discover and hear the Word in terms of God's original intent. Only then may we begin to ascertain its meaning for our own historical setting.<sup>236</sup>

#### 4.2.2 The Crucial Issue - Authorial Intentionality

Fee details why authorial intent is such a crucial issue, though it causes him the greatest problems when dealing with Pentecostal distinctives, and generates the most tension among evangelicals. An insistence on determining authorial intent provides several benefits. It serves as a corrective, limiting the possible meanings a text might be given,<sup>237</sup> and gives us a way forward to construct our theologies in a truly biblical fashion. It will teach us that apparent contradictions in the text need not always be resolved or harmonized, but may stand together in healthy tension. Unity is found in the diversity.<sup>238</sup>

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<sup>236</sup> Ibid., 35-36.

<sup>237</sup> Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 43. As an example, he cites B.B. Warfield's interpretation of "the perfect" in I Corinthians 13:10 as referring to the canon of the New Testament. Since neither Paul nor his audience could have possibly understood the text in this way, it cannot be considered the 'meaning' of this text.

<sup>238</sup> Ibid.

### 4.2.3 Intentionality & Particularity/Eternality

Fee does not refrain from tackling perhaps the most difficult hermeneutical issue of all. The question is: Since God spoke his Word in historically particular circumstances, *how much of the particularity itself is a part of the eternal Word?* If the texts call us to practice hospitality, do we agree that washing feet (the particular) is a part of the eternal (showing hospitality)? It is obvious from the outset that this question is one of the harder for which to proscribe systematic solutions.

When faced with passages in Acts where the eternality of the particulars is difficult to determine, Fee holds to what he believes is the purpose and overall point of the passage. Many hermeneutical difficulties lie in the manner with which one acknowledges - or fails to acknowledge - the immense role that tradition in terms of denominational heritage, and presuppositions, play in the interpretation of Scripture.<sup>239</sup> Fee believes the selectivity of hermeneutics is for the most part related to tradition, not to exegesis. Tradition may lead us to ask specific questions of the text, which are not otherwise legitimate. These questions then lead us towards the kind of hermeneutical posture to which we are predisposed. For example, to go to the text of Acts asking, "What is the evidence of Spirit-baptism?" may be asking a question of the text that it was not

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<sup>239</sup> One need only refer to Rudolf Bultmann's now-famous essay on whether it is possible to do presuppositionless exegesis, and his resounding "No" to that question. See "Is Exegesis Without Presuppositions Possible?" In *Existence and Faith, Shorter Writings of Rudolf Bultmann* (Cleveland: Meridian Books, 1960), 289-96.

written to answer. The answer found, of course, can scarcely be the proper one.<sup>240</sup>

#### **4.2.4 Summary**

Fee opts for the radical middle in the hermeneutical challenge associated with an inherent ambiguity of Scripture. This middle ground is the determination of authorial intent - both human and Divine. With this is his insistence on a Spirit-centered approach to New Testament imperatives, and a constant awareness of the impact of tradition upon one's hermeneutics. These three principles are the foundation for Fee's reflection on Pentecostal hermeneutics and theology.

### **4.3 HERMENEUTICS AND PENTECOSTAL THEOLOGY**

With Fee's hermeneutical principles in hand, we are now prepared to examine his theology on Spirit-baptism, particularly as it relates to his own denomination, the Assemblies of God. For though Fee claims to be Pentecostal in every regard, he nonetheless takes considerable exception to the stated form of two of their key (some would argue distinctive) doctrines: the baptism of the

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<sup>240</sup> Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 75.

Holy Spirit as a subsequent act following conversion; and the declaration that the evidence of such baptism is speaking in tongues.<sup>241</sup>

#### 4.3.1 Hermeneutics and Historical Precedent

Pentecostals admit to basing their theology of subsequence and initial evidence on historical precedent as found in Acts. With specific regard to Pentecostal theology, one must take the genre of the book seriously. Acts is historical narrative, and it was within this arena that much of the scholarly debate with Pentecostalism first took place. Many have argued that one must distinguish between *didactic* and *historical* portions of Scripture, and that the didactic portions have primary importance for the formation of Christian doctrine.<sup>242</sup> It has been declared that what is clearly descriptive history in Acts

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<sup>241</sup> For those who may not recall the official wording of the AG position, it is stated as follows in Articles 7 & 8 of the "Statement of Fundamental Truths," *Minutes of the Thirty-Fifth General Council of the Assemblies of God* (Miami Beach, FL: August 12-16, 1973), 102:

##### 7. The Baptism of the Holy Ghost

All believers are entitled to and should ardently expect and earnestly seek the promise of the Father, the baptism of the Holy Ghost and Fire, according to the command of our Lord Jesus Christ. This was the normal experience of all in the early Christian church . . . This experience is distinct from and subsequent to the experience of the new birth (Acts 8:12-17; 10:44-46; 11:14-16; 15:7-9). . .

##### 8. The Evidence of the Baptism in the Holy Ghost

The baptism of believers in the Holy Ghost is witnessed by the initial physical sign of speaking with other tongues as the Spirit of God gives them utterance (Acts 2:4). The speaking in tongues in this instance is the same in essence as the gift of tongues (I Cor. 12:4-10,28), but different in purpose and use.

<sup>242</sup> For example, Donald Guthrie declares, "We may observe at once that this evidence from the book of Acts does not provide us with any reflection on the theology of the Spirit. It is wholly concerned with his activity. . . .The theological exposition of the doctrine of the Spirit did not fit into Luke's purpose in Acts, but comes to fuller expression in the epistles." Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Theology* (Downers Grove: Inter-Varsity, 1981), 548.

must not be translated into normative experiences for the ongoing church.<sup>243</sup> Fee does not deny that theology abounds in Luke's work. Rather, he simply pleads for one to remember that Luke cast his theology in historical narrative, and for anyone concerned with good hermeneutics, this must be taken seriously.<sup>244</sup> The key to determining what may be didactic within a framework of historical narrative is, for Fee, the role of authorial intent.

Although Luke's "broader intent" may be a moot point for some, it is a defensible hypothesis that he was trying to show how the church emerged as a chiefly Gentile, worldwide phenomenon from its origins as a Jerusalem-based, Judaism-oriented sect of Jewish believers, and how the Holy Spirit was ultimately responsible for this phenomenon of universal salvation based on grace alone.<sup>245</sup>

#### 4.3.2 Three Key Principles

Fee outlines three specific principles regarding hermeneutics and historical narrative. 1) Authorial intent is the chief factor in determining normative values from narratives. 2) That which is incidental to the primary intent of a

<sup>243</sup> See, for example, Clark Pinnock and Grant Osborne, "A Truce Proposal for the Tongues Controversy," *Christianity Today* 16 (Oct. 8, 1971), 6 - 9; John R.W. Stott, *The Baptism and Fullness of the Holy Spirit* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1964), 8; and Anthony Hoekema, *Holy Spirit Baptism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 23-24.

<sup>244</sup> Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 90. Pentecostal scholars are quick to point out that there is renewed recognition of Luke as a theologian. I. Howard Marshall's, *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, Contemporary Evangelical Perspectives (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970; revised ed., Downers Grove: IVP, 1998) has been called "An important shift in Evangelical thinking." See R.P. Menzies, "The Distinctive Character of Luke's Pneumatology," *Paraclete* 25:4 (1991): 20. Also significant is *Witness to the Gospel: The Theology of Acts*, ed. I.H. Marshall and D. Peterson (Grand Rapids, Eerdmans, 1998). Marshall writes, "Luke was entitled to his own views, and the fact that they differ in some respects from those of Paul should not be held against him at this point. On the contrary, he is a theologian in his own right, and must be treated as such." *Historian and Theologian*, 75. W.W. Gasque, in his masterful *A History of the Interpretation of the Acts of the Apostles* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1975; reprint, 1989), includes two chapters on Luke the Theologian, pp. 136-163 and 251-305.

<sup>245</sup> Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 91.

narrative cannot have the same didactic value as the intended teaching, though it may provide insight into the author's theology. 3) For historical precedent to have normative value, it must be demonstrated that such was the specific intent of the author. If the author intended to establish precedent, then such should be regarded as normative.<sup>246</sup> As anyone familiar with Pentecostal hermeneutics and theology will quickly realize, the preceding "guidelines" commence the challenge of the Pentecostal position for subsequence and initial evidence, for both are based on the assumption that Luke intended to teach these doctrines from the related narratives in Acts. Further, they are grounded in the standard starting point of Evangelical hermeneutics: the search for authorial intent.

Pentecostals have responded forcefully, yet creatively, to Fee's guidelines. Their response is discussed in detail below.

#### **4.3.3 Categories of Christian Theology**

In general, Fee believes Christian theology may be divided into three (or four)<sup>247</sup> categories: 1) Christian theology (what Christians believe); 2) Christian ethics (how Christians ought to behave); and 3) Christian experience or practice (what Christians do in terms of religious practices). These must be further defined in terms of primary and secondary importance, depending on whether

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<sup>246</sup> Ibid., 92.

<sup>247</sup> This was one of the few changes from *Gospel and Spirit* to *How to Read the Bible*, published several years later. Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How To Read the Bible for all It's Worth*, 2nd. ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993). Its impetus came from a specific challenge by R. Stronstad that the last category must be divided into two. More detail on this below.

they are derived from imperatives, or incidentally by analogy or precedent.<sup>248</sup>

Astutely, he notes that almost everything Christians derive from Scripture by way of precedent is in the third category, Christian experience or practice, and always at the secondary level. This is not to say that secondary statements are unimportant; we simply cannot treat them as identical to primary statements based upon clear imperatives.<sup>249</sup>

Fee wades further into the debate with his fellow Pentecostals:

The doctrine of a baptism in the Holy Spirit as subsequent to conversion and accompanied by tongues seems to belong to the secondary level of doctrinal statements in my third category. That believers are to be (or keep being) filled with the Spirit, that they are to walk and live in the Spirit is at the primary level and normative. When and how one enters the dimension of Christian experience, although not unimportant, is not of the same "normative" quality, because the "when and how" is based solely on precedent and/or analogy.<sup>250</sup>

#### 4.3.4 Specific Principles Regarding Historical Precedent

With these general observations and principles in view, he offers the following specific principles for the use of historical precedent.<sup>251</sup>

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<sup>248</sup> Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 93. See also *How to Read*, 106-108, for the same material rephrased for the layperson. By way of example, in the first category, we might consider the deity of Christ primary; how the two natures concur in unity is secondary. That Scripture is the inspired word of God is primary; the precise nature of inspiration is secondary. With respect to Christian ethics, general maxims such as love for one's enemy, and unlimited forgiveness are primary; concrete principles and application for specific situations are secondary.

<sup>249</sup> Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 93.

<sup>250</sup> *Ibid.*, 93-94.

<sup>251</sup> It is important that these be listed out just as Fee wrote them, for it is on these principles that he has drawn much of the fire from his Pentecostal colleagues. Often the issue concerns the actual wording used. For the sake of later clarification, we offer these principles verbatim.

1) The use of historical precedent as an analogy by which to establish a norm is never valid in itself. Such a process (drawing universal norms from particular events) produces a *non sequitur* and is therefore irrelevant.

2) Although it may not have been the author's primary purpose, historical narratives do have illustrative and, sometimes, "pattern" value. It should be noted, however, that especially in cases where the precedent justifies a present action, that the precedent does not establish a norm for specific action. A caveat is in order here: for a biblical precedent to justify a present action, the principle of the action must be taught elsewhere, where it is the primary intent so to teach.

3) In matters of Christian experience, and even more so of Christian practice, biblical precedents may be regarded as repeatable patterns - even if they are not to be regarded as normative.<sup>252</sup>

Fee directly engages Pentecostal distinctives and historical precedent. He maintains that one is unable to prove authorial intent in the "patterns" of Pentecost, Samaria, Paul, and Ephesus. It is simply not possible to show that Luke *intended* to teach an experience of the Spirit as subsequent to conversion.<sup>253</sup> For Luke, the real evidence of Christian experience was the

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<sup>252</sup> Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 94-96. The repeatable character of certain practices or patterns should be guided by the following considerations: a) The strongest possible case can be made when only one pattern is found, and when the pattern is repeated within the New Testament itself. b) When there is an ambiguity of patterns, or when a pattern occurs but once, it is repeatable for later Christians only if it appears to have divine approbation or is in harmony with what is taught elsewhere in Scripture. c) What is culturally conditioned is either not repeatable at all, or must be translated into the new or differing culture.

<sup>253</sup> On the other hand, one might respond with the equally correct assertion that is also impossible to prove that Luke *did not* intend to teach subsequence from these patterns. The difficulty with demanding proof of authorial intent is that it attempts to place the burden of proof on one viewpoint and not the other.

reception of the Spirit. What he is teaching in this narrative is the validation by the Jerusalem leaders of the spread of Christianity beyond Jerusalem.<sup>254</sup>

#### 4.3.5 The Essence of Pentecostalism

Upon discovering that Gordon Fee does not subscribe to either Subsequence or Initial Evidence as stated by his denomination,<sup>255</sup> the twin doctrines cherished by many Pentecostals as the true doctrinal essence of the movement, one may be drawn to inquire as to exactly *how* Dr. Fee still considers himself a Pentecostal? The answer lies essentially in Fee's definition of the essence of Pentecostalism and the Pentecostal experience.<sup>256</sup> His attempt to

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<sup>254</sup> This is widely agreed upon as Luke's intent for this narrative. With Fee on this are George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, Revised ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 383-4; L.T. Johnson, *The Acts of the Apostles*, Sacra Pagina Series Vol.5 ed. D. Harrington (Collegeville, Minn.: The Liturgical Press, 1992), 150-153; Gerhard A. Krodel, *Acts*, Augsburg Commentary on the New Testament (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1986), 164; F.F. Bruce, *The Book of Acts*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 182-3; John R.W. Stott, *The Spirit, the Church and the World: The Message of Acts* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1990), 187; and I. Howard Marshall, *The Acts of the Apostles: An Introduction and Commentary*, Tyndale Commentary Series (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980), 157-158.

<sup>255</sup> The question of whether tongues is the initial evidence of Spirit-reception Fee dismisses as a "moot point," and thus discusses it very little. Because tongues is seen as a repeated pattern in Acts, many Pentecostals have argued that it is *the* pattern. Fee disagrees. "To insist that it is the only valid sign seems to place too much weight on the historical precedent of three (perhaps four) instances in Acts." Fee does not thereby downplay the role of tongues. In "Tongues - Least of the Gifts? Some Exegetical Observations on I Corinthians 12-14," *Pneuma* 2:2 (1980): 3-14, he argues forcefully that Paul values tongues highly for personal edification. His most recent comment on the issue, in *God's Empowering Presence*, maintains this viewpoint, suggesting that personal edification is in no manner wrong, and is in fact viewed very favourably by Paul, an avid tongues-speaker himself. See *God's Empowering Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Letters of Paul* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1994), 890 & 218-219.

<sup>256</sup> In personal conversation with Dr. Fee by the author, this question was posed. Some, such as William Menzies, view the tying together of tongues as the initial evidence of Spirit-baptism as a subsequent event, as the essence of Pentecostalism; see "The Methodology of Pentecostal Theology", 1-3. Fee was asked how he could still consider himself a Pentecostal, when he disagreed with statements 7&8 (above) of their fundamental truths. He replied that he told the Assemblies of God, "I cannot support the language used to articulate this, but I support

articulate his understanding of what it means to be Pentecostal demonstrates his own strong commitment to Pentecostalism:

In thus arguing, as a New Testament scholar, against some cherished Pentecostal interpretations, I have in no sense abandoned what is essential to Pentecostalism. I have only tried to point out some inherent flaws in some of our historic understanding of texts. The essential matter, after all, is neither subsequence, nor tongues, but the Spirit himself as a dynamic, empowering presence; and there seems to me to be little question that our way of initiation in that - through an experience of Spirit-baptism - has biblical validity. Whether all *must* go that route seem to me to be more moot; but in any case, the Pentecostal experience itself can be defended on exegetical grounds as a thoroughly biblical phenomenon.<sup>257</sup>

#### 4.3.6 Summary

Based on Fee's principles, Pentecostals may say the following about their experience. In the New Testament, the presence of the Spirit was the chief element in Christian conversion and in the Christian life. In Acts, as well as in Paul's churches, the Spirit's presence involved a charismatic dimension normally associated with the reception of the Spirit. Although speaking in tongues may *not* have been normative, it was normally expected to accompany Spirit-baptism in the early church. Modern believers, many of whom have not experienced a

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what you *mean* by what you have written." At issue is the language used. To this author, he offered the following: "I do not throw out initial evidence, I throw out the language, because it is not biblical, and therefore irrelevant. From a reading of Luke and Paul I would expect people to speak in tongues when they are empowered by the Spirit. The reception of the Spirit is most commonly evidenced by speaking in tongues. It is very normal. I expect people to be empowered by the Spirit for witness. For most people this will be a subsequent experience, because they will have become Christians without realizing that this is for them." Gordon Fee, interview by author. December 5, 1997.

<sup>257</sup> "The Issue of Subsequence and Separability," in *Gospel and Spirit*, 111.

charismatic dimension to their conversion, may still (on the basis of the New Testament pattern), experience such a dimension of Christian life. This includes speaking in tongues, for it was the repeated expression of the dynamic dimension of the coming of the Spirit. If the Pentecostal may not say one *must* speak in tongues, the Pentecostal may surely say, why *not* speak in tongues? It does have repeated biblical precedent, it did have evidential value at Cornelius' household (Acts 10:45-46), and - in spite of much that has been written to the contrary - it does have value both for the edification of the believer (I Cor 14:2-4) and, with interpretation, for the edification of the church (I Cor 14:5, 26-28).<sup>258</sup>

The unfortunate omission of this valid, biblical dimension of Christian life from the life of the church is the backdrop against which we must understand the Pentecostal movement, deeply unsatisfied with life in Christ without life in the Spirit. Though their timing may have been off, what they sought to recapture for the church was not.

That this experience was for them usually a separate experience in the Holy Spirit and subsequent to their conversion is in itself probably irrelevant. Given their place in the history of the church, how else might it have happened? Thus the Pentecostal should probably not make a virtue out of necessity. At the same time, neither should others deny the validity of such experience on biblical grounds, unless, as some do, they wish to deny the reality of such an empowering dimension of life in the Spirit altogether. But such a denial, I would argue, is actually an exegeting *not* of the biblical texts but of one's own experience in this later point in church history and a making of that experience normative. I for one like the biblical norm

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<sup>258</sup> Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 98-99. Also helpful are Fee's *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, Gordon D. Fee, ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987), 569-713; and *idem*, *Empowering Presence*, 863-868, 886-890.

better; at this point the Pentecostals have the New Testament clearly on their side.<sup>259</sup>

#### 4.4 THE PENTECOSTAL RESPONSE

As might be expected, Pentecostal scholars have responded definitively to the hermeneutical and theological challenges put forward by Fee. While many Pentecostals have written on the topic, only three scholars have taken Fee's challenge seriously and provided appropriate responses: William Menzies, long-time Pentecostal scholar and Professor; Roger Stronstad, Academic Dean at Summit Pacific College, (Abbotsford, BC); and Robert P. Menzies, Assemblies of God (USA) Professor and Missionary in Asia. In each section, Fee is given opportunity to respond to his critics.<sup>260</sup> Three issues in particular have been raised: 1) authorial intent and the essence of Pentecostalism; 2) Fee's categories of Christian theology; and 3) historical precedent. The reader will quickly notice that these scholars do not debate the merits of presupposing authorial intent as the foundation of the argument, or appeal to experience as a qualified verifier of Pentecostal experience. Rather those involved play by the rules of Evangelical hermeneutics used by Fee, and set out to demonstrate Luke's charismatic intent.

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<sup>259</sup> Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 119.

<sup>260</sup> The exception here will be Robert Menzies, to whom Fee has not responded. When asked about this in an interview with this author, Fee replied that a response would have drawn him much further into the debate, for which he has neither the time nor passion. "By the time Bob published his thesis I had moved on to so many other projects that I simply abandoned the hermeneutical give and take...I had read only enough of Menzies to know that ... under the pressure of time [I wasn't] able to handle it adequately." Gordon D. Fee, interview by author, 27 January 1998, electronic mail.

#### 4.4.1 Authorial Intent and the Essence of Pentecostalism

That Luke had specific theological intentions when writing his narratives is highly likely. Determining what his intent might have been remains one of the biggest issues separating Fee and other Pentecostal scholars. Fee's contention is that genre seriously affects biblical interpretation, and further, when narratives are used to derive theology, specific authorial intent must be shown. He does not therefore allow the critical passages of Acts to be used to establish normative patterns. Pentecostals recognize this, and get straight to the point. William Menzies declares:

If one can demonstrate that Luke did not intend to convey a theological message by his narratives, he has at that point effectively undercut the possibility of a clear Pentecostal theology. Pentecostal theology is dependent on a hermeneutical methodology which takes seriously the theological intention of Luke. Acts must be more than an interesting glimpse into the life of the early church. It must be more than mere historical resource. Since the only access we have to Spirit-baptism initiation experiences are mediated to us through the descriptive mode, and that limited to Acts, we are heavily indebted to Luke-as-theologian.<sup>261</sup>

Fee's hermeneutics raise several important questions. Who determines authorial intent: Pentecostals or non-Pentecostals? Who determines what is primary and what is secondary? Who is authorized to adjudicate between Pentecostals and their opponents as to whether or not Luke may teach 21st century Christians about their experience of the Holy Spirit? Many Pentecostals believe Fee's hermeneutics muzzle the important passages of Acts, leaving him

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<sup>261</sup> Wm. Menzies, "The Methodology of Pentecostal Theology," 7.

in no position to answer the above questions. Though Fee's work challenges the tendency to allegorize, moralize, and/or spiritualize historical narratives, as a whole it must be rejected.<sup>262</sup>

In focusing on Luke's theological intent, Fee consistently employs a basic presupposition: in the New Testament, the presence of the Spirit was the chief element in Christian conversion. Whereas others addressed Fee on his hermeneutical principles *per se*, Robert Menzies challenges the notion that Luke shares Paul's pneumatological emphasis in his writings on the Spirit's function. If Luke's basic intent in relating the activities of the Spirit is charismatic and not soteriological, the Pentecostal case concerning authorial intent in historical narratives is much stronger.

Fee's work played an important role in the theological development of Pentecostalism since the 1970's. He clearly argued that Pentecostalism could no longer rely on 19th century interpretive methods. But R. Menzies maintains that this message is no longer relevant. Pentecostals have replaced their outdated hermeneutics with approaches that speak the Modern hermeneutical language. Fee's critique of Pentecostal hermeneutics, updated in 1991, now fails to address today's crucial question: "Does Luke, in a manner similar to Paul, present the Spirit as the source of new covenant existence?"<sup>263</sup> For R. Menzies the answer is "No."

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<sup>262</sup> Roger Stronstad, "The Biblical Precedent for Historical Precedent," in *Paraclete* 27:2 (1993): 11.

<sup>263</sup> Robert P. Menzies, *Empowered for Witness*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplementary Series, eds. John Christopher Thomas, Rickie D. Moore, and Steven J. Land, no. 6 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1994), 239. This question is the crux of Menzies' work,

I would suggest that the pneumatologies of Luke and Paul are different but compatible; and the difference should not be blurred, for both perspectives offer valuable insight into the dynamic work of the Holy Spirit. Clearly Paul has the more developed view, for he sees the full richness of the Spirit's work. . . . Paul attests to both the soteriological and the prophetic (as well as charismatic) dimensions of the Spirit's work. Luke's perspective is less developed and more limited. He bears witness solely to the prophetic dimension of the Spirit's work, and thus he gives us a glimpse of only a part of Paul's fuller view. Nevertheless, Luke, like Paul, has an important contribution to make. He calls us to recognize that the church, by virtue of its reception of the Pentecostal gift, is a prophetic community empowered for a missionary task. In short, not only are the pneumatological perspectives of Paul and Luke compatible, they are complementary: both represent important contributions to a holistic and harmonious biblical theology of the Spirit.<sup>264</sup>

For R. Menzies, Luke's intent is clearly subordinate to the question raised above. If his description of a 'distinctive' pneumatology for Luke is correct, then Luke's intent to teach a Spirit-baptism as distinct from conversion is, he believes, easily demonstrated. "One need only establish that Luke's narrative was designed to encourage every Christian to receive the Pentecostal gift. And, since Luke highlights Pentecost as a fulfillment of Joel's prophecy concerning an outpouring of the Spirit upon 'all flesh' (Acts 2:17-21), this appears to be self-evident."<sup>265</sup>

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and is answered in the negative through 200-plus pages of argument and exegesis. Although the specific proofs supporting the claim are outside the scope of this work, we will nonetheless explore the results and impacts of his thesis. The interested reader may find a brief summary of his research in "The Distinctive Character of Luke's Pneumatology," *Paraclete* 25:3 (1991): 17-30.

<sup>264</sup> R. Menzies, *Empowered for Witness*, 241.

<sup>265</sup> *Ibid.*, 239. For Fee's failure to respond publicly to Robert Menzies, see n. 31 above. In private conversation, Fee offered the following. He agrees that Luke's primary interest is in the Spirit, and His missiological rule. It is less on initiating experiences than on the role of the Spirit in the Church. The soteriological dimension is not his focus. Luke *assumes* the soteriological dimension. Fee does not believe that he reads Luke with Pauline lenses, anymore than he does in I Peter, or John, where both assume the reception of the Spirit is what makes one a Christian.

Finally, Fee has been charged with 'selling out' the essentials of Pentecostalism. After all, one who subscribes neither to the stated doctrines of subsequence nor initial evidence, and yet claims to be a Pentecostal, will face some disbelief. Some suggest Fee has simply reached for a hermeneutic acceptable to the Evangelical world. His reluctance to employ the concept of *normative* when describing charismatic phenomena associated with Spirit baptism leaves one with an 'impoverished' Pentecostal theology. "The use of *normal* in this connection is indeed compatible with the views of some contemporary evangelicals, but it is too weak to be made into a doctrine. Repeatability is hardly a preachable item."<sup>266</sup> William Menzies argues:

The obvious result of this reductionism is a willingness to permit *repeatability* of patterns, but not *normativity*. Hence, speaking in tongues associated with Spirit baptism may be *normal*, and even desirable, possibly, but it cannot be proclaimed as a *normative* model. Hence one is sorely pressed on exegetical grounds . . . if this be true, to establish a clear doctrine of either subsequence or tongues as accompanying Spirit baptism. This reductionist point of view . . . is somewhat short of a thoroughgoing Pentecostal theology [and] is apparently a position held today by a number of evangelicals.<sup>267</sup>

Fee's belief that his proposals should not impact the essentials of Pentecostalism has also come under fire. To some, Fee's message is

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It is a thoroughly N.T. point of view. "I do let Luke speak for himself. He just isn't saying what they are saying he says." Interview by the author, 5 December 1997.

<sup>266</sup> Wm. Menzies, "Methodology of Pentecostal Theology," 10. Italics Menzies.

<sup>267</sup> Ibid., 9. Italics Menzies. Timothy Cargal agrees. "In one of the first responses by Pentecostals to these challenges, Fee essentially conceded the case by joining didactic value with authorial intent." Timothy B. Cargal, "Beyond the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy: Pentecostal Hermeneutics in a Postmodern Age," *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 15:2 (1993): 183.

theologically indistinguishable from that of James Dunn<sup>268</sup>. His repudiation of Pentecostal theology leaves him with nothing new to offer to the theological world, and challenges the Pentecostal understanding of their own Spirit-baptism experience at its deepest level. Fee agrees with most non-Pentecostals in affirming that Spirit-baptism is equated with conversion, although he does insist that the charismatic, empowering dimension is lacking, and should be restored. For Robert Menzies, this still undercuts crucial aspects of Pentecostal theology:

When the Pentecostal gift is confused with conversion, [the] missiological (and I would add, Lukan) focus is lost.

The bottom line is this: If Fee is right, Pentecostals can no longer proclaim an enabling of the Spirit which is distinct from conversion and available to every believer, at least not with the same sense of expectation, nor can Pentecostals maintain that the principal purpose of this gift is to grant power for the task of mission. To sum up, the doctrine of subsequence articulates a conviction crucial for Pentecostal theology and practice: Spirit-baptism, in the Pentecostal sense, is distinct from . . . conversion. This conviction, I would add, is integral to Pentecostalism's continued sense of expectation and effectiveness in mission.<sup>269</sup>

#### 4.4.2 Fee's Response<sup>270</sup>

Fee has responded with some clarification. He concurs on the charismatic nature of Luke's writings, and that his primary concern was charismatic and not

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<sup>268</sup> *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism Today* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1970). In one of the first challenges to Pentecostal Theology, James Dunn forcefully challenged the Pentecostal position on subsequence by firmly equating the experience of Spirit-baptism with conversion.

<sup>269</sup> Wm. Menzies, "Methodology of Pentecostal Theology," 9.

<sup>270</sup> With the republication of the two key articles from 1976 and 1985 in 1991, Fee included a brief postscript in *Gospel and Spirit* containing his response to Wm. Menzies and R. Stronstad.

soteriological. It is not 'theology' in the larger sense that concerns him when discussing Acts, but the concept of 'didactic' as it is related to the question of establishing Christian norms. He believes that part of the problem lies in his usage of 'norms' and 'normative.' By 'normal', Fee understands that this is the way it was in the early church. The dynamic, empowering dimension of life in the Spirit was a normal, expected, recurring experience. Precisely because it was so 'normal', it was presupposed; there was no compulsion to talk about it at every turn. By 'normative', however, he means something that must be adhered to by all Christians at all times and in all places, if they are truly obedient to God's word. It becomes a matter of obedience, no questions asked.<sup>271</sup>

He acknowledges the concern that this transition, however, from 'normative' to 'normal' waters down the Pentecostal position. Fee disagrees with the assertion that "Repeatability is hardly a preachable item."<sup>272</sup> He points to the millions of believers worldwide who have and are experiencing the Pentecostal reality of dynamic life in the Spirit, many of whom have never heard of subsequence or initial evidence.<sup>273</sup> He concludes:

Precisely because I understand this dimension of life in the Spirit to be the New Testament norm, I think it is repeatable, and should be so, as the norm of the later church. Where I would tend to disagree with my tradition in the articulation of this norm is when they use language that seems more obligatory to me than I find in the New Testament documents themselves.<sup>274</sup>

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<sup>271</sup> Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 102.

<sup>272</sup> Wm. Menzies, "Methodology of Pentecostal Theology," 10.

<sup>273</sup> Gordon Fee, Interview by author, 5 December, 1997.

<sup>274</sup> Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 103.

#### 4.4.3 Categories of Christian Theology

Roger Stronstad, in particular, has taken issue with Fee's three-fold classification of doctrinal statements: 1) Christian theology (what Christians believe); 2) Christian ethics (how Christians ought to behave); 3) Christian experience or practice (what Christians do in terms of religious practices). He believes that Fee is guilty of "a confusion of categories" when he places the experience of Spirit baptism, and the Pentecostal explanation of it, into the third category. According to Stronstad, Spirit-baptism is not something Christians 'do'; rather, it is an experience. The third category ought to be spiritual experience, with a fourth category needed for Christian practice. The essence of this argument is the hope that the hermeneutics appropriate for Christian practice somehow do not apply to Christian experience. By challenging the placement of Spirit-baptism into Fee's third category, Stronstad hopes to by-pass the more difficult of his hermeneutical guidelines. Thus Fee's entire hermeneutical scheme, suggested for the category of Christian practice, may not apply to the Pentecostal doctrine of Spirit-baptism.

As a spiritual experience it is akin to, say, the spiritual experience of being born again. Both the experiences of Spirit-baptism and of being born again are experiences in which God causes something to happen to the person. In neither case is it something that Christians do. . . . Consequently, the principles which apply to [the category of] . . . Christian practice, are irrelevant for this new category, spiritual experience.<sup>275</sup>

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<sup>275</sup> Roger Stronstad, "The Biblical Precedent for Historical Precedent," *Paraclete* 27.2 (1993): 4-5.

#### 4.4.4 Fee's Response

Fee's use of three and not four categories, was "more descriptive than definite." While Stronstad correctly observed that there is a fundamental difference in spiritual experience and Christian practice, Fee acknowledges he put them together because he perceived the hermeneutical issues to be very similar for each category. Whether or not this is actually true remains open for further examination and dialogue. Fee admits that he might well be wrong in that assumption. His main concern was not to establish a hermeneutical axiom, but to make the hermeneutical observation that most differences among Christians occur in this third (and fourth) category.<sup>276</sup> Neither Fee nor Stronstad have actually examined what differences, if any, occur hermeneutically between the two categories.

#### 4.4.5 The Merits of Historical Precedent

Fee maintains that Pentecostals employ the key passages in Acts on the basis of historical precedent alone. For historical precedent to function with didactic merit, Fee argues it must be taught elsewhere in Scripture. Herein lies the sore spot between most Pentecostal scholars and Fee. No other part of

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<sup>276</sup> "Response to Roger Stronstad's 'The Biblical Precedent for Historical Precedent'," In *Paraclete* 27:2 (1993): 12.

Scripture teaches subsequence or initial evidence. Thus, for Pentecostals, Fee has undercut their theology at the root. Roger Stronstad complains:

Ultimately, this methodology means that Jesus, or Paul, or Peter, or John, may instruct the contemporary Christian, but that Luke, because he chose to write historical narrative, neither intended to instruct the church nor will be allowed to instruct the contemporary church, whatever his intention might or might not have been.

It is a monumental irony that Luke, the author of 25 percent of the New Testament, is allowed no independent status among the recognized teachers in the New Testament by Reformed hermeneutics and so-called scientific exegesis.<sup>277</sup>

Robert Menzies accurately captures the essence of Fee's dilemma concerning how the normative aspects of Luke's narrative may be clearly identified. "Unless we are prepared to choose church leaders by the casting of lots, or are willing to encourage church members to sell all of their possessions, we cannot simply assume that a particular historical narrative provides the basis for normative theology."<sup>278</sup> Fee's concern is thus legitimate. His solution is to tie historical precedent to authorial intent. On the basis of this, Fee has rejected the Pentecostal formulation of their theology, though he maintains the validity of their experience. The younger Menzies agrees with Fee on this point and has instead focused his attention on the charismatic theology of Luke, with the promotion of the charismatic thus intrinsically implied in any discussion of Lukan intent.

Others take a different approach, suggesting that the hermeneutical 'rules' laid out by Fee border on the arbitrary and that care must be exercised to avoid

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<sup>277</sup> R. Stronstad, "The Hermeneutics of Lukan Historiography," in *Paraclete* 22:4 (1988): 11.

<sup>278</sup> R. Menzies, *Empowered for Witness*, 237.

limiting the theological enterprise.<sup>279</sup> Stronstad argues that Fee's three principles for the use of historical precedent are "fundamentally flawed." In particular, he takes issue with the first of the principles<sup>280</sup>, and gives three examples from Acts illustrating the use of historical precedent by the early church for a variety of purposes, including the establishment of norms.

The first biblical example is at the very beginning of Jesus' public ministry. He anticipates the scepticism of the people when He visits Nazareth, and declares that "No prophet is welcome in his hometown." (Luke 4:24). He then appeals to Elijah (Luke 4:25-26) and Elisha (Luke 4:27), both of whom turned away from their own community to minister to others. Thus, on the basis of the historical precedent of Elijah and Elisha, Jesus left Nazareth and went down to Capernaum (Luke 4:30). Luke also reports Jesus' use of historical precedent when the disciples are charged with Sabbath violations, namely, the picking and eating of wheat on the Sabbath (Luke 6:2). Jesus defends His disciples on the precedent set by David when he and his companions were hungry and ate the consecrated bread, lawful only for the priests (Luke 6:4). Historical precedent is used at the so-called Jerusalem Council of Acts 15, when the Apostles were deciding the fate of Gentile Christians. On the basis of Peter's vision concerning the Gentiles, the Apostles decide that God's purpose is met in making the

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<sup>279</sup> Wm. Menzies, "Methodology of Pentecostal Theology," 10. *Italics Menzies.*

<sup>280</sup> "The use of historical precedent as an analogy by which to establish a norm is never valid."

Gentiles His people. Further, their decision to refrain from insisting upon Gentile circumcision, establishes a normative doctrine in the church.<sup>281</sup>

Despite his arguments against the validity of Fee's dictums, Stronstad recognizes his predicament:

The impasse in this debate is that whereas it is possible to expose the flaws in Fee's hermeneutic of historical precedent, it is impossible to prove that there is a biblical precedent for historical precedent. In other words, although it is possible to demonstrate that there are examples in the Book of Acts where the church used historical precedent to establish a norm, it is impossible to prove that Luke intended for his readers to interpret his narratives by the same principle. It is impossible to prove this because Luke never tells his readers to do this.<sup>282</sup>

Stronstad concludes that the validity of the use of biblical precedent must either commend itself as self-evident, or it does not. Pentecostals operate on a hermeneutic which affirms that normative beliefs and practices may properly be derived from narratives on the basis of historical precedent. Though often criticized for this approach, other New Testament scholars tacitly agree.<sup>283</sup> The real issue for Stronstad then, is not whether Pentecostals are justified in using historical precedent hermeneutically, but whether they have done so correctly.

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<sup>281</sup> Stronstad, "Biblical Precedent," 6-7.

<sup>282</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>283</sup> He quotes J. Ramsey Michaels, "There is nothing wrong in principle with deriving normative beliefs and practices from narratives." From "Evidences of the Spirit, or the Spirit as Evidence? Some Non-Pentecostal Reflections," In *Initial Evidence*, ed. Gary McGee (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991), 203. See also G. Osborne, *The Hermeneutical Spiral* (Downers Grove, Inter-Varsity, 1991), 153; and Marshall, *Historian and Theologian*, 75.

#### 4.4.6 Fee's Response

Fee responds by confessing that in all of the criticism directed towards his articulation of things, he has failed to find another hermeneutical approach that "took me by the hand and showed me how one goes about doing this - that is, establishing something normative on the basis of historical precedent alone."<sup>284</sup> Regarding the criticism of his first principle, he notes that the key word for him in that principle is "analogy." His only point was that anything based on analogies is sure to fail hermeneutically when establishing norms, for they open up too many possibilities.<sup>285</sup> As for Stronstad's pointed questions concerning exactly who had the authority to decide authorial intent, Fee has two suggestions. First, scholars must work to discover whether Luke actually *had* a doctrinal/theological imperative in his narratives, with regard to repeating the specifics. Second, with the evident diversity of patterns with Acts itself, how does one determine which are normative? If Luke's concern and intent was to provide patterns for the establishment of normative doctrine, Fee wonders, how do we explain his failure to narrate similar events in the same way? Luke's fondness for great variety as he reports the experience of the early believers leads Fee to conclude that the establishment of normative patterns was not his chief objective.

I would not want to say that Luke did *not* intend us to understand the baptism of the Spirit to be distinct from and subsequent to conversion, intended for empowering, and always evidenced by speaking in tongues; I am simply less convinced than my Pentecostal forebears that Luke did so intend. And chiefly because, even though this pattern

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<sup>284</sup> Fee, "Response to Stronstad," 11-14.

<sup>285</sup> *Ibid.*, 13.

can be found in three (probably four, perhaps five) instances, it is clearly not expressly narrated in this way in every instance. Although I am quite open on this question, I do not find . . . the kinds of criteria that help me to think otherwise.<sup>286</sup>

Fee wholeheartedly agrees that Jesus justified and defended his and other's actions on the basis of historical precedent. He also supports Stronstad's use of his third illustration, the Gentile mission in Acts. For Fee, however, there is a difference between defending one's actions, and establishing a norm. It is certain that Jesus defended the right of His disciples to pluck grain on the Sabbath from historical precedent. But did He thereby establish a norm, for all generations following? Jesus did move from his hometown to another location on the basis of the historical actions of two Old Testament prophets. Did He thus establish a norm, that we must do the same? In both cases, the answer is undoubtedly negative.<sup>287</sup>

All of this to say, then, that I am an advocate of the "biblical precedent for historical precedent"; I always have been, and undoubtedly always will be. My roots are deep within restorationism, after all. But on the issue of "biblical precedent as historical precedent for establishing what is normative" - as I understand that word - I need more dialogue with the larger Pentecostal community, not with the aim of scoring points in the debate, but with the aim of helping me to understand so

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<sup>286</sup> Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 103-104.

<sup>287</sup> "Response to Stronstad," 13-14. Charles Holman, in another response to Stronstad, agrees. Further, he notes that the third example used, of the Gentile mission, is only valid because it meets certain finely stated criteria. He questions what criteria Stronstad would offer to distinguish between historical precedent that is intended to serve as a norm, and that which is not. "It does us no good to perceive Luke as a theologian and then be unable to arrive at criteria by which his historical narrative becomes authoritative for us in experience and practice." Holman suggests consideration be given to: 1) the broad literary structure of a document; 2) the consistent recurrence of themes; 3) the place of emphasis such themes occupy in the document as a whole; 4) the distinction between sub themes and the more prominent themes and the relation of the two. In "A Response to Roger Stronstad," *Paraclete* 27.3 (1993): 11-14.

that I would be able to articulate such a perspective with personal integrity within my own present historical context.<sup>288</sup>

#### 4.5 CONCLUSION

Fee's contributions to hermeneutics, both for Pentecostalism and the Christian world in general, are significant. Rarely does one read material so concerned to integrate the practical with the theoretical, the 'exegesis' with the 'spirituality.' For Fee, the inherent tension in Scripture can be alleviated only through the discovery of authorial intent. This focus, however, seriously challenges the traditional Pentecostal practice of relying on perceived patterns in Luke's narratives. In addition, Fee's non-typical views concerning the core of Pentecostalism have been highly objectionable to those holding to Subsequence and Initial Evidence as the essence of the movement.

For Pentecostals, the opportunity to interact theologically with Fee's proposals over the past 35 years has been a goldmine of self-discovery and provoked a new awareness of their own hermeneutical issues. Pentecostals have responded forcefully to Fee's challenge. They have taken considerable exception to Fee's understanding of authorial intent and historical precedence. In each case, they have argued with some success for their own view of these issues, employing far more sophisticated and scholarly arguments to their cause than had been the case with their forefathers.

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<sup>288</sup> Fee, "Response to Stronstad," 14.

Though many of these issues will be resolved largely on the basis on theological presupposition, the fact this debate has occurred is significant in demonstrating Pentecostalism's increased academic interests, and the coming of age of Pentecostal hermeneutics and theology. It has been shown that the Pentecostal scholars who responded to Fee did so by employing accepted Evangelical hermeneutical practices. None of the scholars in the debate proposed a distinctively Pentecostal approach to the hermeneutical issues, but rather played by the rules set out by Fee. For example, when discussing the importance of authorial intent and whether Luke thus intended to teach initial evidence, the response is to propose the "Charismatic Theology" of Luke, making the argument that all of Luke-Acts intends to teach charismatic theology. One will note that the debate does not include a discussion of whether authorial intent is the deciding factor in determining accurate Pentecostal theology – this modernistic foundation of hermeneutics is assumed. The debate is thus doubly significant, both for the theological discussion itself, but perhaps more importantly, for the tremendous hermeneutical shift towards Evangelical hermeneutics demonstrated by both sides. As Robert Menzies has noted,

Now, almost a century after its genesis, the Pentecostal movement finds itself in a new environment: American revivalism has given way to modern Evangelicalism. The major tenets of Pentecostal theology remain the same; but the way we as Pentecostals approach Scripture – the hermeneutic, which supports our theology – has been significantly altered. *The hermeneutic of Evangelicalism has become our hermeneutic.*<sup>289</sup>

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<sup>289</sup> Robert P. Menzies, "Evidential Tongues: An Essay on Theological Method," *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 1.2 (July 1998): 111. Italics by the author.

The focus on this thesis will now shift from hermeneutical issues *per se* to the wider question of how the hermeneutical model chosen by Pentecostalism will impact the youngest generations of Pentecostals, who find themselves living and serving God with a mindset strongly influenced by Postmodern thought. The old adage intones that no denomination is able to sustain the passion and creativity of its founders beyond the third generation. As Pentecostalism witnesses the fourth and fifth generation of its offspring on the world stage, few topics ought to be of greater importance to the Pentecostal community than their ability to translate the essence of Pentecostalism into the minds and experience of their children, youth, and young adults. As statistics are proving, the old adage may well be as accurate for Pentecostalism as for any mainline denomination before them.

In chapter five, the work of Rudolf Bultmann and his more recent followers will be surveyed as an example of the use of the more extreme Modern methods of hermeneutics in an effort to speak to Modern culture. It will investigate the proposals of Bultmann, and the findings of *The Jesus Seminar*, inquiring as to any possible similarities between their approach and Evangelical trends in hermeneutics. Further, we will survey the current cultural landscape for the appropriate Pentecostal response to this ultra-Modern presentation of the gospel. As will be shown in chapter five, there is a demonstrable shift in secular society from the precepts of Modernity to Postmodernity, acutely felt in the younger generations who most readily accept change.

It will be demonstrated that should Pentecostalism desire to see the newest generations of Pentecostal believers embracing and living in the full experience of the Holy Spirit as their forbearers did so intend, the movement must resist the trend in some circles to align Pentecostal hermeneutics further with those of modern Evangelicalism. Rather it must push towards methods of interpreting the scriptures that allow for the use of some very Postmodern concepts – the role of community and personal experience - within the Pentecostal hermeneutical process. To these issues and others, we now turn in chapter five.

## CHAPTER V

### POSTMODERNITY, PENTECOSTALISM - AND RUDOLF BULTMANN

We cannot use electric lights and radios and, in the event of illness, avail ourselves of modern medical and clinical means and at the same time believe in the spirit and wonder world of the New Testament.<sup>290</sup>

Rudolf Bultmann

All I want is reality. Show me God. Tell me what He is really like. Help me to understand why life is the way it is, and how I can experience it more fully and with greater joy. I don't want the empty promises. I want the real thing. And I'll go wherever I find that truth system.<sup>291</sup>

Anonymous Teenager

I personally believe that the age-old wisdom in the Bible can affirm my generation in all its complexity, while pointing us to a greater, eternal harmony. But will the church be able to *communicate* this to us?<sup>292</sup>

Rudolpho Carrasco (GenX)

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<sup>290</sup> Rudolf Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. Schubert M. Ogden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 4.

<sup>291</sup> George Barna, *Baby Busters: The Disillusioned Generation* (Chicago: Northfield Publishing, 1992), 144.

<sup>292</sup> Quoted in Tom Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), 93.

## 5.1 INTRODUCTION

Pentecostalism is, at its core, an evangelistic movement. The early Pentecostal passion surrounding the soon return of Christ led the new revival movement to present the Gospel earnestly to the world in the experiential and supernatural manner in which it had been received. To connect with their generation, early Pentecostals portrayed Scripture as a “living Word” which must be experienced by the hearer. Other groups felt differently, suggesting that the gospel, as the Bible presents it, is full of “myths” that Modern mankind finds unbelievable. By way of remedy, we ought to demythologize the gospel accounts, re-explaining those portions which recorded the "supernatural" or "mythical".

In the discussion concerning Scripture and the perceived need to demythologize, no name figures more prominently than that of Rudolf Bultmann (1884-1976). His desire to facilitate a better understanding of the gospel by a very rational and "enlightened" Modern humanity led him to advocate the above hermeneutic. While in the time of Bultmann, one was hardly described in terms of having promoted a “Modern” or “Postmodern” hermeneutic, his approach to the interpretation of Scripture has much in common with typical Modern objectives. Further, it has spawned a new era of hermeneutics in the twentieth century which are decidedly Modern in nature. In theological and evangelistic terms, Pentecostalism was birthed from a desire to pursue God through the

Scriptures in a manner exactly opposite to that which Bultmann championed. For the purposes of this thesis, therefore, it is useful to examine Bultmann's proposed hermeneutic and those that have arisen in its wake, for they stand in stark contrast to the methodological approach to scriptural interpretation that Pentecostals should seek to employ.

The precepts of Postmodernity are making their way into the academic institutions of our time. The newest generation having found themselves on the grand stage of history are significantly more open to, and more consciously searching for the supernatural, than any generation in several centuries. As Pentecostals, we must not only refuse to "demyth" the supernatural accounts in Scripture, we must emphasize and explain them to a generation seeking God in his realm - the supernatural.

It is the position of this chapter that while demythologization may have had some small merit in the world with which Bultmann dealt, the pursuit of such an agenda today is among the most destructive and detrimental that could be undertaken. Pentecostals must not only carefully evaluate the place of Evangelical hermeneutics in the Pentecostal understanding of Scripture, but continue to stand firm against the more extreme expressions of a new generation of scholars wishing to demythologize the Scriptures, such as *The Jesus Seminar*. Understanding the approach of Bultmann and *The Jesus Seminar* as the hermeneutical extreme of Modernity, this chapter will demonstrate the necessity of a Pentecostal hermeneutic, antithetical to the presuppositions of *The Jesus Seminar*, and distinct from that of Evangelicalism, in focus and priority, if not

entirely in methodology. This demonstration will come, not from a theological or epistemological argument, but from an examination of contemporary culture and attitudes among our newest generations.

This thesis will be discussed and explained in several steps. A brief account of Bultmann's life and work will set the historical background. Some explanation of the concept of demythologization will be offered, as well as Bultmann's defence of the exigency for such an approach to Scripture, taken directly from an examination of his key work in this area. Some attention will be given to current hermeneutical approaches which follow in the spirit of Bultmann. Finally, a brief excursus into the Postmodern world of today's youth will bring the demythologization process into direct encounter with its greatest challenge as we inquire about the wisdom of such an approach today.

One would not suggest that the hermeneutics of Modernity employed by Evangelicalism would of necessity or design lead to the type of emasculation of supernaturalism proposed by Bultmann or his recent followers. The blind following of Evangelical hermeneutics by Pentecostals may in the end, however, lead away from the type of presentation of the Gospel that Pentecostals would wish to proclaim to this generation – a proclamation not just of words, but also with a demonstration of the Spirit's power.<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>293</sup> 1 Corinthians 2:4-5.

## 5.2 LIFE AND TIMES OF BULTMANN

Rudolf Karl Bultmann was born on August 20, 1884, the son and grandson of Evangelical-Lutheran pastors. From 1892-1895 he attended elementary school at nearby Rastede, and the *Gymnasium* at Olderburg from 1895-1903 while his father pastored in the area. In 1903 at the age of 19, he began theological studies at Tübingen University, completing three semesters before his final four semesters, split evenly between Berlin and Marburg. Bultmann noted a number of professors whom he considered to have made substantial contributions to his academic development including Heidegger, Herrmann and Weiss.<sup>294</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> Charles W. Kegley, ed., *The Theology of Rudolf Bultmann* (New York: Harper & Row, 1966), xix-xx. Johannes Weiss, a member of the "history of religions school", was concerned to understand exactly what Jesus and His followers meant in speaking of the "Kingdom of God". He taught that properly understood, the reference would be to God erupting into history, in a "divine storm", to bring to violent end world history and powers. This influence can be seen clearly in Bultmann as he always speaks of the "Reign of God" instead of the "Kingdom of God". By speaking this way, the stress is laid upon God and His action, rather than the actions of humanity. Wilhelm Herrmann was very important for contemporary theology, for he influenced both Barth and Bultmann. Herrmann believed that revelation, while found generally in nature, is foremost in the "inner life" of the historical Jesus, and not in biographical details about Him such as the virgin birth, resurrection and miracles. These are of secondary importance. It is the inner life of Jesus as attested to in the gospels that puts its hold on us, even as it did on the first disciples. While we cannot speak directly of God, we know Him and may speak of Him existentially in terms of the impact of Jesus' inner life on our own. Another significant influence can be found in the work of Martin Heidegger, a professor of philosophy who taught at Marburg with Bultmann from 1923-1928. The impact of Heidegger's existentialist views began to appear in Bultmann's work as early as 1925. In 1927 the philosopher published *Being and Time*, largely regarded as one of the most influential sources of existentialist philosophy of this century. Heidegger's views were appropriated by Bultmann because they fit his understanding of New Testament teaching on existence. God is "Wholly Other", apart from mankind and the universe, yet by Him alone does humanity exist. He must be known existentially; that is, we cannot speak of God objectively. What can be known and spoken of concerning God is found in human existence, for we cannot know God other than through our own experience of Him, as the "inner life" of the Christ of Faith touches us individually. See also Roger Johnson, *Rudolf Bultmann: Interpreting Faith for the Modern Era*, in *The Making of Modern Theology 2* (Ottawa: Collins Liturgical Publications, 1987); and John Macquarrie, *20th Century Religious Thought* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1988).

He completed his doctoral studies in 1910, and post-doctoral research in 1912, qualifying him to teach New Testament studies. It is interesting to note that his student years were from 1903-1912, years permeated by the optimistic liberalism which dominated European culture and theology in the period leading to World War I. Many theologians were immensely optimistic about mankind and the inevitability of spiritual and moral progress on the earth, leading ultimately to the establishment of the Kingdom of God. The onset of the Great War in 1914 and the horrors against humanity by humanity that were witnessed, greatly decreased the number of voices in the choirs of liberal optimism.<sup>295</sup>

Bultmann was appointed a lecturer in New Testament at the University of Marburg in 1912, where he remained for four years, leaving to take an Assistant Professorship at Breslau in 1916. In 1920 he taught at Geissen before assuming his prominent role as Professor of New Testament at Marburg where he taught until his retirement in 1951.<sup>296</sup> It was during this time that the writings which established him as a major New Testament scholar first appeared. *The History of the Synoptic Tradition (1921)* and *Jesus (1926)* challenged the quest for the historical Jesus. These books radically altered New Testament studies by suggesting that the Synoptics were not concerned to give the kind of historical information that many scholars had to that point been searching for and, to his consternation, finding.<sup>297</sup> *New Testament and Mythology (1941)*, *Theology of the*

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<sup>295</sup> Norman Perrin, *The Promise of Bultmann* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1969), 12.

<sup>296</sup> Ibid.

<sup>297</sup> Johnson, *Bultmann*, 91.

*New Testament (1948)* and *Jesus Christ and Mythology (1958)* served to solidify the Bultmannian case for demythologization.<sup>298</sup>

### 5.3 DEMYTHOLOGIZATION

Bultmann's most influential contribution to theology came as a result of his desire to communicate the gospel more effectively to Modern minds and hearts. This is a vital point, and one which many of his more devastating critics have overlooked. As a succinct and direct overview of Bultmann's position is desired, we will examine his key work in this area. On June 4, 1941, Bultmann addressed the Society of Evangelical Theology at Alpirsbach, Germany, on the topic, "New Testament and Mythology: The Problem of Demythologizing the New Testament Proclamation." Thus appeared what Schubert M. Ogden later called "perhaps the single most discussed and controversial theological writing of the century."<sup>299</sup>

#### 5.3.1 Myth in Scripture

Bultmann began by stating what he deemed to be the problem: myth reigns supreme in Scripture. A proper definition of "myth" as Bultmann understood it is

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<sup>298</sup> For English translations of Bultmann's work see Rudolf Bultmann, *The History of the Synoptic Tradition*, trans. John Marsh (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1963); *idem*, *Jesus and the Word*, trans. Louise Pettibone Smith and Erminie Huntress (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1934); *idem*, *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings*, trans. Schubert Ogden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984); *idem*, *Theology of the New Testament*, trans. Kendrick Grobel, 2 vols. (New York: Charles Scribners' Sons, 1951-1955); *idem*, *Jesus Christ and Mythology* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1958).

<sup>299</sup> Schubert M. Ogden, "Preface," in Rudolf Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology and Other Basic Writings*, ed. and trans. Schubert M. Ogden (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), vii.

essential for a correct understanding of his views, for the term carries negative connotations of something which is simply false, or a legend with no basis in reality. For Bultmann, "myth embraces those reality claims that do not square with scientific understanding."<sup>300</sup> Another writer observes that "myth is present wherever the unworldly is spoken of in a worldly way, where one speaks of the gods in a human way, where the transcendental is objectified."<sup>301</sup> The purpose of the myth is not to make the gods human, but to show the dependence of humanity upon them. According to Marcus Barth, they are anthropocentric: "To explain and understand a myth means therefore, to translate or transpose its language and its contents into such words as are suitable to express man's plight, man's decisions, man's expectations."<sup>302</sup> Though we may wonder whether some New Testament myths wish simply to tell us about God and not about ourselves, this is nonetheless the position from which Bultmann begins. Demythologization is the only way to do justice to the innermost meaning and intent of the myths of Scripture.

The worldview of the New Testament is mythical, located in a three-storied universe with the earth in the middle of Heaven and Hell. On the earth, the forces that rule above and below actively battle for control and influence on mankind. Supernaturalism is everywhere and is very much a part of life, a blend of Jewish apocalypticism and the Gnostic myth of redemption. The question

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<sup>300</sup> James F. Kay, "Theological Table-Talk: Myth or Narrative?" *Theology Today* 48 (1991): 327.

<sup>301</sup> Marcus Barth, "Introduction to Demythologizing," *The Journal of Religion* 37 (1957): 148.

<sup>302</sup> *Ibid.*, 148.

Bultmann posed is whether Christian proclamation, "...when it demands faith from men and women, expects them to acknowledge this mythical world picture of the past."<sup>303</sup> Is this even realistic to expect? Bultmann does ask whether mythical world truths have been lost during the Enlightenment, and if these ought to be recovered and rediscovered by Modern thinkers. Unfortunately, however, he dismissed this in a sentence, asserting that because all of our thinking is shaped by science, humanity can only now think in mythical terms through "sheer resolve" and this process would "reduce faith to a work" and would be simply "arbitrariness."<sup>304</sup> The veracity of that statement flies in the face of the millions of believers worldwide who, according even to the type of existential experience of which Bultmann would have approved, have found it possible to cast off the aspects of scientific thinking which are unhelpful, and have embraced much of the New Testament worldview without much apparent distress.

### **5.3.2 Unbelievable Biblical Myths**

He proceeds to detail the various aspects of the New Testament myth that Modern mankind will no longer believe. The idea that heaven is above and hell below is challenged, and perhaps rightly so, for it is not as much the location of these places that matters to believers but their existence, of which Bultmann makes no comment. He states "Also finished by knowledge of the forces and laws of nature is faith in spirits and demons" ; "...the wonders of the New

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<sup>303</sup> Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology*, 3.

<sup>304</sup> Ibid.

Testament are also finished as wonders..." and "We cannot use electric lights and radios and, in the event of illness, avail ourselves of modern medical and clinical means and at the same time believe in the spirit and wonder world of the New Testament."<sup>305</sup> The question that arises in response, however, is what greater difficulty lies believing in angels, demons, and miracles, that does not lie in believing in God *a priori*, which Bultmann assumes is possible? If one can believe in God, it would seem that belief in various spirits and acts of God would follow easily, for one has already had to adjust one's epistemology past the limits of the scientifically verifiable in order to admit belief in God.

Mythical eschatology is finished by the rather obvious fact that Christ's *Parousia* did not occur as quickly as New Testament writers had hoped. Mankind cannot understand how a supernatural "something or other" such as the Holy Spirit could intervene in our closed universe and influence us. The idea of grace made available to believers through water baptism or the Lord's Supper meets a similar fate in the Modern mind of which Bultmann speaks. Death as a punishment for sin is obsolete, for all know medically that individuals will die at a certain point, regardless of the piety of a life, or great talent displayed in sinning. Original sin and substitutionary atonement are dismissed on grounds too numerous to mention. That the resurrection of Christ somehow empowers people twenty centuries later to live better lives is beyond Modern thinking. ("Beyond" may perhaps be the very best choice here, though we are quite sure it is unintentional in this manner.)

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<sup>305</sup> Ibid., 4.

Finally, Bultmann suggests that "the idea of a pre-existent heavenly Christ and the correlative idea of our own translation into a heavenly world of light, in which the self is supposed to receive heavenly garments and a pneumatic body, are not only rationally incredible but also say nothing to us."<sup>306</sup> When one is limited to Bultmann's approach to the Scriptures, it is little wonder that something such as the pre-existent Christ is meaningless. At this point he might have contemplated more fully whether something of importance in humanity's worldview has been lost through the Enlightenment.

### **5.3.3 All or Nothing?**

He rejects the idea that one may demythologize certain portions of the New Testament but not others. Some may wish to deem obsolete the spatial references to heaven and hell, for example, but still insist on their reality. Bultmann tolerates none of this. "We can only completely accept the mythical world picture or completely reject it."<sup>307</sup> He himself, however, does not seem to follow his own proscription. Later in the essay Bultmann asserts that there is nothing "mysterious" or "supernatural" about Christianity, and that it is an original possibility of mankind.<sup>308</sup> He also maintains, however, that it is only as a consequence of the saving work of God in Christ that this possibility is capable of being realized. Bultmann states, "The question naturally arises as to whether

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<sup>306</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>307</sup> Ibid., 9.

<sup>308</sup> Ibid., 24.

this appeal to a unique salvation occurrence does not constitute an important qualification of his original demand for a radical demythologization of the New Testament. Can one really make such an appeal without setting a limit to demythologization?"<sup>309</sup> We would answer that this is an example of the line of contradiction that runs throughout Bultmann's reasoning.

Bultmann taught that in order for the New Testament to retain its validity it must be demythologized, for that is the very nature of a myth. It wishes to teach something about humanity, which it cannot do if we fail to understand it. Earlier attempts by liberal theology attacked this problem by simply dismissing all myths. Unfortunately, the truths of these passages were dismissed with the mythological language itself. As Marcus Barth noted, "Elimination was the old way of demythologization."<sup>310</sup> The truths hidden in the wrappings of mythological language were not to be discarded, but to be made known. Bultmann wished instead to *interpret* mythology for Modern minds, to interpret the mythology of the New Testament dualism in existentialist terms – by removing the supernatural elements.<sup>311</sup>

#### **5.4 BULTMANN'S LEGACY – THE JESUS SEMINAR**

Of the many theological endeavours that have followed in Bultmann's footsteps, none are more celebrated (and lamented) than *The Jesus Seminar*.

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<sup>309</sup> Schubert M. Ogden, "Bultmann's Project of Demythologization and the Problem of Theology and Philosophy," *The Journal of Religion* 37 (1957): 164.

<sup>310</sup> Barth, "Demythologizing," 152.

<sup>311</sup> Bultmann, *New Testament and Mythology*, 15.

Slightly more than twenty years old, this latest formal inquiry into the historical Jesus follows some two hundred years of similar exploration. Seeking to determine which of the Gospel records of Jesus' life and teaching are authentic in light of the many Modern forms of biblical criticism, the seminar has made a great many friends – and perhaps even more enemies.

In his history of *The Jesus Seminar*, Perry Kea notes that the origins of the search for the historical Jesus can be traced back to the Enlightenment, and the application of the scientific method to biblical history. "When scholars informed by the Enlightenment considered the figure of Jesus in the gospels, they began to ask if the claims made for Jesus could be supported by rational evidence or arguments. So began the quest for the historical Jesus."<sup>312</sup> The nineteenth century produced many "lives" of Jesus, perhaps none better than Albert Schweitzer's *The Quest for the Historical Jesus*, published in English in 1910, which applied literary criticism to the gospel accounts of Jesus' life, and determined him to be an apocalyptic prophet.<sup>313</sup> Birger Pearson notes:

The story of the "Quest of the Historical Jesus," as told by Schweitzer, includes not only rationalist attempts at discrediting traditional Christian teaching, but also attempts by Christian theologians to fend off such critiques by creating an edifice of critical theological scholarship by which a believable "real Jesus" might emerge to view. The result, often enough, was a

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<sup>312</sup> Perry V. Kea, "The Road to the Jesus Seminar," [http://www.westarinstitute.org/Periodicals/4R\\_Articles/RoadtoJS/roadtojs.html](http://www.westarinstitute.org/Periodicals/4R_Articles/RoadtoJS/roadtojs.html) (accessed November 15, 2007). See also John Woodmorappe, "The Jesus Seminar Reeks with Rationalism in its most Primitive Form," <http://www.rae.org/jseminar.html> (accessed November 16, 2007).

<sup>313</sup> Albert Schweitzer, *The Quest of the Historical Jesus: a Critical Study of its Progress from Reimarus to Wrede*, trans. W. Montgomery (N.Y.: Macmillan, 1910; reprint, Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2005). (first German edition 1906).

"modernized" Jesus, one whose ethical genius and message of a "spiritual kingdom" brought him close to the liberal ideas of 19th-century German Protestantism.<sup>314</sup>

The years following the end of World War I saw a shift in focus from the biblical records of Jesus' life to the oral traditions behind the written records. Applying form criticism to the Gospels, scholars such as Bultmann believed they were gaining a glimpse into the traditions about Jesus before they were recorded in writing. Further recognizing that the order and sequence of events as recorded in the New Testament were thus artificial, Bultmann and others argued that the "Jesus of History" was not as important as the "Christ of Faith." In this period, known as the "No Quest", Bultmann developed his system of demythologization, arguing for the demythologization of New Testament records as pertains to the life and work of Jesus of Nazareth, and focusing upon the theological activity of early Christianity. Though several of his students would again bring renewed focus into the search for the historical Jesus (known as the "New Quest")<sup>315</sup>, Bultmann's questioning of the relevance and veracity of specific New Testament records regarding Jesus Christ remain influential to this day.<sup>316</sup>

Through the 1960s and 1970s, scholars began to focus upon literary criticism once again, concentrating upon Jesus' use of parables and allegories.

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<sup>314</sup> Birger A. Pearson, "The Gospel According to the Jesus Seminar," <http://www.veritas-ucsb.org/library/pearson/seminar/home.html> (accessed November 16, 2007). This article appears as originally submitted it to the Claremont Graduate School for publication as no. 35 in the "Occasional Papers" series of the Institute for Antiquity and Christianity.

<sup>315</sup> See, for example, Ernst Kasemann, "The Problem of the Historical Jesus," In *Essays on New Testament Themes*, trans. W. J. Montague, Studies in Biblical Theology (London: SCM Press, 1964).

<sup>316</sup> Kea, "The Road".

According to Kea, Dan Via's *The Parables: Their Literary and Existential Dimensions* (1967)<sup>317</sup>, Robert Funk's *Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God: The Problem of Language in the New Testament and Contemporary Theology* (1966)<sup>318</sup>, and Robert Tannehill's *The Sword of His Mouth* (1975)<sup>319</sup>, each "...demonstrated that the aesthetic dimension of Jesus' language was not merely decorative or ornamental, but essential to the communication of his message. While these works were concerned to examine Jesus' speech forms for their literary qualities, they also had the effect of demonstrating that the author of these parables and aphorisms (namely, Jesus) had a rather subversive or unconventional view of reality."<sup>320</sup>

In the 1980s, the focus on Jesus' language as key to the communication of his message led to the creation of *The Jesus Seminar* by Robert Funk. Comprised of nearly 200 scholars, the seminar met twice yearly with the goal of determining what Jesus actually said and did. Its findings were published in

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<sup>317</sup> Dan Otto Via, *The Parables; Their Literary and Existential Dimension* (Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1967).

<sup>318</sup> Robert Walter Funk, *Language, Hermeneutic, and Word of God; the Problem of Language in the New Testament and Contemporary Theology* (New York, Harper & Row, 1966).

<sup>319</sup> Robert C. Tannehill, *The Sword of His Mouth* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975).

<sup>320</sup> Ibid. See also John Dominic Crossan, *In Parables: the Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (New York: Harper and Row, 1973); idem, *In Fragments: the Aphorisms of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983); C. H. Dodd, *The Parables of the Kingdom* (New York, Scribner, 1961); Norman Perrin, *The Kingdom of God in the Teaching of Jesus*, New Testament Library (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1963); idem, *Rediscovering the Teaching of Jesus* (New York: Harper and Row, 1967); and Amos Niven Wilder, *The Language of the Gospel; Early Christian Rhetoric* (New York, Harper and Row, 1964).

three reports: *The Five Gospels* (1993)<sup>321</sup>, *The Acts of Jesus* (1998)<sup>322</sup>, and *The Gospel of Jesus* (1999)<sup>323</sup>. The basic critical approach is presented in a discussion of seven "pillars of scholarly wisdom" in the Introduction to *The Five Gospels*.<sup>324</sup> They are:

1. The distinction between the historical Jesus and the Christ of Christian faith.
2. Preference for the synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke) over John as sources for the historical Jesus.
3. The chronological priority of the Gospel of Mark.
4. The hypothetical source "Q" used independently by Matthew and Luke.
5. "The liberation of the non-eschatological Jesus . . . from Schweitzer's eschatological Jesus."
6. The fundamental contrast between an oral culture, such as that of Jesus, and a print culture.
7. The "burden of proof" on those who argue for authenticity, rather than on those who argue for inauthenticity.

Basing its finding upon these seven key pillars, the seminar examined each passage in the Gospels relative to Jesus' speech or deeds, and voted to determine authenticity by using coloured marbles.

Much of the methodology of the Jesus Seminar is based on the results of two centuries of critical scholarship. The evidence of the Modern tendencies in the seminar is quickly observed on the second page of *The Five Gospels*:

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<sup>321</sup> Robert W. Funk, *The Five Gospels: The Search for the Authentic Words of Jesus* (Santa Costa CA: Polebridge Press, 1993).

<sup>322</sup> Robert W. Funk, *The Acts of Jesus: The Search for the Authentic Deeds of Jesus* (San Francisco: Harper, 1998).

<sup>323</sup> Robert W. Funk, *The Gospel of Jesus: According to the Jesus Seminar* (Santa Costa CA: Polebridge Press, 1999).

<sup>324</sup> See Funk, *The Five Gospels*, Introduction. Also see Birger, "The Gospel According to the Jesus Seminar".

The contemporary religious controversy, epitomized in the Scopes trial and the continuing clamor for creationism as a viable alternative to the theory of evolution, turns on whether the worldview reflected in the Bible can be carried forward into this scientific age and retained as an article of faith. Jesus figures prominently in this debate. The Christ of creed and dogma, who had been firmly in place in the Middle Ages, can no longer command the assent of those who have seen the heavens through Galileo's telescope. The old deities and demons were swept from the skies by that remarkable glass.<sup>325</sup>

John Woodmorappe writes, "Note the equation of anti-supernaturalist preconceptions with a "scientific" (actually rationalistic) worldview. Clearly, these modernist scholars do not distinguish reason from rationalism... To them, a questioning of anti-supernaturalism--or a belief in the reality of divine action--is in itself an attack on reason, scholarship and science."<sup>326</sup>

Given the excessively Modern nature of the seven pillars used, it is of little surprise that only 18% of the sayings and deeds of Jesus as reported by the Synoptic gospels were found to be authentic; John fared even worse, as nearly the entire book was found to lack veracity.<sup>327</sup> Further, as one might expect, none

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<sup>325</sup> Funk, *The Five Gospels*, 2.

<sup>326</sup> Woodmorappe, "The Jesus Seminar Reeks".

<sup>327</sup> See Funk, *The Five Gospels*. Naturally, many New Testament scholars have written against the findings of the seminar. See, for example, Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (San Francisco: Harper, 1996); Ben Witherington III, *The Jesus Quest: The Third Search for the Jew of Nazareth* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1996); Paul R. Eddy and Gregory A. Boyd, *The Jesus Legend: A Case for the Historical Reliability of the Synoptic Jesus Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2007); N.T. Wright, *Jesus and the Victory of God*, Christian Origins and the Question of God, vol.2 (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1997); Michael Wilkins and J.P. Moreland, eds., *Jesus Under Fire: Modern Scholarship Reinvents the Historical Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996); and Craig A. Evans, *Fabricating Jesus: How Modern Scholars Distort the Gospel* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006).

of the records of Jesus' life which portray him as divine, or participating in the expression of the supernatural acts of God, have been retained.<sup>328</sup>

## 5.5 THE BULTMANNIAN LEGACY AND POSTMODERNS

Bultmann's desire to remove the myth from the New Testament accounts of Jesus, and the seminar's desire to further emasculate the records of Jesus' life and ministry, could hardly be more inappropriate in today's culture. Our critique of Bultmann's position on demythologizing and *The Jesus Seminar's* conclusions will not come as much from scholarly sources who have criticized their work from the viewpoint of theological appropriateness, for many have pursued this.

Rather, we examine the usefulness of demythologization in reaching the generations of North American youth known as *Generation X* and the *Millennials*, by asking whether the attempt of Bultmann and *The Jesus Seminar* to make the gospel more "believable" to the Modern mind, borne out in demythologization, is effective in reaching this generation.

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<sup>328</sup> Birger A. Pearson, Professor Emeritus of Religious Studies at the University of California, Santa Barbara, notes that those in the seminar found exactly what they were looking for: "A group of secularized theologians and secular academics went seeking a secular Jesus, and they found him! They think they found him, but, in fact, they created him. Jesus the 'party animal,' whose zany wit and caustic humor would enliven an otherwise dull cocktail party --this is the product of the Jesus Seminar's six years' research. In a sense the Jesus Seminar, with its ideology of secularization, represents a 'shadow image' of the old 'New Quest,' with its neo-orthodox theology -- and its ultimate bankruptcy." In "The Gospel According to the Jesus Seminar."

### 5.5.1 Impact of Postmodernism

As will be demonstrated more thoroughly in the next few pages, it is clear that Postmodernity has had an impact on today's youth. Although the significance or permanence of Postmodernity may well be debated, it seems clear that certain of its presuppositions are making inroads in the thinking of the post-boomer generations. In terms of the rejection of the rationalism often espoused by organized religion, and importance of experience in particular, today's students and young adults are approaching the Christian faith, and our attempts to propagate the Gospel, in ways not seen since pre-Enlightenment times.

In his excellent work, *The Younger Evangelicals*, respected author Robert E. Webber draws a number of conclusions regarding the differences between the youngest Evangelicals in North America, and the generations preceding them. Foremost on Webber's list is the fact that today's youth are fully aware that they are maturing in a Postmodern world. As such, they themselves have a much broader concept of what constitutes "reason" for they acknowledge that all rationality, scientific and otherwise, has some measure of faith inherent within.<sup>329</sup>

Webber continues by listing several dozen other characteristics of younger Evangelicals, including their:

- Recovery of a biblical understanding of human nature, particularly in the post-9/11 era
- Awareness of a new context for ministry which differs from the pragmatist approach, and includes a new paradigm of thought

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<sup>329</sup> Robert E. Webber, *The Younger Evangelicals: Facing the Challenges of the New World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 47-48.

- Stance for the absolutes of the Christian faith in a new way, recognizing that the road to the future runs through the past
- Commitment to the plight of the poor
- Willingness to live by the rules
- Familiarity with technology, particularly that which is highly visual, and their ability to communicate through imaginative stories, appreciating the power of the symbol and of the arts
- Longing for community, and commitment to intergenerational and multicultural ministry
- Attraction to absolutes which are not necessarily acquired by rationalism
- Readiness to commit, search for shared wisdom, and recognition of the unity between thought and action
- Demand for authenticity in those with whom they interact<sup>330</sup>

Walt Mueller, author of *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture*, notes with interest that J.I. Packer's classic work *Knowing God* has been replaced in many circles with Henry Blackaby's *Experiencing God*. The shift from knowing to experiencing clearly demonstrates the changing values of younger generations.<sup>331</sup>

Youth and Young Adult Pastor Tony Jones clearly states the impact of Postmodernity upon past, present, and future generations. He notes that in general, the Boomers studied under Modern professors, fully appreciative of the Enlightenment. Generation X studied during the transitional phase. "But the Millennials are getting full-blown, no-holds-barred Postmodern thought."<sup>332</sup> Little wonder then that the industries based directly on selling to youth, such as those of music, cinema, and advertising, are embracing the Postmodern ethos.

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<sup>330</sup> Ibid., 47-54.

<sup>331</sup> Walt Mueller, *Engaging the Soul of Youth Culture: Bridging Teen Worldviews and Christian Truth* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006), 65.

<sup>332</sup> Tony Jones, ed. *Postmodern Youth Ministry* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan/Youth Specialties, 2001), 29.

Further, for those working with today's youth, it is important to recognize that they were born into a culture of transition; those born today are entering a thoroughly Postmodern world. While not all will adopt Postmodern tenets as their own, Postmodernity will be the reigning culture in our institutions of higher learning.<sup>333</sup>

Other authors take this concept even further, acknowledging that what is learned from ministry to Generation X will soon have to be applied throughout culture. Pastor Brad Cecil challenges those who suggest that Postmodernity is simply another trend on the conference circuit, arguing instead that it is the most important cultural shift of the last 500 years. "It's not a generation issue exclusive to Gen-X or Millennials. In fact, it's fast becoming the adopted epistemology of all adults. Everyone in ministry – not just youth and young adult pastors – will have to wrestle with this phenomenon."<sup>334</sup>

Some observers note the task of determining the spiritual values of GenX has been considerably more difficult than for their parents, the Boomer generation. Concerning Generation X, Harvard Professor Harvey Cox notes:

[T]heir religious proclivities have remained a mystery almost as inscrutable as that of the Holy Trinity. Here is a generation that stays away from most churches in droves but loves songs about God and Jesus, a generation that would score very low on any standard piety scale but at times seems almost obsessed with saints, visions, and icons in all shapes and sizes. These are the young people who, Styrofoam cups of cappuccino in hand, crowd among the shelves of New Age spirituality titles in the local book market and post thousands of religious and quasi-religious notes on the bulletin boards in cyberspace.<sup>335</sup>

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<sup>333</sup> Ibid.

<sup>334</sup> Pastor Brad Cecil, quoted in Jones, ed. *Postmodern Youth Ministry*, preface.

<sup>335</sup> Harvey Cox, forward to *Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X*, by Tom Beaudoin (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1998), ix.

### 5.5.2 Anti-religious but Pro-spiritual

In *Virtual Faith: The Irreverent Spiritual Quest of Generation X*, author Tom Beaudoin suggests four themes inherent in GenX spirituality. First, this generation is inherently suspicious of Christianity as has been presented by organized religious institutions. Further, Xers wish to emphasize the sacred nature of their shared experiences, communal in nature, and lived daily in human existence. Third, today's youth identify with the scriptural theme of the suffering servant. Finally, Generation X seeks unique ways of being religious and expressing their faith. Students of Postmodernity will observe its impact on this generation throughout these themes.<sup>336</sup> Christians need not fear these themes, for in many ways they look back to Christian themes of the premodern era. As Robert Webber asks, "Where do we go to find a Christianity that speaks meaningfully to a Postmodern world?...[O]ur challenge is not to reinvent Christianity, but to restore and then adapt classical Christianity to the Postmodern cultural situation."<sup>337</sup>

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<sup>336</sup> Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith*, 26, 41-42.

<sup>337</sup> Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 24.

Paul Tyson, a lecturer in the sociology of religion at Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, Australia, observes four specific types of spirituality present in the youth he has studied.<sup>338</sup> According to Tyson:

At the conservative right end of the spectrum is the...**modern fundamentalist** spirituality. This spirituality seeks certainty, authoritative meaning and a clear moral framework. Next is...the blending of...fundamentalism with...**hypermodernism**. This blend is often seen where American fundamentalism combines with contemporary consumer culture. [Next] is **relationalism** which, to varying degrees, expresses discontent with the atomisation, fragmentation and superficiality of consumer culture, and places high value on meaning derived from relationships. At the far end of the spirituality spectrum comes...**radical post-secularism**. These young people have no interest in modern certainty or postmodern irrationalism, reject hypermodern consumerism and want more than relationally orientated metaphysical unbelief. These young people have a theological and religious thirst for spiritual water that reflects their sense of living in a very arid spiritual environment. They are typically highly critical of 'church'. Of these spirituality types, only modernist fundamentalism is '**secular**' in the sense that its belief world assumes 'conservative' religious Biblical supernaturalism is in conflict with 'progressive' atheistic scientific naturalism. All other spiritualities are in some manner **post-secular** and this has revolutionary implications.<sup>339</sup>

Organized religion and religious groups have fallen into some disfavour with those most impacted by Postmodernity, and precisely for the reasons mentioned

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<sup>338</sup> Although detailed study of these categories is outside of the scope of this thesis, a basic understanding will well serve the student of today's younger generations. As the reader will note, Tyson suggests that all youth are not fully affected by Postmodern thought, though this segment of youth is declining. While that might possibly be true for Australia, this author would suggest that very few, if any, North American youth have failed to be impacted by Postmodern thought.

<sup>339</sup> Paul Tyson, "Contemporary Australian Youth Spiritualities and Evangelical Youth Ministry," [www.ea.org.au/content/documents/pdf%20files/Tyson%20-%20Youth%20Spirituality%20Spectrum.pdf](http://www.ea.org.au/content/documents/pdf%20files/Tyson%20-%20Youth%20Spirituality%20Spectrum.pdf) (accessed November 19, 2007). Tyson continues the article by suggesting specific ways youth ministry must be tailored to each of the groups in his spectrum.

above.<sup>340</sup> Many churches have watched the great decline in church attendance among all ages with alarm (and many appear not to have noticed), with teenagers and young adults leading the way.<sup>341</sup> Canadian Sociologist Reginald Bibby has tracked the attitudes of Canadian teens towards religion for over 25 years, and has discovered increasing numbers of Canadian teens would be classified in the *relationalism* or *radical post-secularism* categories outlined above. In his book *Canada's Teens: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*, Bibby reveals the results of two national surveys completed in 2000. The dichotomy between identity and practice is readily apparent: among Canadian teens, a full 75% identify with some religious group, while only 22% attend weekly services.

Most interesting here is the admission of 43% who said they would be open to increased connection with organized religion, agreeing that "I would be open to more involvement with religious groups if I found it to be worthwhile."<sup>342</sup> For Generation X and the Millennials, the church ought to be practical and useful in helping people deal with life and life's issues. It must be more focused on helping those in the community than on keeping those in the pews happy. Religion for religion's sake is out.<sup>343</sup>

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<sup>340</sup> Reginald Bibby and Donald Posterski, *Teen Trends: A Nation in Motion*, abridged ed. (Toronto: Stoddart, 2000), 50-51.

<sup>341</sup> Weekly church attendance in Canada by all ages declined from 61% in 1956, to 35% in 1985, according to *Gallup Canada*, one of the country's largest polling organizations. Quoted in Reginald Bibby, *Restless Gods: The Renaissance of Religion in Canada* (Toronto: Novalis, 2002), 12-13.

<sup>342</sup> Reginald Bibby, *Canada's Teens: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (Toronto: Stoddart, 2001), 117-118.

<sup>343</sup> Barna, *Baby Busters*, 142.

Summing up his latest survey, Bibby notes, “Overall, these findings point to a paradox: many young people who are not involved in organized religion are nonetheless seemingly interested in many things that organized religion ‘is about’.” He then quotes religion writer Douglas Todd of the *Vancouver Sun* who writes:

Most young people probably would appreciate a safe, accepting – even fun – place where they can ask hard religious questions, and where ‘doubt’ is not a dirty word...Either the clergy’s genuine welcome is not getting out to teenagers, mass culture is just too hostile to faith institutions, or the spiritual message isn’t one that clicks with most young people. Or all of the above.<sup>344</sup>

As many youth and young adults continue to avoid traditional denominations in particular, and organized Christianity in general, observers often inquire as to where, if anywhere, they are headed. In an interview in *The Twentysomething American Dream*, a typical GenX attitude is observed: “What the hell’s going to church for? These days you’ve got to take religion into your own hands.”<sup>345</sup> Beaudoin notes this has occurred in two ways: First, they have a widespread regard for paganism, however vaguely defined. Second, Xers have a growing enchantment with mysticism. “As practiced by Xers, mysticism is defined broadly as paganism and is often expressed as religious eclecticism. Xers take symbols, values, and rituals from various religious traditions and combine them into their personal “spirituality.” They see this spirituality as one

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<sup>344</sup> Douglass Todd, “‘Religion’ just doesn’t seem hip,” *National Post*, 6 February 1999, quoted in Bibby, *Canada’s Teens*, 127-128.

<sup>345</sup> M.L. Cohen, *The Twentysomething American Dream: A Cross-Country Quest for a Generation* (New York: Dutton, 1993), 183.

being far removed from “religion,” which they frequently equate with religious institution.”<sup>346</sup>

Bibby and Posterski agree, noting that paradoxically, youth have having difficulty relating to organized religion precisely as they exhibit a strong interest in the things that religion has traditionally focused upon – the supernatural, spirituality, ethics, morality, and meaning. 46 per cent rate *the quest for truth* as “very important” and 24 per cent rate *spirituality* the same. Only 10 per cent of teens, however, rate *religious involvement* as very important. “Time and again, young people express an openness to things spiritual, and disinterest in things organizational.”<sup>347</sup>

New Age teachings and others which emphasize the interaction between the immanent and the transcendent are becoming increasingly popular.<sup>348</sup> Bibby’s research reveals that a majority of Canadian teens believe in conventional Christian values:

- life after death - 78%
- heaven - 75%
- the existence of God – 73%
- Jesus was the Divine Son of God – 65%

These same teens, however, also believe in a variety of less conventional values:

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<sup>346</sup> Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith*, 25.

<sup>347</sup> Bibby and Posterski, *Teen Trends* (2000), 53.

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid.*, 53-55.

- near-death experiences – 76%
- Extra Sensory Perception (ESP) – 59%
- astrology – 57%
- individuals can possess psychic powers – 55%<sup>349</sup>

Observing an “irreverent religiousness” in this generation, Author Tom Beaudoin disagrees with those who view “Xers” as “...simply irreligious or generally indifferent towards spirituality.” Rather, Xers possess a “unique religiousness” observed largely in their interaction with contemporary culture.<sup>350</sup> Religious symbolism, even if used in an irreverent and improper manner, abounds in GenX culture, and can be used to clearly observe a generational theology. According to Beaudoin,

Religious institutions, our elders, or other sceptics should not fear irreverence and popular culture. Paradoxically, interpreting pop culture theologically – especially with an eye to its irreverence – highlights the depth of Generation X’s religious practice. The more popular culture is explored, and the more irreverence is viewed as a legitimate mode of religiosity (in all its illegitimacy), the more Generation X will be shown as having a real religious contribution to make. GenX can make great strides not only towards fostering its own spirituality but also toward reinvigorating religious institutions and challenging the faith of older generations.<sup>351</sup>

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<sup>349</sup> Bibby, *Canada’s Teens*, 123. Bibby’s latest survey also demonstrates that a higher percentage of today’s teens obtain moral guidance from what they’ve experience personally than do their parents and grandparents, who rely on external sources such as the church. This also points to the impact of Postmodern thought upon today’s youth, who often see morality in relativistic terms. See Bibby, *Restless Gods*, 217.

<sup>350</sup> Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith*, 175-176.

<sup>351</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

Beaudoin seeks to challenge the common assumption that youth are not interested in spiritual issues and raises the ante by suggesting that organization religion may even learn from their younger Postmodern critics. “GenX’s suspicion or outright derision of institutions, which includes...a reclamation of Jesus against institutions, is a bedrock component of Xer’s irreverent spirituality. Xer religiosity squarely challenges institutions to come to terms with their relevance or irrelevance, to question whether they have become institutionalized.”<sup>352</sup> Further, Beaudoin suggests: “In general, GenX culture challenges Churches to preach and practice from a position of humility and weakness in the world. By shunning the trappings of privileged social status... and seeking to serve, not to be served, Churches will respond faithfully not only to the prophetic charge brought by GenX but, more important, to the example of Jesus.”<sup>353</sup>

Today’s youth may also effectively challenge the Church to revive spiritual or mystical tradition, to refocus upon spiritual growth and religious journey where there has been a lack of focus. Their emphasis upon silence and meditation may prove to be a needed correction for the many Churches caught in the endless rush and busyness of programs and committees.<sup>354</sup>

Tony Jones agrees that Postmodern thought may well be a positive force in the Church, and challenges those who would suggest that Postmodern thought

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<sup>352</sup> Ibid., 161.

<sup>353</sup> Ibid., 162.

<sup>354</sup> Ibid., 165.

is in some way inherently evil. For Jones, many of the Postmodern critiques of Modernism should be welcomed by the Church. “No longer are we beholden to the scientific proof model of evangelism – everything does not need to be explained and rationalized. This should come as a relief to Christian youth workers who have been attempting to *explain* great mysteries like the incarnation, the resurrection, and the Lord’s Supper.<sup>355</sup>

### 5.5.3. Pentecostalism and the Postmodern

Although it has been demonstrated that Pentecostalism has increasingly accepted an Evangelical hermeneutic borne out of Modernity, there is evidence that this shift in the academy has not yet made a significant impact in the Pentecostal pew. Various scholars have noted the inherent emotionalism in Pentecostalism, and their typical openness to experience and the supernatural.

An article for *The Economist* notes the experiential dimension of this movement, suggesting that the most remarkable religious success story of the past century has been “the least intellectual (and most emotive)” religious movement of all. Though founded by a “one-eyed black preacher” who was convinced that God would send revival if people prayed hard enough, there are now “at least 400 million revivalists around the world.” According to the Pew

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<sup>355</sup> Jones, *Postmodern Youth Ministry*, 39. See also Nick Shepherd, “Postmodern Responses to Being Church,” [www.yehright.com/files/postmodern.pdf](http://www.yehright.com/files/postmodern.pdf) (accessed November 15, 2007).

Forum on Religion, many of these adherents have witnessed healings and/or exorcisms, and have “received direct revelation from God.”<sup>356</sup>

As has been established, many youth today are bypassing the Christian church, the appointed herald of the only supernatural God, for cheap and deadly imitations elsewhere. Pentecostalism must take up this challenge, for its own sons and daughters are among this generation of Postmodern youth. Simply caring for those already in the pews has never been a part of the Pentecostal mandate; this is a missions-oriented movement. Reginald Bibby notes that the life blood of religious groups is their youth. Social scientists who have studied those joining such organizations have concluded that religious groups grow primarily by recruiting and retaining their own children, and adding a few outsiders along the way, primarily through friendship and marriage.<sup>357</sup>

Posterski and Bibby note that any attempt to present the gospel to the minds of Postmodern youth will have to:

...carefully explore the realm of the supernatural. Young people do not have God grudges on their shoulders. They are not anti-religious. Rather, out of the legacy of their heritage and the input of their world, they are supernaturalists...Young people are predisposed to the supernatural, and although they don't intend to turn to organized

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<sup>356</sup> “O Come All Ye Faithful,” *The Economist* [http://economist.com/research/articlesBySubject/displaystory.cfm?subjectid=7294978&story\\_id=10015239](http://economist.com/research/articlesBySubject/displaystory.cfm?subjectid=7294978&story_id=10015239) (accessed November 19, 2007). See also “Pentecostals: Christianity Reborn,” [http://www.economist.com/world/displaystory.cfm?story\\_id=8401206](http://www.economist.com/world/displaystory.cfm?story_id=8401206) (accessed November 19, 2007).

<sup>357</sup> Bibby, *Canada's Teens*, 115.

religion to actively pursue their interest, they are not negative about spiritual realities.<sup>358</sup>

We would suggest that those who have followed Bultmann's demythologization of the gospel are not only non-effective, but are damaging the cause of the Good News in this generation. With Pentecostals in the lead, the church as a whole must return to teaching and preaching about a God of miracles who can be experienced as he continues to act in very real ways in the lives and world of his children. This is the God that youth today hunger for. Beaudoin agrees: "The turn to experience in GenX pop culture encompasses not only personal and communal religious experience but also an emerging sensual spirituality, an experience of living faith in the world, and a desire for an encounter of the human and 'divine'".<sup>359</sup>

Pentecostalism generally continues to place great emphasis on experiencing the supernatural. In her description of the variety of Pentecostal churches worldwide, Sociologist Margaret Poloma notes, "What these churches share is not single structure, uniform doctrine, or ecclesiastical leadership, but a particular Christian world-view that reverts to a non-European epistemology from the European one that has dominated Christianity for centuries."<sup>360</sup> Paul W. Lewis agrees: "...the nature of Pentecostal experience within Biblical

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<sup>358</sup> Reginald Bibby and Donald Posterski, *Teen Trends: A Nation in Motion* (Toronto: Stoddart, 1992), 261.

<sup>359</sup> Beaudoin, *Virtual Faith*, 165.

<sup>360</sup> Margaret M. Poloma, "The Spirit Bade Me Go: Pentecostalism and Global Religion" (Paper presented at the Association for the Sociology of Religion Annual Meetings, Washington, D.C.: August 11-13, 2000), 5.

hermeneutics is tied with certain elements which inform Pentecostal experience, and ultimately these beliefs, experiences, and hermeneutics, demonstrate a Pentecostal epistemology. This Pentecostal epistemology is a non-Enlightenment enterprise, and places Pentecostal thought in a very different framework from conservative Evangelicalism....<sup>361</sup>

Poloma quotes Pentecostal pastor and theologian Jackie David Johns to further illustrate. Johns notes: "At the heart of the Pentecostal world-view is transforming experience with God. God is known through relational encounter which finds its penultimate expression in the experience of being filled with the Holy Spirit. This experience becomes the normative epistemological framework and thus shifts the structures by which the individual interprets the world."<sup>362</sup>

Johns lists six special foci of the Pentecostal worldview, several of which will be observed to have particular relevance to a Postmodern world:

- First, the Pentecostal world-view is experientially God-centered. All things relate to God and God relates to all things.
- Second, the Pentecostal world-view is holistic and systemic. For the Spirit-filled person God is not only present in all events, he holds all things together and causes all things to work together.
- Third, the Pentecostal world-view is transrational. Knowledge is relational and is not limited to the realms of reason and sensory experience.

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<sup>361</sup> Paul W. Lewis, "Towards A Pentecostal Epistemology: The Role of Experience in Pentecostal Hermeneutics," *The Spirit and Church* 2.1 (2000): 95.

<sup>362</sup> Jackie David Johns, "Yielding to the Spirit: The Dynamics of a Pentecostal Model of Praxis," in *The Globalization of Pentecostalism: A Religion Made to Travel*, eds. Murray W. Dempster, Byron D. Klaus, Douglas Peterson (Irvine, CA: Regnum Books International, 1999), 74-75.

- Fourth, in conjunction with their holiness heritage, Pentecostals are concerned with truth, but not just propositional truth. Pentecostals were historically anti-creedal.
- Fifth, the Pentecostal epistemology of encounter with God is closely aligned with the biblical understanding of how one comes to know. . . This understanding is rooted in Hebrew thought and may be contrasted with Greek approaches to knowledge. The Hebrew word for “to know” is *yada*. In general, *yada* is knowledge that comes by experience.
- Finally, the Scriptures hold a special place and function within the Pentecostal world-view. Pentecostals differ from Evangelicals and Fundamentalists in their approach to the Bible. For Pentecostals the Bible is a living book in which the Holy Spirit is always active.<sup>363</sup>

In his PhD dissertation for the University of Auckland, Viv Grigg also argues that Pentecostalism is stylistically well-suited to reach a Postmodern generation. First, charismatic and Pentecostal theology as expressed in transformational conversations fits well with the multiple stories of Postmodernism, just as Evangelical theology is often heavily entwined with Modernist rationalism. Second, the experiential nature of Pentecostalism connects well with those seeking a spiritual experience. Third, holism in Pentecostal circles is expressed by narratives rather than following logical progressions towards universal truth.<sup>364</sup>

Grigg goes even further, arguing that Pentecostals are essentially “postmodern phenomena”, for they’ve moved from integrating the voices of Western power centres to “listening to the multiple voices of the peoples.” He suggests, “Pentecostals have rejected the language, the theology, and the style

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<sup>363</sup> Ibid. This succinct summary is taken from Poloma, “The Spirit Bade Me Go,” 5-6.

<sup>364</sup> Viv Grigg, “The Church and Postmodern City,” Ph.D. diss., University of Auckland, 2005 <http://encarnacao.org/PhD/014 Postmodernity.htm> (accessed November 15, 2007).

of Christianity of the 'official,' 'powerful,' churches."<sup>365</sup> There can be no doubt as to the appeal of this type of Christian denomination for today's Postmodern youth.

Neil Hudson concurs, suggesting that the emphasis on experience at the heart of Pentecostalism may well strategically place the movement to reach the youngest generations. At the heart of Pentecostalism, according to Hudson, is an emphasis on a God who does intervene and do surprising things among his people, a God who is to be encountered, who performs miracles both as a sign to his own people and a cause of wonder for non-believers. Worship for Pentecostals is, therefore, "where one experiences something" as opposed to where one is taught something.<sup>366</sup>

If the classical format of the Evangelical service brings the didactic elements to the fore, including the centrality of the Scriptures, for contemporary Pentecostalism the worship band and display of worship songs are more central. While the Bible is undoubtedly honoured in Pentecostal circles, the goal and desire of Pentecostal services is that the God of the Bible might be experienced – not just appreciated intellectually. While this experience can occur during sermons, it more likely and more often occurs during sung worship or in a ministry time following the sermon where individuals receive prayer. Hudson concludes: "For some, grappling with evangelizing amongst the sensory nature of a postmodern generation, this emphasis on experience resonates with the

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<sup>365</sup> Ibid.

<sup>366</sup> Neil Hudson, "British Pentecostalism's Past Development and Future Challenges," <http://salfordelimchurch.org/heritage.php> (accessed November 15, 2007).

desires expressed in society. It is no surprise that there is a growing feeling that Pentecostalism might succeed in evangelizing a postmodern generation more effectively than they ever did in the rationalistic modernist era.<sup>367</sup>

The practice of some to rid the Scriptures essentially of all references to miracles and divine intervention, and the refusal in many circles to acknowledge that God works in the same ways today, is forcing many youth who seek an encounter with the true God to look elsewhere. As Rodney Stark, a Sociologist from the University of Washington in Seattle notes, “In an endless cycle, faith is revived and new faiths born to take the places of those withered denominations *that lost their sense of the supernatural.*”<sup>368</sup> In the words of one young lady,

All I want is reality. Show me God. Tell me what He is really like. Help me to understand why life is the way it is, and how I can experience it more fully and with greater joy. I don't want the empty promises. I want the real thing. And I'll go wherever I find that truth system.<sup>369</sup>

Bibby agrees:

This is a generation of young people whose current involvement in religion is appreciable. Further, their terms for greater involvement in groups are reasonable; if they can find their participation “worthwhile,” they are open to it. In light of their widespread interest in meaning and mystery, the supernatural and the spiritual, religious groups who have something to bring need to bring it – and, to put it bluntly, stop complaining about the apathy of youth.<sup>370</sup>

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<sup>367</sup> Ibid.

<sup>368</sup> Rodney Stark and William S. Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 529-530. Italics by the author.

<sup>369</sup> Anonymous teenager quoted in Barna, *Baby Busters*, 144.

<sup>370</sup> Bibby, *Canada's Teens*, 131-132.

## 5.6 A PENTECOSTAL CONCLUSION

Bultmann clearly desired to make the gospel more accessible to the men and women of his time. In his thinking, Modern minds could no longer access many of the truths so cloaked in the mythological language of the New Testament. The Modern mentality would no longer accept as valid the many miracles and supernatural occurrences in Scripture which can never be scientifically validated. To bring the gospel back to the people, Bultmann demythologized it, explaining in existential terms the meaning of each myth. With similar intentions, more recent followers of the Bultmannian ideal, such as *The Jesus Seminar*, seek to rid the New Testament accounts of Jesus' life and ministry of all but the most scientifically verifiable records.

With recent research into the "Postmodern mind", however, we are forced to acknowledge that Bultmann's concerns are not valid for the newest generations of Western youth. It appears in fact that a reversal is necessary. Instead of diminishing the transcendent and supernatural component of the gospel, it must be emphasized, for this generation correctly believes it to exist, and will seek it out in whatever form it is offered.

Pentecostals have a key role to play in this effort, for the entire movement arose essentially out of a perceived need to go beyond the rational, scientific approaches to the Gospel so prevalent at the turn of the last century. Paul Lewis notes, "Pentecostal thought actually has an implied historiography, which emphasizes the inseparability of history from God's work in the world. In other

words, contrary to Rudolf Bultmann and his demythological enterprise, God works in and through history, and God's work is not limited to the pre-scientific age nor is it essentially different today."<sup>371</sup> Early Pentecostals were eager to experience the power and person of God, through the Holy Spirit in their daily lives. Though it has been demonstrated that some scholars within Pentecostalism have drifted towards Evangelical hermeneutics, it is also true that for the most part, Pentecostals in the pew have not lost their focus upon the importance of experiencing God personally, and continue to interpret Scripture in a corresponding manner.

For Pentecostals, therefore, the opportunity has never been greater, as they are now faced with a generation of society seeking the same existential approach to God that they have held so dearly for almost a century. Tony Jones notes, "One of the most noteworthy characteristics of the Postmodern/post-Christian world is the dramatic rise of spirituality. Propositional truth is out and mysticism is in. People are not necessarily put off by a religion that does not 'make sense' – they are more concerned with whether a religion can bring them into contact with God."<sup>372</sup>

Pentecostals must be leaders as the Christian church, the true heralds of the One God, rise to this challenge, and present to our searching youth the God who can be experienced. For the sake of this Postmodern generation, may they not become a church which "holds to an outward form of godliness, but denies its power." (II Timothy 3:5). They must embrace a hermeneutic which preserves the

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<sup>371</sup> Lewis, "Pentecostal Epistemology," 105.

<sup>372</sup> Jones, *Postmodern Youth Ministry*, 63.

clear foci of early Pentecostalism. Only with a Pentecostal hermeneutic will the distinctive Pentecostal focus on experiencing God be solidly preserved.

The following chapter will explore trends in Pentecostal hermeneutics since the conclusion of the debate between Gordon Fee and various Pentecostal scholars, via the work of Kenneth Archer. It will be seen that in the time since that debate, some Pentecostal scholars have begun to seriously consider the need for a distinctively Pentecostal hermeneutic, though few have offered a thorough-going model for discussion. Kenneth Archer, Associate Professor of Theology at the Church of God Theological Seminary, in Cleveland, Tennessee, has proposed a distinctive Pentecostal hermeneutic. It is Archer's contention that the importing of Evangelical hermeneutical methods wholesale into Pentecostalism will not serve the movement well into the twenty-first century. His belief that the unique nature of the Pentecostal movement requires a distinctive Pentecostal hermeneutic is of great value to this thesis, for as has been shown, today's youth are open to, and searching for, a God who reveals himself in the supernatural.

As was shown in chapter five, there is a demonstrable shift in secular society from the precepts of Modernity to Postmodernity, acutely felt in the younger generations who most readily accept change. Should Pentecostals recognize that a distinctively Pentecostal approach to Scripture is needed in this hour, Archer's proposals are an important step in ensuring that the Pentecostal interpretation of Scripture will remain both relevant and accurate in the coming

years. Thus, to Archer's work, and the possibilities of a distinctive Pentecostal hermeneutical approach, we now turn in chapter six.

## CHAPTER VI

### PENTECOSTAL HERMENEUTICS FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST CENTURY: A PROPOSAL BY KENNETH ARCHER

The current hermeneutical approach of most academic Pentecostals has been to embrace Modern assumptions and practices about hermeneutics from an Evangelical perspective. I believe this practice will only continue to transform Pentecostals into mainstream neo-fundamentalists, undermining Pentecostal identity and practice.<sup>373</sup>

Today, some Pentecostals attempt to express themselves with an Evangelical and modernistic hermeneutic (the Historical Critical methods). Yet if Pentecostalism desires to continue its missionary objective while keeping in tune with its early ethos, it must move beyond Modernity.

In other words, a Pentecostal hermeneutical strategy is needed which rejects the quest for a past determinate meaning of the author and embraces the reality that interpretation involves both the discovery of meaning and the creation of meaning.

A Pentecostal hermeneutical strategy should attempt to continue to forge an alternative path that neither entirely accepts the pluralistic relativism of Postmodernism nor entirely affirms the objectivism of Modernism – a pathway that began to be forged in early Pentecostalism.<sup>374</sup>

Kenneth Archer

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<sup>373</sup> Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 3.

<sup>374</sup> Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 146, 147, 153.

## 6.1 INTRODUCTION

What of Pentecostal hermeneutics since the debate between Gordon Fee and Pentecostal scholars? The issue has received limited attention since the conclusion of the debate in the early 1990s. In 1993 an issue of *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies*, was devoted entirely to the topic of Pentecostal Hermeneutics<sup>375</sup>, as was the May 2000 issue of *The Spirit and Church*.<sup>376</sup> During that time, various journals have printed articles dealing with Pentecostal hermeneutics,<sup>377</sup> but few have outlined a way forward or proposed a new hermeneutical approach for Pentecostals.

The question then remains, "Do Pentecostals need a distinct hermeneutic to establish firmly their beliefs and practices in Scripture?"<sup>378</sup> In modern Pentecostalism, the majority of the dialogue among Pentecostal scholars concerns whether there actually exists, or should exist, a distinct Pentecostal hermeneutic. Some, such as Robert Menzies, suggest that Pentecostalism has little need of a unique hermeneutic; Pentecostal distinctive doctrines can be derived from Scripture using commonly accepted Evangelical hermeneutical

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<sup>375</sup> *Pneuma* has brought Pentecostal hermeneutics to the fore more than any other publication. Between 1979 and 1994, *Pneuma* published seventeen articles on hermeneutics in its first sixteen volumes.

<sup>376</sup> *Pneuma* 15.2 (Fall 1993); *The Spirit and Church* 2.1 (May 2000).

<sup>377</sup> See for example: Veli-Matti Karkkainen, "Pentecostal Hermeneutics in the Making: On the Way from Fundamentalism to Postmodernism," *Journal of the European Theological Association* Vol. XVIII (1998); Robert O. Baker, "Pentecostal Bible Reading: Toward a Model of Reading for the Formation of Christian Affections," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 7 (1995); Archer, "Pentecostal Hermeneutics: Retrospect and Prospect"; Malcolm R. Brubaker, "Postmodernism and Pentecostals: A Case Study of Evangelical Hermeneutics", *Evangelical Journal* 15:1 (Spring 1997); John Christopher Thomas, "Women, Pentecostals, and the Bible: An Experiment in Pentecostal Hermeneutics," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 5 (1994).

<sup>378</sup> Archer, "Pentecostal Hermeneutics," 74.

methodology. Others, such as Howard Ervin, contend that the Pentecostal emphasis upon the Spirit produces a pneumatological hermeneutic resulting in theological distinctives concerning the Spirit's role in the life of the Church and individual believers.

One who concurs with the latter is Kenneth Archer, Associate Professor of Theology at the Church of God Theological Seminary, in Cleveland, Tennessee. Originally submitted as a PhD dissertation to the University of St. Andrews, Scotland, Dr. Archer's book, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic for the Twenty-First Century*, was released in 2004 as volume 28 in the *Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplementary Series*. In this work, Archer presents both a history of Pentecostal hermeneutics, as well as proposes a new hermeneutical system for Pentecostals of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. Due to the applicable nature of this work to our present study, and the scarcity of other similar proposals, this chapter will examine Archer's work as it sheds light on possible solutions for Pentecostal hermeneutics in this century. An overview of this work will be presented in detail, enabling the reader to accurately follow the in-depth analysis of the hermeneutic prescribed, concluding with thoughts on the contribution of this study to Pentecostal hermeneutics of the future.

It will be seen that Archer's work in Pentecostal hermeneutics is significant both for Pentecostals and this study, as effort is made to move beyond the acceptance of the Historical – Critical method. If Archer's approach to hermeneutics for Pentecostals is a valid enterprise, then Pentecostals may look forward to engaging the Scriptures in a manner methodologically different from

Evangelicals as a whole – yet more in line with their own traditions. Pentecostals may reclaim their hermeneutical roots and once again interpret Scripture in a manner other than that dictated by Modernity.

## **6.2 INTRODUCTION TO ARCHER'S BOOK**

The introductory chapter of this book details the typical remarks one would expect to find at the beginning of such a work, including focus and limitation of study, review of flow of argument, and interestingly, a section entitled “My Personal Hermeneutical Journey: Traveling through the First Naïveté and into the second Naïveté.” In these pages, Archer details his personal “story”, a theme which finds frequent use through this book. Following his conversion experience and throughout his academic career, the author notes: “...I eventually crossed the desert of sceptical (Modern and/or Postmodern) criticism. I had journeyed through the wilderness of the first naïveté (both precritical and then modernistic scientific Biblicism) and entered into the ‘second naïveté’.”<sup>379</sup> This “crossing of the wilderness” sets the stage for the journey of this book that is to follow.

## **6.3 CHAPTER ONE**

### **6.3.1 Defining Pentecostalism**

The goal of Chapter One of this book is to define Pentecostalism, noted in the title as “A Diverse and Paradoxical Endeavor.” After surveying Pentecostalism’s well-established roots in both Topeka, Kansas, and the Azusa

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<sup>379</sup> Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 7.

Street Mission in Los Angeles, Archer moves into the Social and Theological Influences upon the Pentecostal movement. Beginning with the emphasis on emotionalism found within Revivalism, the author notes the tremendous importance this movement played in emphasizing the necessity of a personal conscious conversion experience. As with all of the Evangelical denominations, Pentecostals take the need for a conversion experience most seriously. In addition, early Pentecostals were profoundly impacted by the various Holiness movements<sup>380</sup> which figured so prominently into the Western religious landscape of the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. With their Holiness brethren, Pentecostals firmly believed in a second crisis experience of faith, following conversion, an experience of sanctification, in which the heart and life were cleansed and made holy by divine transformation. As children not of Presbyterian thought, but of Wesleyan thinking, Pentecostals joined with the Holiness movement in protesting the "...evils of Modernity and the cold cerebral Christianity of the mainline Protestant denominations."<sup>381</sup>

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<sup>380</sup> Archer notes that respected scholars of Pentecostalism Donald Dayton, Vinson Synan, and Robert Anderson each view Pentecostalism as having risen out of the Wesleyan/Holiness movements of the late nineteenth century. See Donald Dayton, "The Limits of Evangelicalism: The Pentecostal Tradition," in *The Variety of American Evangelicalism*, ed. D.W. Dayton and R.K. Johnston (Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 1991), 36-56; idem, *The Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1987); Vinson Synan, *The Holiness-Pentecostal movement in the United States* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971); and Robert M. Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1979).

<sup>381</sup> Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 16. See also Harvey Cox, *Fire From Heaven*, 75.

### 6.3.2 The Impact of Modernity Upon Pentecostalism

Further, Archer examines the impact of Modernity upon traditional Christianity, and Pentecostalism in particular, noting 1) Evolutionary theory diminished both the supernatural and personal aspects of God; 2) Higher Criticism undermined the authority of Scripture; and 3) Comparative religion studies which relativized Christianity in comparison to other world religions.<sup>382</sup> As has been well-established, Pentecostalism strongly protested the secularizing influence of Modernity upon Christianity, and the spiritually sterile conditions the wedding of the two created. Mark Noll agrees: "...an ardent desire for the unmediated experience of the Holy Spirit was ... a...universal characteristic of those who became Pentecostals..."<sup>383</sup> Melvin Dieter declares that Pentecostals sought a personal experience of the Spirit's "direct, divine, incontrovertible intervention which did not rely on the intellect or feeling but on a sign of the presence of the Holy Ghost which both the individual experiencing it and all who were looking on would know that 'the work had been done'".<sup>384</sup> Archer states:

In sum, 'Pentecostalism' emerged as an identifiable Christian restorational revivalistic movement within the first decade of the twentieth century. The major theological themes of renewal held by Holiness movements (Wesleyan and Keswickian) were absorbed and synthesized into the 'Full Gospel message', which by 1919 became entirely identified with the Pentecostals...The

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<sup>382</sup> Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 17.

<sup>383</sup> *A History of Christianity in the United States and Canada* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 387.

<sup>384</sup> Melvin E. Dieter, "The Wesleyan/Holiness and Pentecostal Movements: Commonalities, Confrontation, and Dialogue" (paper presented to the annual meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Wilmore, KY: November 10-12, 1988), 18.

Pentecostals' social location was predominantly from the lower social and economic strata of American society. Yet...the most universal characteristic of early Pentecostals was their passionate desire for an unmediated experience with the Holy Spirit...they saw themselves as scripturally sound and at odds with both Liberal theology and Protestant orthodoxy. The Pentecostal movement was a protest both against Modernity and against mainline Christianity.<sup>385</sup>

### 6.3.3 The Early Pentecostal Worldview

Archer continues this chapter by arguing against the Social Deprivation theory put forward by Robert M. Anderson and others as a means of explaining the incredible growth and success of Pentecostalism.<sup>386</sup> Though early Pentecostals did come predominantly from the lower social positions of society, Archer does not believe this theory adequately explains the tremendous growth of Pentecostalism, but rather “reduces the early Pentecostals’ quest for a deeper spiritual walk with Jesus as a personal weakness rather than a serious faith claim.”<sup>387</sup> He continues:

Pentecostals were and continue to be motivated by the ‘Full Gospel message’, which is in direct opposition to Modernity’s conception of reality (the established order of society). People (predominantly Holiness Christians) were attracted to Pentecostalism because of its seemingly scriptural message and supernatural signs. Pentecostalism was not just a reinterpretation of the ‘old time religion’. Pentecostal celebrative worship services, with tongues, trances, exorcisms, dancing, and healings, were transforming activities of commitment to a new movement, rather than simply attempting to preserve old ways. The Full Gospel message was

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<sup>385</sup> Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 22.

<sup>386</sup> See R. M. Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited: The Making of American Pentecostalism* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1979).

<sup>387</sup> Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 24.

birthed as marginalized Christian peoples from the Anglo and African slave Holiness communities read Scripture with revivalistic restorative lenses. Thus, Pentecostalism originated due to the logical coherence of the Five/Four Fold Pentecostal message validated by the supernatural signs amongst the community and in direct opposition to the predominate worldview of Modernity. It was the collision of Scripture, signs (Spirit), and societal worldviews that caused and continues to cause the spread of the movement motivated by the passionate desire for an unmediated experiential encounter with Jesus.<sup>388</sup>

Chapter one concludes with a discussion concerning the early Pentecostal worldview. As has been shown, early Pentecostal belief and attitude clashed strongly with the prevailing Modernistic outlook of the times, both in secular society, and in cessationist Christianity. Archer argues, however, that Pentecostalism should not be characterized as “pre-Modern”, for it was born in the Modern age, and though challenging many Modern assumptions, still used Modern language and belief when necessary (Pentecostals insisted, for example, on an audible, clear sign of the Spirit’s presence).

‘Paramodern’ would be a better way to classify early Pentecostalism. This concept captures the fact that Pentecostalism emerged within Modernity...yet existed on the fringes of Modernity...by its emphasis on physical evidence for the Spirit’s presence – a modernistic slant on scientific experimentation language....The Pentecostal movement began as a Paramodern movement protesting Modernity and cessationist Christianity.<sup>389</sup>

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<sup>388</sup> Ibid., 28.

<sup>389</sup> Ibid., 33.

## 6.4 CHAPTER TWO

### 6.4.1 The Hermeneutical Context of the Early Pentecostals.

Chapter Two describes the hermeneutical context of early Pentecostals, by first examining the historical context from which rose the Fundamentalist / Modernist debate of Scriptural interpretation. In the first section, *Common Sense Realism: The Dominant Hermeneutical Context of the Early-Nineteenth Century*, Archer argues that the impact of German Higher Criticism and the “new science” was significant in terms of biblical interpretation throughout America in particular, quickly dividing Evangelical scholars from their more liberal counterparts. Furthering the work of Mark Noll, Robert Funk, and others, Archer maintains that “The new scientific model of scholarship encouraged the ‘...rapid professionalization’ of biblical scholars, which required them to become ‘specialized’ and accountable to their ‘academic peers’ instead of the Christian communities to which they once belonged.”<sup>390</sup> Evangelical membership in the faculties of America’s universities fell sharply as the Modern University rose to prominence in the United States.

Prior to this paradigm shift, most Americans (and particularly Protestants) adhered to the tenets of Common Sense Realism and believed that one could look upon the evidence clearly provided in Scripture, and from this, determine the ‘facts’ and then classify these facts. Archer quotes A. T. Peirson, a premillennial

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<sup>390</sup> Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 36. See also R.W. Funk, “The Watershed of the American Biblical Tradition: The Chicago School, First Phase, 1892-1920”, *Journal of Biblical Literature* 96 (1976); and Mark Noll, *Between Faith and Culture: Evangelicals, Scholarship, and the Bible in America*, 2d ed. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1991).

dispensationalist and anti-modernist, who in 1895 demonstrated the importance of the Baconian empirical method:

I like Biblical theology that does not start with superficial Aristotelian methods of reason, that does not begin with an hypothesis, and then wrap the facts and philosophy to fit the crook of our dogma, but a Baconian system, which first gathers the teachings of the word of God, and then seeks to deduce some general law upon which the facts can be arranged.<sup>391</sup>

For many years, the Common Sense Baconian system had preserved in American religious thought the concept that the common person, acknowledging the self-evident principles of the existence of God and veracity of His word, could discover the facts of Scripture as one could discover the facts of science. With the passing of the old Common Sense Consensus, Archer believes Protestants moved in one of three directions: Modernist or Liberals argued that the Bible's authority did not rest upon historical or scientific claims; rather, authenticity was found in personal experience. In the opposite direction, the "academically informed Fundamentalists" continued to reaffirm the veracity and authority of Scripture by appealing to the older scientific Baconian Common Sense model. For these Fundamentalists, 'Inerrancy' became the key, and much effort was put into establishing the historical veracity of the Scriptures.<sup>392</sup>

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<sup>391</sup> In Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 38, quoting 'The Coming of the Lord: The Doctrinal Center of the Bible,' in *Addresses on the Second Coming of the Lord: Delivered at the Prophetic Conference, Allegheny, PA, December 3-6, 1895* (Pittsburgh, PA: 1895), 82.

<sup>392</sup> Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 40.

### 6.4.2 The Third Route

In Archer's view, however, Pentecostals and Wesleyan Holiness believers forged a third route, affirming both the objective nature of Scripture and the importance of personal experience as a means to reaffirm the inspiration of Scripture. Scripture was inspired both in the sense of the historical document as well as a present experience of the Spirit through the Scriptures.<sup>393</sup> While both conservative groups looked with disdain upon the new science imposed upon their beloved scriptures by the Modernist liberals, a significant rift developed first between the Fundamentalists and Modernists, and only later between the Fundamentalists and Pentecostals.

While the Fundamentalists built their arguments on the foundation of Common Sense Realism, the Modernists sought Higher Criticism as their underlying base. "Both theological communities were 'modernistic', yet they came to antithetical conclusions about the authority and inspiration of Scripture."<sup>394</sup> Like the conservative Fundamentalists, Pentecostals relied on Common Sense reasoning and argued that Scripture was supernaturally inspired and preserved, and full of power to change individual's lives. Their concern, however, ran deeper than simply proving facts from the Bible treated as a scientific textbook; Pentecostals, like the liberals, sought to authenticate their Christianity via religious experience.

But unlike the liberals, who talked about 'religion of the heart' and experiencing God through the divine elements in the natural,

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<sup>393</sup> Ibid.

<sup>394</sup> Ibid., 63.

Pentecostals would point to the supernatural signs of divine intervention taking place in their worship services (tongues and healing). Hence, early Pentecostals were generating religious experience, whereas the Liberals were simply talking about it.

The Pentecostals said yes to both the authority of Scripture and the authority of experience....Pentecostalism's lived experience was colouring their understanding of Scripture and Scripture was shaping their lived experience.

Unfortunately, after the 1920s the Pentecostals would leave this more paramodern route and attempt to follow the modern path laid down by the Fundamentalists.<sup>395</sup>

## 6.5 CHAPTER THREE

### 6.5.1 Early Pentecostal Biblical Interpretation

Archer begins this chapter by examining the contemporary explanations of early Pentecostal hermeneutics, as given by several prominent Pentecostal scholars. The first, Russell P. Spittler, suggests that while Pentecostals and Fundamentalists differ significantly in terms of speaking in tongues and miracles in today's world, they differ little in their precritical, excessively literal approach to biblical interpretation. Archer disagrees, if only in part, stating that Spittler's analysis produces "too simplistic of a descriptive statement concerning the interpretive method."<sup>396</sup>

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<sup>395</sup> Ibid., 63 – 64.

<sup>396</sup> Ibid., 66. See Russell P. Spittler, "Are Pentecostals and Charismatics Fundamentalists? A Review of American Uses of these Categories," in Karla Poewe (ed.) *Christianity as a Global Culture* (Columbia, SC: The University of South Caroline Press, 1994), 103-16.

For Grant Wacker, Pentecostal interpretive methods arose primarily as a logical extension of their 'ahistorical outlook', a term Wacker uses to suggest Pentecostalism's belief that those writing Scripture were largely uninfluenced by their historical surroundings. Neither should one suppose that the years of history since the writing of the scriptures has contributed to the better understanding of Holy Writ. "In the mind of the typical convert...Scripture 'dropped from heaven as a sacred meteor'."<sup>397</sup> Interpretation was thus wooden at best, and holds "the conviction that exegesis is done best when it is as rigidly literal as credibility can stand."<sup>398</sup> "In other words, Pentecostals were not like classical Protestants or Fundamentalists when it came to interpreting the Bible. Classical Protestants and Fundamentalists read the Bible as a past inspired revelatory document, but the Pentecostals read the Bible as a presently inspired story."<sup>399</sup> On the whole, however, Archer disagrees with Wacker's characterization of the Pentecostal approach as ahistorical, noting "it does not adequately express the Pentecostal interpretive stance."<sup>400</sup> Rather, he believes Pentecostals interpreted Scripture in a transhistorical manner simply because they:

...believed Scripture inherently possessed the ability to speak meaningfully in different social settings than the one from which it originated. The Pentecostal reading did confuse biblical narrative with modernistic historiography...they were convinced that the

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<sup>397</sup> Wacker, "Functions of Faith in Primitive Pentecostalism", in *Harvard Theological Review* 77 (1984), quoting Spittler, "Scripture and the Theological Enterprise", 63.

<sup>398</sup> Wacker, "Functions of Faith", 365.

<sup>399</sup> Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 69.

<sup>400</sup> *Ibid.*, 70.

biblical stories happened just the way they were told and could happen again.<sup>401</sup>

Archer concludes this section by noting the position of Donald Dayton and David Reed, who have described the Pentecostal tendency towards a “subjectivizing hermeneutic”, and a “pietistic hermeneutic” which combined religious experience with biblical interpretation.<sup>402</sup> Indeed, Archer agrees with the notion that there is a “pietistic, experiential, heartfelt approach to interpretation” among Pentecostals, but “strongly disagrees” that this constitutes a subjectivism which possibly contaminates objective truth.<sup>403</sup>

### 6.5.2 The Bible Reading Method

Archer concludes chapter three with a lengthy section entitled “The Bible Reading Method: An Alternative Explanation”. Here, Archer presents a “descriptive analysis of the interpretive method used by first generation Pentecostals”. This is accomplished by examining a variety of early Pentecostal writings, teachings, and sermons, focusing upon Spirit-baptism with the evidence of *glossolalia*, and the Oneness issue.<sup>404</sup> He notes:

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<sup>401</sup> Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 70.

<sup>402</sup> Ibid., 71, quoting Dayton, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism*, 23, and David A. Reed, “Origins and Development of the Theology of Oneness Pentecostalism in the United States” (Ph.D. diss., Boston University, 1978), 117.

<sup>403</sup> Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 72.

<sup>404</sup> For the purposes of this paper, we will summarize Archer’s look at Spirit-baptism as it provides proof of the Bible Reading Method. His examination of Oneness Pentecostals follows a similar approach, and comes to the same conclusions.

The Bible Reading Method was an inductive and deductive commonsensical method, which required all of the ‘biblical data’ on particular topic to be gathered and then harmonized. Once this was accomplished, it could be formatted into a cohesive synthesis from a restorative revivalistic perspective.<sup>405</sup>

In terms of Spirit-baptism, Archer draws first upon Frank Ewart’s historiography of Pentecostalism. Concerning the hermeneutical approach of early Pentecostals, Ewart wrote: “Their adopted method was to select a subject, find all the references on it, and present to the class a scriptural summary of what the Bible had to say about the theme.”<sup>406</sup> As Archer rightly observes, this is perhaps the closest extant summary of the early Pentecostal hermeneutical approach. The oft-quoted account of Charles Fox Parham suggests the same:

Having heard so many different religious bodies claim different proofs as evidence of their having a Pentecostal baptism, I set the students at work studying out diligently what was the Bible evidence of the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, that we might go before the world with something that was indisputable because it tallied absolutely with the Word.<sup>407</sup>

As Parham’s sister later confirmed, his students had no text but the Bible, and no method but to observe everything the Word had to say on a particular subject, and from there, with the help of the Holy Spirit, determine Truth.<sup>408</sup> Archer also traces the interpretive path of William J. Seymour, pastor of Azusa Street

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<sup>405</sup> Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 91.

<sup>406</sup> Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 75, quoting Frank J. Ewart, *The Phenomenon of Pentecost*, rev. ed. (Hazelwood, MO: Word Aflame Press, 1975), 60.

<sup>407</sup> Sarah Parham, *The Life of Charles F. Parham: Founder of the Apostolic Faith Movement* (Joplin, MO: Hunter Publishing Company, 1930; reprint, 1969), 52.

<sup>408</sup> Sarah Parham, “Earnestly Contend for the Faith Once Delivered to the Saints”, in *Selected Sermons of the Late Charles F. Parham, Sarah E. Parham: Co-Founders of the Original Apostolic Faith Movement*, Robert L. Parham, comp. (Baxter Springs, KS: Apostolic Faith Bible College, 1941), 82.

Mission. As with other early Pentecostals, Seymour did not summarize his interpretive method; it may be deduced however, from his explanation of Spirit-baptism within the pages of *The Apostolic Faith*. Here he simply traces the theme of Spirit-baptism through the pages of Acts (chapters 2, 8, 10, and 19), then summarizes the findings into the doctrines of Subsequence and Initial Evidence.<sup>409</sup> Again, this approach testifies to the widespread use of the *Bible Reading Method* among the earliest Pentecostals.

## 6.6 CHAPTER FOUR

### 6.6.1 Pentecostal Story -The Hermeneutical Filter

In this chapter, Archer examines the chief distinguishing feature of the Pentecostal use of the Bible Reading Method from that of their Holiness cousins. “What distinguished the early Pentecostal Bible Reading Method from the holiness folk was not a different interpretive method, but a ‘*distinct narrative*’...The Pentecostal hermeneutical strategy at the foundational interpretive level was a unique story.”<sup>410</sup> Drawing on the work of George Aichele,<sup>411</sup> Harry S. Stout,<sup>412</sup> Anthony Thiselton<sup>413</sup> and others, Archer recognizes

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<sup>409</sup> Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 78, quoting *The Apostolic Faith*, 1.2. As Archer concludes this section, he demonstrates that R.A. Torrey held the same approach to Scripture, while arriving at a different conclusion regarding Initial Evidence.

<sup>410</sup> Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 94.

<sup>411</sup> George Aichele, *et al.*, *The Postmodern Bible: The Bible and Culture Collective* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1995), 1-8.

<sup>412</sup> Harry S. Stout, “Theological Commitment and American Religious History,” *Theological Education* (Spring, 1989), 44-59.

the link between the social cultural location of the individual and their interpretive method. “Reading involves using both the information that is present on the written page, as well as the information we already have in our minds.”<sup>414</sup>

Following Alasdair MacIntyre, Archer asserts that “the interpretive practices of a community are always dependant on the community’s narrative tradition.”<sup>415</sup> For Archer,

The Pentecostal community is a part of the larger Christian community, and yet exists as a distinct coherent narrative tradition within Christianity. The Pentecostal community or a collection of communities is bound together by their ‘shared charismatic experiences’ and ‘shared story’. The Pentecostal narrative tradition attempts to embody the Christian metanarrative.<sup>416</sup> Yet because the Pentecostal community understands itself to be a restorationist movement, it has argued that it is the best representation of Christianity in the world today. This may sound triumphant, yet, the Pentecostals, like all restorational narrative traditions of Christianity, desire to be both an authentic continuation of New Testament Christianity and be a faithful representation of New Testament Christianity in the present societies in which it exists. Of course, the understanding of what was and should be New Testament Christianity is based upon a Pentecostal understanding, hence it reflects the narrative tradition of the community. Because Pentecostals are also a part of the broader Christian community, they must be concerned with the interpretation of its most authoritative text – the Bible. However, Pentecostals will engage Scripture and reality from their own community and narrative tradition.

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<sup>413</sup> Anthony C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics: The Theory and Practice of Transforming Bible Reading* (San Francisco: HarperCollins, 1992), 9.

<sup>414</sup> Jeff McQuillian, *The Literary Crisis: False Claims, Real Solutions* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1998), 16, quoted in Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 94.

<sup>415</sup> Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 96. See Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2d ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984).

<sup>416</sup> By metanarrative, Archer refers to a grand story by which human societies and their individual members live and organize their lives in meaningful ways. The Christian metanarrative refers to the general Christian story about the meaning of the world, the God who created it, and humanity’s place within it. Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 98, n.24.

The Pentecostal story is synonymous with the Pentecostal narrative tradition. The Pentecostal story is the primary hermeneutical context for the reading of Scripture, hence providing the context for the production of meaning. The Pentecostal narrative tradition provides the Pentecostals with an experiential, conceptual hermeneutical narrative that enables them to interpret Scripture and their experience of reality.<sup>417</sup>

### 6.6.2 The Latter Rain

Determining the nature of the Pentecostal story is the task of chapter four. The stated goal here is to demonstrate the significant impact of the Latter Rain movement upon early Pentecostalism, and how this in turn tied into the Pentecostal identity as a restorationist movement. William D. Faupel's work on Pentecostalism<sup>418</sup> is an important step in determining the Pentecostal story; indeed, Archer believes that Faupel has demonstrated that the Latter Rain movement provides the "primary organizational structure for the Pentecostal narrative tradition."<sup>419</sup>

Some of the earliest Pentecostals, such as G. Floyd Taylor<sup>420</sup>, relying on passages from the Old Testament<sup>421</sup> which speak of both a former and a latter

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<sup>417</sup> Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 98.

<sup>418</sup> William D. Faupel, *The Everlasting Gospel: The Significance of Eschatology in the Development of Pentecostal Thought*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplementary Series, eds. John Christopher Thomas, Rickie D. Moore, and Steven J. Land, no.10 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1996), esp.19-43.

<sup>419</sup> Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 100.

<sup>420</sup> Floyd Taylor, *The Spirit and the Bride* (n.p. n.d.), 90-99. This work is commonly thought to be dated c.1907.

rain, interpreted their present reception of the Spirit's outpouring in terms of the Latter Rain; the former rain occurred at Pentecost. This motif provided Pentecostals a framework by which they could interpret Scripture, and determine their place within the narrative of Scripture. Pentecostals saw themselves as the Latter Rain outpouring of God's spirit, enabling them to conclude the final great harvest of souls before the return of Christ.

Pentecostals...seized the 'Latter Rain' motif and utilized it as an apologetic explanation for the importance of their movement. The early rain was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the first-century Christians at Pentecost as recorded in Acts 2. The latter rain was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon saved and sanctified Christians at the turn of the century. The time in-between the early and latter rain was a time of drought caused by the 'great apostasy' of the Roman Catholic Church.

The biblical 'Latter Rain' motif became an important contribution to the Pentecostal story. The 'Latter Rain' motif enabled the Pentecostals to hold together the 'Full Gospel message' because it provided a coherent explanation for the restoration of the gifts, while also providing the primary organizational structure for their story. The Pentecostals became the people of the prophetically promised 'Latter Rain' which meant they had fully recovered not only the Apostolic faith, but also the Apostolic power, authority and practice.<sup>422</sup>

Archer argues that the work of Wesleyan Holiness leader John P. Brooks was clearly influential in early Pentecostalism. Brooks taught that the New Testament contained all the necessary instruction and information for Christian belief and polity. Denominational structures and creeds were not needed, nor

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<sup>421</sup> Deut. 11:10-15; Job 29:29; Prov. 16:15; Jer. 3:3, 5:24; Hos. 6:3; Zech. 10:1. Representative of these passages is Joel 2:23 "Be glad, then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the Latter Rain in the first month." (KJV)

<sup>422</sup> Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 102; also, 103-110 in which he describes the contribution of D.W. Myland to this motif. See also Faupel, *Everlasting Gospel*, 39.

were the traditions of the Church. “Brooks advocated that the real Christians must withdraw from all forms of organized Christianity and band together in local congregations in order to form the authentic church. The authentic church must be patterned after the true church as revealed in the New Testament.”<sup>423</sup> For Brooks and other non-cessationist holiness teachers, the fact that signs and wonders had ceased in the institutional church between the Apostolic and the current era was proof that the divine approval of God had been withdrawn, if only temporarily. These signs and wonders would return when the true Church once again sought the empowerment of the Holy Spirit. This framework became the standard explanation of the role of miracles and the gifts of the Spirit within Pentecostalism.

## **6.7 CHAPTER FIVE: CURRENT PENTECOSTAL HERMENEUTICAL CONCERNS**

This chapter begins with a summary of the essential themes of Pentecostalism, including Initial Evidence, belief in themselves as people of the “Latter Rain”, and an emphasis on supernatural manifestations and charismatic gifts within the worshipping community. Early Pentecostals were eschatological in their outlook, and opposed to the death grip of Modernity on the church.

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<sup>423</sup> John P. Brooks, *The Divine Church* (Columbia, MO: Herald, 1981), 283, quoted in Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 111.

### 6.7.1 The Modernization of Early Pentecostal Hermeneutics

The next section explores “The Modernization of the Early Pentecostal Hermeneutics”, and notes that as more Pentecostals became academically trained, increasing numbers

accepted the basic principles of Historical Criticism while rejecting the naturalistic worldview of Modernity...the historical-grammatical method became the primary method used by many Pentecostals...The Pentecostals moved from the margins into mainstream, from the Paramodern into the Modern. They embraced the modernistic foundations poured by the Enlightenment.<sup>424</sup>

Archer cites the plea by Gordon Anderson and other Pentecostal scholars<sup>425</sup> for Pentecostals to continue to adopt the historical-critical method of hermeneutics, the method used by other conservative Evangelicals. Overall, in Archer’s estimation, the view of Anderson and others have won the day: “As can be seen, Pentecostals have firmly embraced conservative, yet modernistic concerns about texts.”<sup>426</sup> This thesis would argue that while that is indeed true for Pentecostal scholars, it has not yet occurred fully in the Pentecostal pew. Thus, time is of the essence, for as go the scholars, so goes the movement.

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<sup>424</sup> Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 131.

<sup>425</sup> See Gordon L. Anderson, “Pentecostal Hermeneutics: Part 2,” *Paraclete* 28.2 (Spring 1994); also Gordon D. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis: A Handbook for Students and Pastors*, rev.ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1993). See also Bradley Truman Noel, “Gordon Fee’s Contribution to Contemporary Pentecostalism’s Theology of Baptism in the Holy Spirit.” (M.A. thesis, Acadia University, 1998.)

<sup>426</sup> Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 132.

### 6.7.2 A Distinctive Pentecostal Hermeneutic?

The bulk of chapter five concerns the current debate within Pentecostalism as to whether Pentecostal hermeneutics are simply a sub-group of Evangelical hermeneutics, or whether there ought to be a distinctly Pentecostal hermeneutic. Beginning with the debate as initiated outside the Pentecostal community, Archer reviews the critiques of Pentecostalism as begun by F. Dale Bruner, and James D.G. Dunn with books on the topic published in 1970.<sup>427</sup> Dunn has continued to dialogue with Pentecostals through the pages of *The Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, and has been a tremendous dialogue partner for Pentecostal theologians. Archer focuses upon the debate between Dunn and Robert Menzies, Assemblies of God educator and missionary.<sup>428</sup>

Of particular interest to this study is the fact that both Menzies and Dunn used the Historical-Critical method to argue whether or not Luke “separates outpouring of the Spirit on individuals from conversion initiation and see it as an

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<sup>427</sup> See J.D.G. Dunn, *Baptism in the Holy Spirit: A Re-examination of the New Testament Teaching on the Gift of the Spirit in Relation to Pentecostalism Today* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1970); and F. Dale Bruner, *A Theology of the Holy Spirit: The Pentecostal Experience and the New Testament Witness* (London: Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., 1970). Neither of these support the Pentecostal understanding of Subsequence and Initial Evidence, though Dunn is the more sympathetic.

<sup>428</sup> See J.D.G. Dunn, “Baptism in the Spirit: A Response to Pentecostal Scholarship on Luke-Acts,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 3 (1993); also R. Menzies, “Luke and the Spirit: A Reply to James Dunn,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 4 (1994). Other Pentecostal scholars have responded to Dunn’s challenge as well. He lists the following on p. 4: H.D Hunter, *Spirit-Baptism: A Pentecostal Alternative* (Lanham, MD: University Press of America, 1983); H. Ervin, *Conversion-Initiation and the Baptism in the Holy Spirit: An Engaging Critique of James D.G. Dunn’s Baptism in the Holy Spirit* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1984); R. Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1984); F.L. Arrington, *The Acts of the Apostles* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1988); J.B. Shelton, *Mighty in Word and Deed: The Role of the Holy Spirit in Luke-Acts* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1991); R.P. Menzies, *The Development of Early Christian Pneumatology with Special Reference to Luke-Acts* (Journal for the Study of the New Testament Supplementary Series, 54; Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1991).

empowering gift rather than a soteriological gift?”<sup>429</sup> As Archer correctly observes, Dunn answers, “no”, while Menzies argues, “yes”. As these authors debate whether or not a distinctive Lukan pneumatology even exists, what is apparent is that the commonality between them is their belief that the “meaning” is placed within a text by its author. This is significant for Archer, for it shows both Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal scholar alike, debating the key passages of Acts using exactly the same hermeneutical methods. This thesis has observed the same occurrence in our exploration of the debate between Gordon Fee and several Pentecostal scholars. Further examination of this discussion will take place in chapter seven.

## **6.8 CHAPTER SIX: A CONTEMPORARY PENTECOSTAL HERMENEUTICAL STRATEGY**

Archer concludes this work by suggesting his own narrative hermeneutical strategy. This strategy focuses upon the tridactic negotiation for meaning between the biblical text, the Holy Spirit, and the Pentecostal community, and is based loosely on the work of John Christopher Thomas as examined earlier, and again in chapter seven.

### **6.8.1 The Contribution of the Biblical Text**

Drawing on the work of Semiotic practitioner Umberto Eco, Archer demonstrates the important contributions of both the text and reader in the

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<sup>429</sup> Dunn, “Baptism in the Holy Spirit,” 6 and R. Menzies, “Luke and the Spirit,” 117.

making of meaning. Eco argues that the avoidance of improper interpretation of a text may be located within sensitivity to the intention of the text itself, while in no way collapsing the intention of the text back into the intention of the author.<sup>430</sup> Archer notes that Eco believes the intention of the author is “very difficult to find out and frequently irrelevant for the interpretation of a text.”<sup>431</sup> For Archer, this is an important stance, for “Pentecostals would not want simply to produce meaning in a manner that places the community over and against the text but instead allow the text to be a full fledged participant in the making of meaning”.<sup>432</sup>

Critical readers must be sensitive to the lexical system of the language of the text, as well as the genre of the written text, which will aid the reader in proper interpretation.

The early Pentecostals attempted to interpret “Scripture in light of Scripture”, hence emphasizing the world of the text as the means to understanding Scripture. They appreciated the cultural context in which a text was generated, thus they would look to commentaries to inform their understanding, but this was not the Historical Critical method. Because of this, a text centered approach from a Semiotic perspective is not only congenial to early Pentecostals, but it also reinforces the contemporary hermeneutical concern for a critical interpretive strategy that allows for the participation of the reader in the making of meaning. Therefore a Semiotic interpretive strategy will be the most conducive for Pentecostals because it allows for an open interdependent dialectic interaction between the text and the reading community in the making of meaning.<sup>433</sup>

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<sup>430</sup> Umberto Eco *et al.*, *Interpretation and Overinterpretation*, ed. Stefan Collini (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 25.

<sup>431</sup> Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 160, quoting Eco, *Overinterpretation*, 30.

<sup>432</sup> *Ibid.*, 160-161.

<sup>433</sup> *Ibid.*, 162-163.

### 6.8.2 The Contribution of the Pentecostal Community

Foremost in the section is the proposal that the Pentecostal hermeneut must be “entrenched” within a Pentecostal community. He or she must embrace the Pentecostal story, and be connected to the Central Narrative Convictions of Pentecostalism. One will need to be recognized as a Pentecostal by those within the community, and acknowledge that their identity has been shaped and formed by participation in this community. As the community is a key part of the interpretive process, the interpreter must be a willing participant in the Pentecostal story. “The community actively participates in the Pentecostal hermeneutical strategy not passively but actively through discussion, testimony, and charismatic gifts.”<sup>434</sup>

Archer gives four reasons why he believes the literary method of choice for Pentecostal is a Narrative Critical approach. 1) Traditional Historical Critical methods have not paid sufficient attention to the primary literary genre of Scripture, which is narratives; 2) Narrative Criticism is a text-centered approach that attempts to understand the biblical text on its own terms; the emphasis does not fall upon the world behind the text, but on the story world of the text itself; 3) A Narrative Critical approach benefits the Christian communities’ understanding and use of the Bible as Holy Scripture, by using the Bible as the foundational story for belief and practice; and 4) Narrative Criticism insists on the role of the reader in the creation of meaning.<sup>435</sup>

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<sup>434</sup> Ibid., 165.

<sup>435</sup> Ibid., 166-171.

In short, this Pentecostal hermeneutical strategy will embrace a modified Narrative critical methodology while simultaneously affirming the Pentecostal community as the arena for the making of meaning. Interpretation is the result of a creative transaction of meaning, and this meaning is always done from the particular context of an actual reader in community.

The contemporary Pentecostal community needs to recapture the promise of God and what it means to live on the margins in relationship to Jesus as expressed through the Full Gospel. This is a praxis-oriented approach that encourages a pragmatic constraint on the interpretation. If the interpretation does not encourage or motivate the listeners to experience transformation through participating in God's eschatological community then it should be rejected.<sup>436</sup>

### **6.8.3 The Contribution of the Holy Spirit**

As taught by Christ, particularly in chapters 13-17 of John's Gospel, the role of the Holy Spirit is to teach the Christian community, and guide them in a clear understanding of Scripture's meaning for the present. The community must therefore commit themselves to discerning the Spirit's voice as he speaks, guides and directs. "The Christian community provides the dynamic context in which the Spirit is actively invited to participate because without the Holy Spirit's participation there is no authentic Christian community."<sup>437</sup> Because Pentecostals recognize the Spirit's work upon all of humanity, however, they will not limit his speaking to within the community only, but discern what the Spirit is saying to them from outside their community, both through other Christian groups, and Pentecostals worldwide. In terms of interpretation, Pentecostals

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<sup>436</sup> Ibid., 181-182.

<sup>437</sup> Ibid., 183.

invite the Holy Spirit to be involved in the hermeneutical process, and then dedicate themselves to properly discerning his voice. “The goal of the community is to come to an understanding of what the Spirit is saying presently to the community in and through the biblical text(s) and in and through their cooperate experiences of the Holy Spirit.”<sup>438</sup>

Aware that the high level of reader-response called for in this hermeneutical model would generate queries regarding proper validation of constructed meaning, Archer concludes his work by addressing the testing process for the validation of meaning. Following the lead of Willard Swartley<sup>439</sup>, Archer lists four factors that the validation of meaning must address: 1) The community must take into consideration the wider church body and the history of doctrinal development as it assesses the validation of the meaning; 2) The meaning must be validated through the “praxis of faith”. The concern here is whether the meaning can be embraced and lived out within the community. Swartley notes that while being livable does not make meaning correct, if it is not livable it is likely not correct either.<sup>440</sup> 3) The validity of interpretation should be subjected to cross-cultural validation. This becomes especially important as Pentecostals attempt to understand Scripture on political, social, and economic issues; and 4) The validation of meaning should be open to the scrutiny of academic communities both Christian and non-Christian. As the Christian

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<sup>438</sup> Ibid., 185.

<sup>439</sup> See Willard Swartley, *Slavery, Sabbath, War and Women* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1983).

<sup>440</sup> Ibid., 179.

community understands the Bible to historically revealed claims of absolute truth, it must be open to public scrutiny.<sup>441</sup>

Pentecostals require a hermeneutical strategy that involves an interdependent tridactic dialogue between Scripture, the Spirit and community resulting in a creative negotiated meaning... This author has outlined a critical contemporary Pentecostal hermeneutical strategy that takes place through the interdependent dialogical and dialectic process. The readers in community, the story world of the text, and the leading of the Holy Spirit are participants in the tridactic negotiation for meaning.<sup>442</sup>

#### **6.8.4 Contributions of this study to current Pentecostal hermeneutics**

Archer lists five contributions of his study to the Pentecostal hermeneutical debates. 1) The study argues that Pentecostals were a Paramodern movement, existing neither as pre-Modern or Modern. 2) The study readdresses the interpretive method of early Pentecostals as the Bible Reading Method, and not the more restrictive literalistic fundamentalist interpretive method often assumed of Pentecostal hermeneutics; 3) The study places substantial emphasis on the role of the community in the hermeneutical process, outlining the Central Narrative Convictions of Pentecostalism, and demonstrating how essential these are to the interpretive process of Pentecostals; 4) In uncovering the Central Narrative Convictions of early Pentecostalism, Archer has dealt significantly with early Pentecostal identity as well; and 5) The study has presented a “contemporary and post-critical hermeneutical strategy which attempts to move

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<sup>441</sup> Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 189-191.

<sup>442</sup> *Ibid.*, 191.

the Pentecostal academic community beyond the present impasse created by Modernity.”<sup>443</sup>

## 6.9 EVALUATION<sup>444</sup> AND CONCLUSION

In the opinion of this author, Archer has succeeded in his stated goals. “Paramodern” is a useful term for understanding the place of early Pentecostals relative to Modern trends and thinking. While intentionally reactive to the perceived approach of Modernity to faith and the scriptures, Pentecostalism nonetheless arose from within the Modern world. One need only explore the Pentecostal insistence upon *glossolalia* as the Bible “proof” of Spirit-baptism to recognize from whence the earliest Pentecostals arose, for the concept of proof itself is more Modern than Postmodern. Many Postmoderns would be content with experience as an end unto itself, without the need to explicate proof from the experience.

Archer has correctly traced the roots of Pentecostalism both to a work of the Holy Spirit and to a reaction against the excessively rationalistic Protestantism of the era, rejecting many of the secular definitions applied by a variety of historians. Pentecostals celebrated the place of experience within faith, and offered those tired of Christian rationalism a welcome respite, and a holistic approach to life and faith. Drawing from the personal testimonies of

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<sup>443</sup> Ibid., 194-196.

<sup>444</sup> The interested reader may also consult several book reviews of Archer’s work. See Paul Elbert, review of *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic for the Twenty-First Century*, by Kenneth J. Archer, *Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies* 9:2 (July 2006): 320-328; and Jason E. Vickers, review of *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic for the Twenty-First Century*, by Kenneth J. Archer, *Pneuma* 28:2 (Fall 2006): 384-386.

early Pentecostals, Archer has convincingly demonstrated the Pentecostal acceptance of the Latter Rain motif, and their understanding of the supernatural occurrences in their midst as divine confirmation of their historic role in Christian history. Noteworthy for this thesis is Archer's success in exposing Pentecostalism's rejection of the overly rationalistic and cessationistic presuppositions traditionally applied to both narrative discourse and didactic portions of the New Testament.

The thesis joins with Archer in lamenting the Pentecostal modification of their initial understanding of Scripture as both authoritative and trustworthy to include "inerrant" upon their joining the National Association of Evangelicals in the 1940s. Pentecostals did not require the language of inerrancy to determine the authority of Scripture. As Paul Lewis has noted, Pentecostal belief in the authority of Scripture was not found in cognitive constructs alone, but was largely determined by the Pentecostals' immediate experience of God in and through the text. Lewis observes:

It is possible to note that for Pentecostals there is a concomitant relationship between Pentecostal experience and the Bible. Pentecostal experience informs one's understanding of the text; yet the text testifies of the same experience among the early church and the apostles. However, the authenticity of the Scriptures is *a posteriori* to Pentecostals. Evangelical renderings of the Bible is likewise *a posteriori*. The major distinction is that for Evangelicals the authority of the Scripture is cognitively derived and learned, whereas Pentecostals by nature assume the authority of Scripture. Therefore, in a sense, for Pentecostals the authority of the Scripture is self-evident (i.e., the text testifies to the experience which in turn verifies the veracity of the text), while for many Evangelicals the authority of the Bible is logically derived.<sup>445</sup>

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<sup>445</sup> Lewis, "Pentecostal Epistemology," 110-111. Also see Scott A. Ellington, "Pentecostalism and the Authority of Scripture," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 9 (1996): 16-38.

Archer notes, “Inspiration had to be worded in the language of ‘verbal inspiration’ and embrace inerrancy. Hence the Pentecostals attempted to move away from the paramodern and embrace the Modern. Pentecostals accepted the foundations of Modernity and began immersing themselves in the language and concerns of modernistic thought...The Pentecostals simply had to be educated into the modernistic thought and argument of the more ‘intellectual’ tradition.”<sup>446</sup> In the view of this thesis, the move towards accepting inerrancy was not in and of itself the genesis of the challenge that persists to this day, but rather the acceptance of the Modernistic hermeneutical baggage that accompanied it. Still, the reception of inerrancy as a descriptive for Scripture served to emaciate early Pentecostalism’s understanding of Scripture as given by God for orthopraxy first, and orthodoxy, second. In support of this conclusion, Paul Elbert notes:

In considering the New Testament writers themselves, one does not get the impression that they wrote first and foremost just to convey propositional truth, but to encourage faith-response. Pressing on from the concepts of truth and reliability of Scriptures to that of “inerrancy” seems to have just emphasized the correctness of Protestant doctrines, those articulated and unarticulated as well, rather than to enhance the thoughtful study of Scripture on its own terms. In any case, as far as Pentecostals are concerned, perhaps results of this evangelistically suppressing and shame-enhancing union with “inerrancy” and its rationalistically geared overtones may be observable today in the marginalizing of testimony, tarrying, and in the propensity of some to be led more by their own acquisition of academic history than by dreams, visions, and the Holy Spirit.<sup>447</sup>

Archer’s exploration of the Bible Reading Method is constructive, for it conclusively summarizes the early Pentecostal approach to interpreting

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<sup>446</sup> Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 64.

<sup>447</sup> Elbert, review of *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 321-322.

Scripture. More substantive than simple “proof-texting”, Pentecostals relied heavily upon the Holy Spirit for illumination, and the community for guidance, as they used deductive and inductive reasoning skills to bring scriptural teaching to reality in the lives of believers. While we are not arguing that Pentecostals today should entirely replicate the hermeneutical methods of their forbearers, this thesis does conclude that this approach allowed Pentecostals to unite the biblical past with the present, in a manner often contradictory to traditional Protestant creeds and dogma. Early Pentecostals viewed the supernatural occurrences found within Scripture as a pattern for that which ought to occur today; we would suggest this view continues to be essential to the present survival and growth of the movement.

Further, the Pentecostal acceptance of narratives is perhaps more important today than in early Pentecostal history, for the movement is facing a generation that values the human story. Elbert notes, “Archer suggests that an intuitive grasp of narrative features is probably facilitated among people who have a reliance on oral communication and who listen to how stories are told, perhaps being culturally similar to hearers in the first century to whom New Testament documents were read (and to such hearers in the majority of the world today).”<sup>448</sup> This thesis concurs. The use and acceptance of narratives by Pentecostals, and their reliance upon personal testimony, are key to effectively communicating the message of Pentecostalism to the youngest generations of Western youth.

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<sup>448</sup> Elbert, review of *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 324.

Archer has also attempted a penetrating critique of the interpretive agenda of five-hundred years of Protestant scholastic reflection, which he has termed the “Evangelical Historical Critical Method”. The work of I. Howard Marshall<sup>449</sup> and others notwithstanding, Protestants have long viewed Luke through Pauline lenses. Archer successfully demonstrates the natural incompatibility of the wholesale acceptance of Evangelical hermeneutics by Pentecostalism with their core values. Archer’s proposals allow Luke to speak for Luke, deemphasizing the overwhelming attention paid to authorial intent by Evangelical hermeneutics, and promoting “the reality that interpretation involves both discovery and creation of meaning for the present”.<sup>450</sup> For the Postmodern thinker, Archers’ proposal resonates deeply, for the text of Scripture must not only be understood academically, but experienced in reality.

Finally, Archer’s tridactic proposal for a new Pentecostal hermeneutic is well suited to meet the needs of younger generations. His emphasis on the role of the community and the work of the Spirit confirms what young Postmodern thinkers already believe: scriptural interpretation should occur more among the community than by individuals, and a supernatural God will surely be present as one attempts to understand his supernatural Book. Archers’ continuing focus upon the text demonstrates his determination to avoid the rampant subjectivism of an approach fully devoted to the reader-response, and insistence that the

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<sup>449</sup> *Luke: Historian and Theologian*, published in 1970, was a watershed work for the understanding of Lukan theology by Protestant scholars.

<sup>450</sup> Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 194. See also Paul Elbert, “Possible Literary Links Between Luke-Acts and Paul’s Letters Regarding Spirit-Language,” in *Intertextuality in the New Testament*, eds. Thomas Brodie, Stanley Porter, and Dennis MacDonald (Sheffield: Sheffield-Phoenix Press, 2006).

integrity of the text and locus of meaning in the present interpreter must be held in creative tension.

Archer has presented a model for Pentecostal hermeneutics that upholds Pentecostal values, is congruent with the orthodox doctrine of Inspiration, and yet engages both scholastic concerns and the role of the experience within the community in the interpretive process. It cannot be successfully argued that the wholesale embrace of the Historical Critical method of hermeneutics by Pentecostals has bode well either for our understanding of Pentecostal doctrine or our practice thereof. While his hermeneutical approach will likely be revised as the conversation continues into the future, Archer has pointed the way forward from a Pentecostal reliance on the hermeneutical methods of Modernity.

Whether Pentecostals ultimately embrace the specifics of Archer's proposal, or join them to other similar offerings, Archer has demonstrated that Pentecostals can and must move beyond the simple embrace of Evangelical hermeneutics towards a method of interpreting Scripture that is more properly suited to the Pentecostal message, and the newest generations impacted by Postmodern thought. While Pentecostals may well have become more palatable to their Evangelical friends and academic colleagues, they may miss an enormous opportunity to present the Pentecostal understanding of Scripture to a world that is more open to the Pentecostal ethos of a supernatural God who acts supernaturally in our world than ever before.

Chapter seven will focus on the role of the Holy Spirit in hermeneutics, an area long-overdue for theological attention. Beginning with a discussion on why

the Spirit's involvement is crucial, this chapter then seeks to describe just how the Holy Spirit assists the believer in the interpretation of Scripture. Further, we will discuss whether a hermeneutical system distinctive to Pentecostalism is warranted, and whether embracing the beneficial connections with Postmodern thought may well prove advantageous for Pentecostals. Finally, we will examine whether, as some writers claim, experiential verification gives Pentecostals a hermeneutical advantage over those who have not experienced particular manifestations of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostalism's approach to experiential verification may well prove to be their most significant contribution to the larger world of Evangelical hermeneutics. To these issues, and others, we now turn in chapter seven.

**CHAPTER VII:  
THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN HERMENEUTICS:  
THE PENTECOSTAL EDGE?**

Pentecostal approaches to biblical interpretation are playing an increasingly important role in the contemporary hermeneutical debate. We want to acknowledge that Pentecostal approaches to biblical hermeneutics are in a better position to accept the possibility of a subjective and more experiential dimension in hermeneutics.<sup>451</sup>

R. J. May

In other words, [the Pentecostals'] charismatic experience is an experiential presupposition which enables them to understand the charismatic life of the Apostolic church, as Luke reports it, better than those contemporary Christians who lack this experience.<sup>452</sup>

R. Stronstad

We cannot consider Pentecostalism to be a kind of aberration born out of experiential excesses but a 20<sup>th</sup> century revival of New Testament theology and religion. It has not only restored joy and power to the Church, but a clearer reading to the Bible as well.<sup>453</sup>

C. Pinnock

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<sup>451</sup> Robert J. May, *The Role of the Holy Spirit in Biblical Hermeneutics*, [www.biblicalstudies.org.uk](http://www.biblicalstudies.org.uk) (accessed November 25, 2005), Chapter One, 1.

<sup>452</sup> Roger Stronstad, "Pentecostal Experience and Hermeneutics," *Paraclete* 26.1 (1992): 17.

<sup>453</sup> Clark Pinnock, forward to *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke*, by Roger Stronstad, viii.

## 7.1 INTRODUCTION

The authority of Scripture is held by Evangelicals to be fundamental to the Christian faith. Before doing theology, one must recognize the unrivalled nature of Scripture, and acknowledge the role of God the Holy Spirit in its formation. Everywhere debated however, is the method by which the theologian or lay person is to interpret the Word of God. What hermeneutic is to be used? As has been shown in the preceding chapters, conservatives (including Pentecostals) disagree considerably on this, and much work has been done in search of proper interpretive methods.

Throughout this discussion a vital element has largely been lacking. Though most begin their work on hermeneutics by affirming the role of the Holy Spirit in the creation and transmission of Scripture, few scholars find it necessary to include a detailed description of the Spirit's role in illumination. This chapter will explore the reasons for the deficiency of discussion concerning the function of the Holy Spirit in hermeneutics, and will then discuss why the involvement of the Spirit is inherently necessary. An attempt will be made to understand how the Holy Spirit aids us in interpreting the Word of God through a survey of current literature on the subject. We will then address the possibility of a convergence of Pentecostal hermeneutics with Postmodern thought, and examine four options in this regard. Arising from this is the question of whether Pentecostals and Charismatics, through their experience with the Holy Spirit, have an interpretive

advantage in hermeneutics. Many Pentecostal scholars will be shown to favour just such a concept, while others raise considerable objections. It is hoped that through this survey, a distinctly Pentecostal contribution to hermeneutics will be observed, one on which the foundation of a truly Pentecostal hermeneutic can continue to be built which will properly serve the current generation of truth seekers.

## 7.2 THE HOLY SPIRIT AND HERMENEUTICS: A DEAFENING SILENCE

When beginning research on the role of the Spirit in hermeneutics, one soon discovers a frustrating paucity of material on the subject. A brief survey of current hermeneutical textbooks by Robert May<sup>454</sup> reveals an amazing lack of attention to the Spirit's role in the hermeneutical process. A recent article in the *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* postulates the correct method of hermeneutics from a Pentecostal perspective, but scarcely mentions the role of the Spirit.<sup>455</sup> Clark Pinnock notes that a scholar such as Gordon Fee can write a book entitled *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics*, and say nothing about the Spirit's role in interpretation.<sup>456</sup> Another author comments, "The

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<sup>454</sup> May, *The Role of the Holy Spirit in Biblical Hermeneutics*.

<sup>455</sup> Arden C. Autry, "Dimensions of Hermeneutics in Pentecostal Focus," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 3 (1993): 29-50.

<sup>456</sup> Clark Pinnock, "The Work of the Holy Spirit in Hermeneutics," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 2 (1992): 7; G.D. Fee, *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1991).

illumination of the Holy Spirit is regularly mentioned in the theological literature; yet detailed discussion of this subject is rare."<sup>457</sup>

To what can this neglect be attributed? Various explanations have been put forward. Bruce Waltke suggests that the Enlightenment "with its emphasis on unaided human reason and the scientific method, saw no need for supernatural enlightenment for the accurate interpretation of the Bible."<sup>458</sup> Pinnock submits two others. First, liberal scholars have long been interested in illumination and the "second horizon" of Thiselton.<sup>459</sup> They gravitate towards reader-focused interpretations, and are generally not concerned with the dangers of subjectivism. In reaction to this, Evangelicals focused strongly on historical exegesis, to the almost total negation of the reader's interpretative role.<sup>460</sup> In addition, the rationalism so prevalent in our society since the Enlightenment translates into a preference for static propositions. "It leads us to treat the Bible as a code book rather than a more flexible case book. When the Bible is approached as a code book, the Spirit cannot open it up. No room is left for that. Our cultural presuppositions tend to distort the true purpose of the Bible and the nature of its text."<sup>461</sup>

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<sup>457</sup> E.D. Radmacher and R.D. Preus, eds., *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 451.

<sup>458</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, "Exegesis and the Spiritual Life," *Crux* 30 (1994): 29.

<sup>459</sup> A.C. Thiselton, *New Horizons in Hermeneutics*, (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992).

<sup>460</sup> Pinnock, "*The Work of the Holy Spirit*", 8-9.

<sup>461</sup> *Ibid.*

### 7.3 WHY MUST THE HOLY SPIRIT BE INVOLVED?

Regardless of the manner in which we envisage the Holy Spirit to have inspired Scripture, we must nonetheless agree that he *did*. The work of the Spirit did not end, however, when the last letter of the New Testament had been written. Surely he was at work throughout history, guiding those who 'formed' the canon, and ensuring the proper transmission of the Bible from the original autographs to our present-day copies.<sup>462</sup> Paul Lewis has commented on the Pentecostal view of the Spirit's role in Scripture:

The Pentecostal notes the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit through the whole process to the present day. Historically, God revealed himself to the people through both deeds and word. The Spirit safeguarded these traditions perpetuated about the words and deeds of God, first oral and then written, as the Spirit also inspired the authors and editors who constructed the Biblical texts which were accepted as authoritative by the Church. The Spirit through the canonization process led the acceptance and recognition of the Biblical texts by the church. The canonized scripture, which is accepted by all branches of orthodoxy, we read today as the Christian Bible. Today, the Holy Spirit illuminates the mind and heart of the reader to receive the meaning of the Biblical text. Further, the Holy Spirit also enables us to apply those things taught to our daily life.<sup>463</sup>

As Wesley wrote, "The Spirit of God not only once inspired those who wrote it [the Bible] but continually inspires those who read it with earnest prayer."<sup>464</sup> As important perhaps as asking "how", which is dealt with below, is the inquiry of *why* we ought to consider the Spirit's role. Truly, the help of the Holy Spirit is

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<sup>462</sup> For an excellent discussion see F.F. Bruce, *The Canon of Scripture* (Downers Grove: IVP, 1988); also Lee McDonald, *The Biblical Canon: It's Origin, Transmission, and Authority* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 2007).

<sup>463</sup> Lewis, "Pentecostal Epistemology," 111-112.

<sup>464</sup> John Wesley, *Notes Upon the New Testament*, quoted in Clark Pinnock, "The Role of the Spirit in Interpretation," *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* 36 (1993):493.

imperative for a correct interpretation of Scripture. Without exhausting the subject, five reasons will be explored.

### 7.3.1 The Nature of the Bible

First, we must contemplate the nature of Scripture itself. The Bible is a spiritual book which was 'God-breathed'. We are not able to truly believe that it is such without the inner witness of the Holy Spirit to its authenticity.<sup>465</sup> John Calvin, reacting against the Roman teaching of ecclesiastical testimony wrote:

Let it therefore be held as fixed, that those who are inwardly taught by the Holy Spirit acquiesce implicitly in Scripture; that Scripture, carrying its own evidence along with it, deigns not to submit to proofs and arguments, but owes the full conviction with which we ought to receive it to the testimony of the Spirit. For though in its own majesty it has enough to command reverence, nevertheless, it then begins to truly touch us when it is sealed in our hearts by the Holy Spirit.<sup>466</sup>

### 7.3.2 God's Self-Revelation

Second, within the pages of Scripture, God has chosen to reveal himself. Christians believe the Bible is therefore a sacred book, and one which is not naturally understood by mankind. "*The nature of the Revealer...demands that the exegete has proper spiritual qualifications. God has hidden himself in Scripture and must sovereignly show himself to us. We cannot make God talk*

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<sup>465</sup> For further discussion see Bernard Ramm, *The Witness of the Spirit: An Essay on the Contemporary Relevance of the Internal Witness of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1959).

<sup>466</sup> John Calvin, *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, vol. I., ed. John T. MacNeil. (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1960) 1:72.

through the scientific method."<sup>467</sup> French Arrington states, "Scripture given by the Holy Spirit must be mediated interpretively by the Holy Spirit."<sup>468</sup> James Packer notes that Evangelicals have often failed to realize the full significance of the Spirit's role in enabling a believer to understand the Scriptures.<sup>469</sup> If the intent of Scripture is the self-revelation of God, we cannot expect to gain a true understanding of Scripture without the Spirit, who is to "lead you into all truth."<sup>470</sup> Luther noted that "Scripture is the sort of book which calls not only for right reading and preaching but also for the right Interpreter: the revelation of the Holy Spirit."<sup>471</sup>

### 7.3.3 The Depravity of the Reader

Third, mankind is as inherently sinful as the Bible is naturally holy. The depraved nature of the human subject must be acknowledged. Paul's words to the Corinthians are instructive on this point. "The man without the Spirit does not accept the things that come from the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness to him, and he cannot understand them, because they are spiritually discerned."<sup>472</sup>

Bruce Waltke comments:

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<sup>467</sup> Waltke, 34.

<sup>468</sup> French Arrington, "The Use of the Bible by Pentecostals," *Pneuma* 16.1 (1994): 105.

<sup>469</sup> J.I. Packer, "Infallible Scripture and the Role of Hermeneutics," in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D.A. Carson and J.D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 348.

<sup>470</sup> John 16:13.

<sup>471</sup> Ewald M. Plass, comp., *What Luther Says: An Anthology* (St. Louis: Concordia, 1959), 76.

<sup>472</sup> I Cor. 2:14, (NIV)

Because of our innate depravity our minds have been darkened (Rom. 1:18-22; Eph. 4:17-18; I John 2:1). We suppress the truth (Rom. 1:18), and we aim to justify our behaviour, including our unbelief and unethical conduct (Prov. 14:12; 16:26). Satan continues to deceive us with half-truths, calling into question God's goodness and truthfulness (Gen. 3). Sin has destroyed our ability to do right (Rom. 7:13-25). We must come to the text with a pure conscience. Thus, apart from God's regeneration and the work of the Holy Spirit we cannot hear the text clearly.<sup>473</sup>

#### 7.3.4 Transformation of the Individual Believer

Fourth, the goal of the text is to transform the lives of the readers.

Inspired Scripture without the Spirit will remain a dead letter, and is useless in accomplishing this goal.<sup>474</sup> Pinnock notes, "The goal of the Spirit as he works within our lives shedding light on the Word is to deepen our friendship with God. We do not read the text out of mere historical interest but for the purposes of transformation, in order that the Scriptures might become a revelatory text for us. The Spirit must be at work for this to happen."<sup>475</sup> The Spirit is the One in whom the text of Scripture comes alive for present day believers. Without his work, lives will remain unchanged, for the power of the Word cannot be separated from the constant work of the Spirit in the life of each individual. Scott Ellington suggests, "It is the transformative action of the Holy Spirit which persistently intrudes on Christian experience and prevents our interpretations from becoming

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<sup>473</sup> Waltke, *Exegesis*, 33.

<sup>474</sup> Pinnock, *"The Work of the Spirit,"* 5.

<sup>475</sup> Pinnock, *"The Role of the Spirit,"* 493.

simply a process of reading our own needs and wants into the text and hearing only what we want to hear."<sup>476</sup>

### 7.3.5 Transformation of the Church

Finally, the Scriptures were given for the uplifting and furtherance of the Kingdom of God. God did not leave the Church without help when Christ left the earth, but sent the Comforter to be with his people. Larry Hart writes, "Through pointing the church back to her very life-breath, through the promotion of spiritual renewal, through reminding the church of the 'God-breathed' nature of the Bible, and through working signs and wonders, proponents of Holy Spirit renewal may be aiding the church in her quest to understand and apply Biblical truth in a fundamental way."<sup>477</sup> Pinnock rightly observes that Evangelicals need to re-appropriate two notions of Scripture that are often stressed in Orthodox and Catholic circles: 1) The Bible is the book for the people of God and 2) the Church is the normal *locale* of illumination - even for Protestants. "Scripture originally arose from the life of the community and was meant to be interpreted in the ongoing life of that community."<sup>478</sup>

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<sup>476</sup> S. Ellington, "Pentecostalism and the Authority of Scripture," 22.

<sup>477</sup> Larry Hart, "Hermeneutics, Theology, and the Holy Spirit," *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 14 (1987): 63.

<sup>478</sup> Pinnock, "*The Role of the Spirit*," 495.

## 7.4 HOW DOES THE HOLY SPIRIT AID IN ILLUMINATION?

Having noted the importance of the Spirit's work in our hermeneutics, reflection on exactly how He is involved is in order. Though the writing on this has been limited, some scholars have dared to speculate, and we offer their suggestions.

### 7.4.1 French Arrington

French Arrington presents four ways in which interpreters rely on the Holy Spirit:

- 1) Submission of the mind to God so that the critical and analytical abilities are exercised under the guidance of the Holy Spirit; 2) a genuine openness to the witness of the Spirit as the text is examined; 3) the personal experience of faith as a part of the entire interpretive process; and 4) a response to the transforming call of God's Word.<sup>479</sup>

Each of these is indirectly connected to one of the situations described above, detailing the necessity of the Spirit's involvement.

### 7.4.2 John Goldingay

Another author suggests the work of the Holy Spirit in our interpretation of Scripture transpires as follows. First, he is concerned with the intellectual work of exegesis, interpreting the original languages of ancient texts. Exegeting a passage of Scripture to ascertain the message to both the reader and hearer can often be mentally laborious work. We are renewed mentally and spiritually as he

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<sup>479</sup> Arrington, "Use of the Bible," 105.

works with us, giving us strength for our task.<sup>480</sup> Russell Spittler states, "Exegesis puts one into the vestibule of truth. The Holy Spirit opens the door."<sup>481</sup>

Second, as has been noted above, the minds of humanity have been darkened, affected by the Fall, and no longer possess the mental purity and holiness to discern the Word of God clearly. The spiritual Word is foreign to us; the Holy Spirit opens our minds to receive the things of God. According to Hays, II Corinthians 3 suggests that "...only readers made competent by the Spirit can throw back the veil and perceive the sense of Scripture; those who have not turned to the Lord who is Spirit are necessarily trapped in the script, with minds hardened and veiled."<sup>482</sup> The Spirit both renews minds to understand, and sparks insight that the essential significance of the text for today might be determined.<sup>483</sup>

The Spirit is vitally important in the exercise of the *charism* that expounds how the ancient Word is to be presently lived. That Scripture intends to transform the community of God is without question. The Holy Spirit enables both the one who preaches and they who listen to receive the Word of God, and identify what Scripture signifies for them. Preaching is essentially the task of interpreting a text correctly, determining the relevant message for the believer

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<sup>480</sup> John Goldingay, *Models of Interpretation of Scripture* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 188.

<sup>481</sup> Russell P. Spittler, "Scripture and Theological Enterprise," in *The Use of the Bible in Theology: Evangelical Options*, ed. R.K. Johnston (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1985), 76.

<sup>482</sup> Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, reprint ed. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993), 148.

<sup>483</sup> Goldingay, *Models of Interpretation*, 188.

today, and delivering that to the people of God. Without the Spirit, the sermon will be "mere antiquarianism".<sup>484</sup>

### 7.4.3 Mark Cartledge

Mark Cartledge has attempted to derive some insight into the role of the Holy Spirit in hermeneutics from the five 'paraclete sayings' of John's gospel. In John 14:16-17 Jesus makes the connection between love and obedience, noting the Spirit is given to enable his followers to live lives of obedience. No doubt the Spirit also empowers believers today to obey those things in Scripture which we might rather overlook! Chapter 14:26 states that the Holy Spirit will teach the disciples and remind them of everything that Jesus taught them. Surely he does the same today, bringing Scripture into the remembrance of believers in the most urgent times and situations. The Spirit is given to testify to the disciples concerning Jesus (15:26-27). Who among us can say that we do not need fresh revelation respecting the work of Christ in our own lives, and further help in testifying of Christ to others? John 16:7-11 tells us that when he comes, the Counsellor will convict the world of sin. Through whom will he do this, if not through his disciples? True enough, the Spirit's conviction will be felt directly on the heart of every person. But as believers, our search for personal holiness will be reflected outward to those who are seeking, convincing and convicting them of their own sin. Finally, the words of John 16:12-15 promised to all disciples the

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<sup>484</sup> Ibid. cf. Fred Craddock, *Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1985), 135-136.

presence of the Spirit, who would lead and guide them into all truth. What more could the interpreter ask for?<sup>485</sup>

#### 7.4.4 Clark Pinnock

In a 1993 article Clark Pinnock offered an eight-fold proposal on the subject.<sup>486</sup> First, and significantly for this thesis, he suggests we must see interpretation more in the sense of a corporate exercise, and not the purview of the individual alone. Second, we must recognize the dynamic nature of our interpretive journey, as we maintain an eschatological focus. Third, though the intellect has garnered much of the focus of this discussion, we should realize that God's purpose in unfolding the truth of his Word goes beyond our intellect, to word and deed. Fourth, biblical interpretation must function in the same context as does the Church herself, that of world mission. Fifth, the Spirit helps the Church recognize the "signs of the times" and to reflect biblically and theologically on current trends and issues within the Church and in society at large. There is little doubt that Postmodernism would fall within this category. Sixth, following the Spirit's leading does not suggest infallibility. Mistakes will be made and corrected through the community and the Word. Seventh, our commitment to unity must be stronger than our desire to preserve denominational walls and paradigms. Finally, and most interesting for this study,

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<sup>485</sup> For the full discussion of the five paraclete sayings of John see Mark J. Cartledge, "Empirical Theology: Towards an Evangelical-Charismatic Hermeneutic," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 9 (1996): 121-125.

<sup>486</sup> Pinnock, "The Work of the Holy Spirit," 16-23.

we must be open to God's leading of individuals as we develop friendship with God through the Scriptures.

Pinnock's last point is particularly poignant as he writes:

...the Spirit does open up the Scriptures for us as individuals with a view to developing our friendship with God (Ps. 25.14; Jn 15.14). We experience it in the sacrament evangelicals call the 'quiet time', a time when we daily read the Bible prayerfully. In such moments, we often experience God speaking to us, when we allow the Bible to convict and convert, to build up and to tear down, to comfort and to challenge us. Usually we try to take the text in its intended sense and apply it. But sometimes we hear God saying something different, where a text will be given a meaning different from the one intended. At such times, a text written in one context functions as a word of God with a difference force in a new one. It seems that a text may be the occasion of an insight without being the cause of it. The method is to allow a historical exegesis to interact with a prophetic openness to the Spirit.<sup>487</sup>

#### 7.4.5 Robert May

Robert May has offered a framework which moves towards a holistic understanding of the Spirit's role in hermeneutics. Our biblical hermeneutics should be **reasonable**, acknowledging, on one hand, the work of the academy and our own rational abilities, and the dynamics of a people in a supernatural relationship with God, on the other. Our interpretive methods should **resonate** with both the past history of the Church and historical interpretation, as well as the present Church community. As a member of the Godhead, the Spirit's work

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<sup>487</sup> Pinnock, "The Work of the Spirit", 22. Pinnock refers here to J.D.G. Dunn, *The Living Word* (London, SCM Press, 1987), 130-36.

will always be seen as **relevant** no matter in which context the present Church might find herself in. Finally, and admittedly most difficult to clearly describe, our reading of the Scriptures should be **revelatory**, bringing people into encounter with the living God, through which God speaks to His people.

So where our hermeneutics are reasonable to the Christian mind, where there is a sense of resonance with both past and present church communities, where our hermeneutics are relevant to the context of the one who reads and where God ultimately is revealed, we suggest that there is a greater likelihood that the Holy Spirit is at work in our hermeneutics.<sup>488</sup>

#### 7.4.6 Roy B. Zuck

One of the more thorough non-Pentecostal discussion of this issue comes from Roy B. Zuck, currently Senior Professor Emeritus of Biblical Exposition at Dallas Theological Seminary. In an article published in the journal *Bibliotheca Sacra*<sup>489</sup>, Zuck addresses the issue of whether the Spirit's involvement in hermeneutics ultimately leads to a subjective interpretive process. Asking questions such as "Is the Bible not clear in its meanings? Can only a select few have insight into the meaning of Scripture? Are the 'deep things of God' and his 'thoughts' (1 Cor 2:10-11) understood by only some Christians?" Zuck suggests fourteen propositions; we offer the pertinent ones here.<sup>490</sup>

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<sup>488</sup> May, "The Role of the Holy Spirit", Conclusion, 2.

<sup>489</sup> Roy B. Zuck, "The Role of the Spirit in Hermeneutics", in *Bibliotheca Sacra* 141 (1984): 120-129.

<sup>490</sup> Zuck, "The Role of the Spirit", 120-129. The other points are as follows. The role of the Spirit in interpreting the Bible: does not mean that one's interpretations are infallible; does not mean only scholars can interpret Scripture; requires spiritual devotion on the part of the

- The Spirit's ministry in Bible interpretation does not mean he gives new revelation. The Spirit's work is always in association with the Word of God, not beyond it or in addition to it
- The work of the Spirit in interpretation does not mean that he gives some interpreters a mental acuity for seeing truths under the surface that are not evident to any other dedicated Bible students.
- The Spirit's work in biblical interpretation does not rule out the use of study helps such as commentaries and Bible dictionaries.
- The role of the Spirit in interpretation is no substitute for diligent study
- The ministry of the Holy Spirit in Bible interpretation does not mean interpreters can ignore common sense and logic. The Spirit assists the Spirit-filled learner to think clearly and accurately.
- The place of the Holy Spirit in interpreting the Bible means that he does not normally give sudden intuitive flashes of insight into the meaning of Scripture.

Though the above suggestions on how the Spirit aids us are exactly that – suggestions - they are nonetheless helpful for a more complete understanding of his role in our work. It is important for Pentecostals to have a substantial grasp of the Spirit's role in hermeneutics, for we have always expected the Holy Spirit would be involved in our interpretation of Scripture, helping determine what was meant and what is meant today.

Before delving further into the discussion concerning a Pentecostal advantage in hermeneutics by virtue of their experiences of the Spirit, we must first pause and conclude our discussion on the necessity of a distinctively Pentecostal hermeneutic.

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interpreter; means a lack of spiritual preparedness hinders accurate interpretation; is no substitute for diligent study; is included in but not identical with illumination; does not mean that all parts of the Bible are equally clear; does not result in believers having a comprehensive and completely accurate understanding of the entire Scriptures.

## 7.5 A DISTINCTIVE PENTECOSTAL (AND POSTMODERN) HERMENEUTIC?

The debate presently occurring within the Pentecostal community concerns whether Pentecostals have need of a specific Pentecostal hermeneutic, or whether one borrowed from Evangelicalism, albeit with some modification, is sufficient. Viewing the position of Menzies as that of the majority of Anglo-Pentecostals, Archer laments:

Pentecostals who use Redaction Criticism and the historical-grammatical method are primarily concerned with historical analysis in order to discover the author's intended meaning. They seek to unlock the passage's meaning by elucidating what cultural influences and beliefs lie behind the text. The primary focus, then, is the world behind the text and not the text itself. The importance of the horizon of the present reader has been ignored and furthermore the world of the text becomes secondary to the historically reconstructed world behind the text...Hence, the majority of academically trained Pentecostals who embrace Historical Criticism have moved away from the early Pentecostals' emphasis upon the text and readers. They have embraced Modernity's critical approaches that have always been primarily concerned with the world behind the text. Thus, they have moved away from the early pre-critical Paramodern approach of early Pentecostals to the acceptable critical Modern approaches, and in doing so aligned themselves with conservative North American Evangelicalism whose roots are Reformed and modernistic.<sup>491</sup>

A minority of Pentecostal scholars, according to Archer, view this new assimilation into Evangelicalism as negative and destructive to Pentecostal identity and doctrine. Mark McLean is representative:

A strict adherence to traditional evangelical/fundamentalist hermeneutic principles leads to a position which, in its most positive forms, suggests the distinctives of the twentieth century Pentecostal movement are perhaps nice but not necessary; important but not vital to the life of the Church in the twentieth

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<sup>491</sup> Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 141.

century. In its more negative forms, it leads to a total rejection of Pentecostal phenomena.<sup>492</sup>

Can the philosophies of Postmodernity be synchronized in any manner with Pentecostal hermeneutics? Does Pentecostalism need a distinctive hermeneutic to ensure the continued relevance of our presentation of the Gospel to Generation X and the Millennials? As chapter one has noted, there appear to be four responses to this question.<sup>493</sup> 1) The first response is in the affirmative: we ought to build a distinctive Pentecostal hermeneutic based on Postmodern viewpoints, free from rationalistic Evangelicalism. 2) The second response is in the negative: we should reject Postmodern influence and build upon the foundation of an Evangelical hermeneutic. 3) The third response suggests we should join Pentecostalism's concerns with traditional Evangelical hermeneutics. 4) The final response concludes we should cautiously proceed to develop a Postmodern Pentecostal hermeneutic.

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<sup>492</sup> Mark McLean, "Toward a Pentecostal Hermeneutic," *PNEUMA: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 6.2 (1984): 37.

<sup>493</sup> The following categories are from Malcolm Brubaker, "Postmodernism and Pentecostals: A Case Study of Evangelical Hermeneutics," *Evangelical Journal* 15.1 (1997): 39-44.

### 7.5.1 Affirmative – the connection is beneficial.<sup>494</sup>

One of the major supporters of this view is Timothy Cargal.<sup>495</sup> He has argued that not only is there a natural link between Pentecostalism and religions that place high value on the role of experience in worship and hermeneutics, but that the link also extends to the rejection of the grammatico-historical hermeneutic by both groups. Although some Pentecostals have in fact moved towards the grammatico-historical method as was shown in chapter four, Cargal notes that in general, the Pastor in the field still relies on traditional pre-critical<sup>496</sup> methods of interpretation. Thus, the Pentecostal scholar could guide the Pastor in this line of interpretation, each striving to make the text as applicable as possible to their respective audience.

In this work Cargal argues that with its experiential focus, Pentecostalism shares some common ground with Postmodern thought, and is therefore naturally placed to engage Postmodern culture on its own terms. Cargal dismisses the Modern construction that only what is historically and objectively true is meaningful; he naturally therefore takes issue with the foundational

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<sup>494</sup> John C. Poirer and B. Scott Lewis believe that the majority of Pentecostal scholars have reacted positively to Postmodern thought. "Ancient historians often tell of a city's inhabitants streaming out of the gates to greet a liberating conqueror or visiting dignitary. No image better fits the reception that Pentecostal scholars and theologians have given to Postmodernism." In John C. Poirer and B. Scott Lewis, "Pentecostal and Postmodernist Hermeneutics: A Critique of Three Conceits", *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 15.1 (2006): 3.

<sup>495</sup> "Beyond the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy: Pentecostals and Hermeneutics in a Postmodern Age," *Pneuma* 15.2 (1993): 163-187. In agreement with Cargal here is Gerald T. Sheppard, "Biblical Interpretation After Gadamer," *Pneuma* 16.1 (1994): 120-135.

<sup>496</sup> A method of Biblical interpretation which relies heavily upon a plain reading of Scripture, without examination of the history or semantic meaning of a particular text. A common saying among those employing a pre-critical hermeneutic is: "If the plain sense of Scripture makes common sense, seek no other sense or you'll end up with nonsense." Source unknown.

principles of the Historical-Critical method of hermeneutics. Arguing that Pentecostals have always believed that reason and rationalism were important but that hermeneutical processes must involve more, he welcomes the Postmodern openness to truth outside of traditional modernist (and perhaps Evangelical) perspectives. Cargal declares:

As a Postmodern paradigm increasingly illuminates the thinking of our culture in general, any hermeneutic which does not account for its loci of meanings within that Postmodern paradigm will become nonsensical and irrelevant. If for no other reason than that, we must ...explore the possibilities of a Pentecostal hermeneutic in a Postmodern age.<sup>497</sup>

### **7.5.2 Negative - We should reject the Postmodern influence**

Also among those resisting the idea of Postmodern influence in Pentecostalism is Robert Menzies. Responding to the article by Timothy Cargal which argues that Pentecostalism is well-placed to engage culture with a Postmodern perspective, he argues for the return to the similarities inherent between Pentecostal and Evangelical hermeneutics, and suggests that Pentecostals might even contribute to existing Evangelical hermeneutics, though not in the vein that will be discussed in the next section of this thesis. Menzies writes:

I see the assimilation of the modern Pentecostal movement into the broader Evangelical world as an exciting and positive event. Looking back over the last fifty years, Pentecostals can affirm the strength they have found in their Evangelical heritage. This legacy from Evangelicalism has been especially helpful with respect to

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<sup>497</sup> Cargal, "Postmodern", 187.

biblical interpretation....Looking forward I see the potential for additional theological contributions to the larger Evangelical world and Christian community. The Pentecostal understanding of Spirit-baptism is important in this regard....The hermeneutical climate within Evangelicalism is more conducive now than ever before to Pentecostal theological contributions.<sup>498</sup>

Menzies asserts that Cargal underestimates the ability of scholars to bridge the gap between the ancient and modern situations of the text. While we cannot gain absolute certainty regarding historical matters, we can nonetheless gain knowledge. He believes the tendency in many Postmodern writers to shift the locus of determinant for meaning away from the text to the reader may be nothing more than a reactionary move against years of sterile, dry, biblical criticism, resulting from the tenets of modernism consistently applied to hermeneutics. Pentecostalism has seen the importance of the readers in the interpretative process for entirely different reasons, as was demonstrated in chapter three. Menzies also suggests that the influence of Evangelical hermeneutics upon Pentecostalism has been beneficial. The charge that Evangelical hermeneutics have been overly rationalistic is, accordingly to Menzies, too broad, and without serious support.<sup>499</sup>

For Menzies, the move towards a more reader-centered approach to the text, common to the Postmodern line of thought, is a dangerous one:

These approaches strike me as the logical successors of a sterile biblical criticism which has so emasculated the text that it had

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<sup>498</sup> Robert P. Menzies, "Jumping Off the Postmodern Bandwagon," *Pneuma* 16.1 (1994), 119.

<sup>499</sup> *Ibid.*, 117-119.

nothing of significance to communicate. At some point, the question had to be asked: why bother with all of this? The solution to this dilemma was obvious: if significance cannot be found in the meaning of the text, then it must be imported from outside the text.<sup>500</sup>

The issue here is substantial. May notes: “Pentecostal presuppositions about a supernatural and transcendent reality are not only a point of contact with a Postmodern worldview, but equally challenge modernist assumptions that are so dominant within traditional Evangelical critical methods.”<sup>501</sup> To be sure, Menzies serves the Pentecostal community well when he raises concerns over the location of the final determinant of meaning. Traditional Evangelical (and increasingly, Pentecost) hermeneutics have leaned heavily upon the historical-critical method, inherent with its safety in locating meaning objectively in the text. Given the wide variety of “objective” opinions as to the authorial intent of particular texts, however, we question the inherent objectivity of relying upon authorial intent as a bulwark against reader-centred subjectivity. As has been noted, the transition towards a reader-centered hermeneutic can be risky as the meaning may now be found subjectively with the reader. Menzies has reacted too strongly, however, when he describes Cargal’s proposals as “ultimately disturbing”.<sup>502</sup> Future trends in Pentecostal hermeneutics suggest that increasing numbers of Pentecostal scholars are uncomfortable with the “either – or” approach demonstrated by Menzies and others.

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<sup>500</sup> Ibid., 118.

<sup>501</sup> May, “The Role of the Holy Spirit”, Chapter One, 6.

<sup>502</sup> Menzies, “Jumping Off”, 115.

### 7.5.3 Pentecostals Should Add to Evangelical Hermeneutics

This approach sees the value of the grammatico-historical method, but with Pentecostal concerns that the meaning derived is not stripped of its experiential dimension. The chief proponent here is Roger Stronstad. His work on the charismatic language of Luke-Acts utilizes a critical methodology, which Stronstad believes combines the best of Evangelical scholarship with experiential verification.<sup>503</sup> Some scholars believe that by the very act of experiencing for themselves that which Scripture describes, Pentecostals may interpret those descriptive passages with greater clarity than those without said experience. While Stronstad acknowledges the value of traditional Evangelical hermeneutics, he recognizes the importance of experience in the interpretive process. Thus, a harmonizing of experiential verification with Evangelical hermeneutics is, in his opinion, the best way forward.<sup>504</sup> This concept will be explored in greater detail in the next section.

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<sup>503</sup> Roger Stronstad, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1984).

<sup>504</sup> See Roger Stronstad, "Pentecostal Experience and Hermeneutics," *Paraclete* 26.1 (1992):14-30, and *idem*, "Trends in Pentecostal Hermeneutics," *Paraclete* 22.3 (1988): 1-11.

#### 7.5.4 Pentecostals Should Develop a Unique Hermeneutic

Among the supporters of this view is Kenneth Archer,<sup>505</sup> who feels that if Pentecostalism is to remain the relevant missionary force that it has been, elements of Postmodernism are essential. He notes with approval the efforts of some scholars to bring their Pentecostal spirituality and pneumatology to bear in their hermeneutical work.<sup>506</sup> As was shown in chapter six, Archer would blend together the Postmodern emphasis on the interpreter's context with classical Pentecostal spirituality.

Today some Pentecostals attempt to express themselves with a purely modernistic hermeneutic (the historical-critical method), yet if Pentecostalism desires to continue in its missionary objective while keeping in tune with its classical ethos, then Pentecostalism must have a Postmodern accent; an accent which is both a protest against modernity as well as a proclamation to move beyond modernity; or better, after the modern.<sup>507</sup>

Accordingly, some Pentecostal scholars, such as Roger Stronstad, have begun to propose hermeneutical guidelines more in keeping with the early traditions and experience of Pentecostalism. On the role of experience within hermeneutics, for example, Stronstad has proposed that it must enter the

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<sup>505</sup> See, for example, Archer, "Pentecostal Hermeneutics: Retrospect and Prospect." This line of thinking is found throughout Archer's work.

<sup>506</sup> For example, John Christopher Thomas, "Women, Pentecostals, and the Bible." *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 5 (1994): 41-56. Thomas' work in this area will be explored in greater detail later in this chapter.

<sup>507</sup> Archer, "Pentecostal Hermeneutics," 80.

process at the beginning, rather than the end as suggested by other

Pentecostals scholars.<sup>508</sup>

Stronstad contends that a Pentecostal hermeneutic will have a variety of cognitive (Protestant grammatico-historico exegesis) and experiential elements (salvation and charismatic experience). Stronstad recognizes that charismatic experience in itself will not enable one to become “an infallible interpreter” of Scripture; yet charismatic experience provides an important pre-understanding to the Scripture.<sup>509</sup>

In this manner, Stronstad has challenged those who claim that Pentecostals often create theology from their shared experiences. By promoting the importance of experience at the beginning of the hermeneutical process, Stronstad has taken the first steps towards a truly Pentecostal hermeneutic.

Other Pentecostal theologians have suggested further steps towards a holistic Pentecostal hermeneutic. John Christopher Thomas, drawing from the methodology of the Jerusalem Council (Acts 15), has proposed a hermeneutic containing three key components: the community, the activity of the Holy Spirit, and the Scripture.<sup>510</sup> Archer notes, “Thomas has thus far presented a hermeneutical approach that attempts to be consistent with early Pentecostal ethos and resists the complete adoption of an Evangelical and modernistic Historical Critical method.”<sup>511</sup> Further, he states:

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<sup>508</sup> See W. MacDonald, “A Classical Viewpoint,” in *Perspectives on the New Pentecostalism*, ed. Russell P. Spittler (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1976), 58-75; also W. Menzies, “The Methodology of Pentecostal Theology,” 1-14.

<sup>509</sup> Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 143. See R. Stronstad, “Pentecostal Experience and Hermeneutics”, 16-26.

<sup>510</sup> See J.C. Thomas, “Women, Pentecostals, and the Bible.”

<sup>511</sup> Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 146.

Today, some Pentecostals attempt to express themselves with an Evangelical and modernistic hermeneutic (the Historical Critical methods). Yet if Pentecostalism desires to continue its missionary objective while keeping in tune with its early ethos, it must move beyond Modernity.

In other words, a Pentecostal hermeneutical strategy is needed which rejects the quest for a past determinate meaning of the author and embraces the reality that interpretation involves both the discovery of meaning and the creation of meaning.

A Pentecostal hermeneutical strategy should attempt to continue to forge an alternative path that neither entirely accepts the pluralistic relativism of Postmodernism nor entirely affirms the objectivism of Modernism – a pathway that began to be forged in early Pentecostalism.<sup>512</sup>

### 7.5.5 Summary

It is the opinion of this thesis that Pentecostals must employ distinctive hermeneutical principles, primarily to maintain the Pentecostal focus upon the present-day experience of the Holy Spirit in life and ministry, and further, to share this same expectation of supernatural experience with those Postmoderns looking to experience God for themselves. Of the four options presented above, we believe that Pentecostals cannot simply embrace a connection with Postmodern thought, as Cargal would seem to suggest, for there is much in Postmodern thinking that has been shown to be antithetical to core doctrines of Christianity. Avoiding Postmodern influence altogether, however, as R. Menzies has proposed, is likewise unadvisable for Pentecostals, for it may well prove to alienate our presentation of the Gospel from those who need to accept and

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<sup>512</sup> Ibid., 146, 147, 153.

embrace it. "Jumping off the Postmodern Bandwagon" is not an option for Pentecostals.

Rather, Pentecostals must develop a distinctive approach to hermeneutics in the vein proposed by R. Stronstad and K. Archer, above. In our opinion, the differences between the approaches advocated by each are few, as none would pretend to develop a uniquely Pentecostal hermeneutic completely devoid of the beneficial advances in Evangelical hermeneutical scholarship, Archer included. His focus on the text in his proposed hermeneutic, while different than the traditional text-centered Evangelical approach, nonetheless pays homage to the caution Evangelicals have exercised to avoid the rampant subjectivity often associated with a full reader-response hermeneutic.

## **7.6 EXPERIENTIAL VERIFICATION: THE PENTECOSTAL EDGE?**

To be sure, Pentecostalism has become more academic in its defence, and its scholars have tended to align themselves recently with Evangelicals in their move towards adopting conservative methods of historical criticism.<sup>513</sup> Yet a difference in focus remains. For the Pentecostal, Scripture must primarily speak to the modern reader; simply focusing on what the text may have originally meant is not enough. The Pentecostal insists on closing the gap between the two horizons.

A hermeneutic that focuses only upon what the original inspired author meant . . . will not satisfy the requirements of a Pentecostal hermeneutic. The essence of Pentecostalism asserts that the spiritual

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<sup>513</sup> Archer, "Pentecostal Hermeneutics," 74.

and extraordinary experiences of the biblical characters are possible for contemporary believers.<sup>514</sup>

As was demonstrated in chapter four, there is in some contemporary Pentecostal scholars the continuing tendency towards Modern academics while moving toward a hermeneutical system that is heavily slanted towards rationalism, and downplays the role of the Holy Spirit and/or experience.<sup>515</sup>

Yongnan Jeon Ahn argues:

Within the modernistic epistemological presupposition scholars, who utilize historical critical methodology, tend to intrinsically restrict the experiential dimension of the interpreter in hermeneutical enterprise that has formed the bedrock of the Pentecostal hermeneutics. As emphasizing the role of experience in Pentecostal hermeneutics, Pentecostals need to recognize the necessary involvement of the interpreter in hermeneutical process in order to understand the meaning of a text.<sup>516</sup>

French Arrington agrees: "The real issue of Pentecostalism has become hermeneutics, that is, the distinctive nature and function of Scripture and the roles of the Holy Spirit, the Christian community, grammatical-historical research, and personal experience in the interpretive process."<sup>517</sup> The Holy Spirit enables the reader to bridge the gap between the ancient authors of Scripture and the present interpreter.<sup>518</sup> Pentecostals contribute most substantially to hermeneutics in the area of experience and verification. Whereas Classical Pentecostalism

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<sup>514</sup> Ibid, 75.

<sup>515</sup> J.C. Thomas, "Women, Pentecostals and the Bible," 41.

<sup>516</sup> Yongnan Jeon Ahn, "Various Debates in the Contemporary Pentecostal Hermeneutics," *The Spirit & Church* 2.1 (May 2000): 31.

<sup>517</sup> F.L. Arrington, "The Use of the Bible," 101.

<sup>518</sup> Ibid., 105.

tended to distinguish poorly between the horizons of reader and author, contemporary scholars are relying on their own experience to bridge that gap.

In the discussion concerning whether Pentecostals may have an advantage in the interpretation texts which describe an experience commonly occurring within Pentecostalism, readers may be surprised to discover how many Pentecostal scholars have written in support of such a notion<sup>519</sup>. Before surveying those who have written in the affirmative, however, we will first consider the objections of one leading Pentecostal scholar: Gordon Anderson.

### 7.6.1 Gordon Anderson

Dr. Gordon Anderson, President of North Central University in Minneapolis, Minnesota, believes this approach leads to an apparent elitism that cannot well serve either Pentecostalism or the wider Evangelical community. Arguing for the substantial similarity in the Pentecostal and Evangelical approach to interpretation, Anderson states, “A Pentecostal hermeneutic is not special insight unavailable to others.”<sup>520</sup> Anderson differentiates between two schools of thought concerning how the Holy Spirit aids interpretation of the scriptures. “Either the Holy Spirit enables the human mind to intellectually grasp *the revelation* of Scripture, or alternatively, the human mind is quite capable of understanding the meaning of the scriptures without the aid of the Holy Spirit, it is

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<sup>519</sup> This is not intended to be an exhaustive survey, but rather a brief look at a variety of Pentecostal scholars who have expressed thoughts on this subject.

<sup>520</sup> Gordon L. Anderson, “Pentecostal Hermeneutics”, in *Drinking From our own Wells: Defining a Pentecostal-Charismatic Spirituality* (Conference Papers vol.2, Twenty-Second Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies, Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, MO: November 12-14, 1992), 7.

rather *the will* of the one reading that is the object of the Holy Spirit's action."<sup>521</sup>

For Anderson, Pentecostals ought to align themselves with the second position; the Spirit does not act upon the mind but rather upon the will of the individual. The Spirit's role is not to shed light upon the meaning of the text itself, but to move the will of the individual to a place of receptivity to the meaning of scriptures.

Naturally, by taking this position, Anderson does not believe Pentecostals to have a superior opportunity to understand the scriptures through their charismatic experience, but are empowered through the Spirit, along with all other believers, to act accordingly. Other Pentecostal scholars disagree, suggesting that Pentecostals may be in an advantageous position through the Spirit's work on the believing mind as well.

### **7.6.2 William Menzies**

William Menzies proposes that the crux of the hermeneutical issue is actually methodology. He suggests three levels of a Pentecostal hermeneutic. First, is the *inductive* level, itself comprised of three varieties of inductive listening: declarative, implicational, and descriptive. The second is the *deductive* level. Menzies points out that after one has conducted inductive hermeneutics, certain patterns or theological motifs, common either to the whole of Scripture or to a particular author, begin to emerge. While not stated specifically in Scripture, these patterns and motifs are often essential for understanding the particular

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<sup>521</sup> May, "The Role of the Holy Spirit", Chapter One, 4; see Anderson, "Pentecostal Hermeneutics", 11.

nuances of the text. Finally, he describes what he calls the *verification* level. While others chide Pentecostals for their dangerous practice of “exegeting” out of experience, Menzies argues that it is dangerous to develop theology and hermeneutics from *non-experience*. If a biblical truth is to be promulgated, then it certainly ought to be verifiable and demonstrable in life. When Peter stood on the day of Pentecost and proclaimed “this is that,” testimony about the experience, and exposition of Joel’s prophecy flowed together, hand in hand.<sup>522</sup>

### 7.6.3 Howard Ervin

Howard Ervin, a one-time Baptist turned Pentecostal, suggests a *Pneumatic* hermeneutic, based on the need for an epistemology firmly rooted in biblical faith, “...with a phenomenology that meets the criteria of empirically verifiable sensory experience (healing, miracles, etc.) and does not violate the coherence of rational categories.”<sup>523</sup> A pneumatic epistemology also “...provides a resolution of (a) the dichotomy between faith and reason that existentialism seeks to bridge, though at the expense of the pneumatic; (b) the antidote to a destructive rationalism that often accompanies a critical-historical exegesis; and (c) a rational accountability for the mysticism by a piety grounded in *sola fide*.”<sup>524</sup> Because Pentecostals allow the experiential immediacy of the Holy Spirit to inform their epistemology, this contact with the *pneumatic* enlightens their

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<sup>522</sup> William Menzies, “The Methodology of Pentecostal Theology,” 1-14.

<sup>523</sup> Howard M. Ervin, “Hermeneutics: A Pentecostal Option,” In *Essays on Apostolic Themes: Studies in Honour of Howard M. Ervin Presented to Him by Colleagues and Friends on his Sixty-Fifth Birthday* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1986), 23.

<sup>524</sup> Ibid.

hermeneutics in a way that may be considered beyond the traditional view of illumination.

Pentecostal experience with the Holy Spirit gives existential awareness of the miracles in the Biblical world view. These events are no longer "mythological" (the view of Neo-orthodoxy), but "objectively" real. Contemporary experience of divine healing, prophecy, miracles, tongues, and exorcism are empirical evidence of the impingement of a sphere of non-material reality upon our time-space existence with which one can and does have immediate contact. Awareness of and interaction with the presence of this spiritual continuum is axiomatic in a Pentecostal epistemology that affects decisively its hermeneutic.<sup>525</sup>

#### 7.6.4 Roger Stronstad

Roger Stronstad believes there are five components to a Pentecostal hermeneutic. 1) Charismatic experiential presuppositions; 2) the *pneumatic*; 3) genre; 4) exegesis; and 5) experiential verification.<sup>526</sup> This is a clear wedding together of Pentecostal concerns with traditional Evangelical hermeneutics. If the five components are examined clearly, only the first and fifth are observed to be at all distinctive.

Stronstad feels strongly that Pentecostals have much to offer traditional hermeneutics in the areas of pre-understanding and experiential verification. "The Charismatic experience of the Pentecostal - ministering in the power of the Holy Spirit, speaking in other tongues as the Spirit gives utterance, being led by the Spirit - enables him to understand Luke's record of the activity of the Holy

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<sup>525</sup> Ibid., 35.

<sup>526</sup> Ibid., 28-29.

Spirit in Acts better than the non-Pentecostal."<sup>527</sup> Clark Pinnock, in the forward to Stronstad's book *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke*, writes, "We cannot consider pentecostalism to be a kind of aberration born of experiential excesses but a 20th century revival of New Testament theology and religion. It has not only restored joy and power to the church, but a clearer reading to the Bible as well."<sup>528</sup> Stronstad interprets this further:

Charismatic experience in particular and spiritual experience in general give the interpreter of relevant Biblical texts an experiential presupposition which transcends the rational or cognitive presuppositions of scientific exegesis. In other words, [the Pentecostals'] charismatic experience is an experiential presupposition which enables them to understand the charismatic life of the Apostolic church, as Luke reports it, better than those contemporary Christians who lack this experience.<sup>529</sup>

### 7.6.5 John Christopher Thomas

John Christopher Thomas has sought to develop a Pentecostal hermeneutic from the Acts 15 record of the Jerusalem Council. For Thomas, this passage records an example of hermeneutics based on 1) the collective experience of the community, 2) the scriptures, and 3) the primary role of the

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<sup>527</sup> See Roger Stronstad, "Pentecostal Experience and Hermeneutics," 15. Gary Badcock agrees. See *Light of Truth and Fire of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997), 139-144.

<sup>528</sup> *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke*, Forward, viii.

<sup>529</sup> "Experience and Hermeneutics," 17. This concept is not new. Indeed, there are scholars who believe that the reference to "private spirits" in the Westminster Confession of Faith refers to Charismata in terms of interpretive help. See Byron G. Curtis, "Charismata as Hermeneutical Help? 'Private Spirits' in Catholic-Protestant Debate (1588-1650) and in The Westminster Confession of Faith" (Lisle, Illinois, Evangelical Theological Society Annual Meeting, 1994), 1-20.

Holy Spirit in mediating these scriptures to the context of the believers.<sup>530</sup>

Contrary to the current Evangelical use of the Historical-Critical method which regards authorial intent as a deciding factor in determining scriptural truth,

Thomas suggests the tridactic method used in Acts 15 might better suit

Pentecostals in their search for suitable hermeneutical principles:

[T]his study suggests that there may indeed be a distinctive hermeneutical approach to Scripture, contained in the New Testament itself, that is more in keeping with the ethos and worldview of the Pentecostal community than are many of the interpretive approaches currently being employed by a number of Pentecostal interpreters.<sup>531</sup>

Regarding the role of context and community, Thomas notes, "...the methodology revealed in Acts 15 is far removed from the historical-grammatical approach where one moves from text to context. On this occasion, the interpreters moved from their context to the biblical text."<sup>532</sup> Participants in the conference first related their various experiences as God demonstrated His desired inclusion of the Gentiles in the plan of salvation. Only after these testimonies did the Apostles refer to Scripture; with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, passages were then chosen which supported the testimonies relating God's activity within the community. Indeed, the reference to the Holy Spirit in verse 28 indicates a stronger link to the Spirit's role in the interpretive process than many conservatives (or Pentecostals) are willing to acknowledge.

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<sup>530</sup> J.C. Thomas, "Women, Pentecostals, and the Bible," 50.

<sup>531</sup> *Ibid.*, 55.

<sup>532</sup> *Ibid.*, 50.

Thomas acknowledges that this reliance on the Holy Spirit in the interpretive process can lead to “rampant subjectivism”, but argues that this model provides protection against this, for it “clearly regards Scripture as authoritative, for ultimately the experience of the Church must be measured against the biblical text...”<sup>533</sup>

Robert May notes:

Thomas is clearly dissatisfied with much of the contemporary discussion regarding the role of the Spirit in interpretation. For Thomas, there is a clear role for the Spirit which is tangible and necessary for the believing community to function effectively. Thomas is also aware of the subjective element that is obvious when such a path is chosen. He has placed controls in the paradigm that he is proposing that would help limit the range of interpretations, but he refuses to stifle the Spirit’s role through mere ‘academic lip service’. And this is refreshing and challenging, if a little dangerous.<sup>534</sup>

### **7.6.6 Paul Lewis**

Paul Lewis notes that Pentecostal experience is both unique and important in a variety of ways. First, long before the debates over inerrancy, Pentecostals assumed the authority of Scripture, for they experienced that which the Scriptures described. Second, in the debate between the text and the reader as the locus of authority, Pentecostals “...assume that the author and interpreter are both necessary as sender and receiver of Divine assistance as both are

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<sup>533</sup> *ibid.*, 55.

<sup>534</sup> May, “The Role of the Spirit”, Introduction, 5.

‘inspired’ by the Holy Spirit.”<sup>535</sup> Further, in terms of the pre-understanding of the interpreter, “Pentecostal experience authenticates and provides reassurance that the pneumatological experiences of the Bible are also meant for today.”<sup>536</sup>

Pentecostal experience also impacts the application of the text, and how these applications are accepted within the Pentecostal community. Finally, Pentecostal hermeneutics are informed by a “third horizon” which refers to the culture and world-view of the members of the recipient culture, if different from the interpreter’s culture. This “third horizon” can assist in understanding one’s own cultural bias. “Theological reflection invites an experience through a practice, which in turn leads to more theological reflection...So, not only does Pentecostal experience influence the pre-understanding directly as a person interprets the Bible, it also informs the theological framework, which itself forms part of the pre-understanding.”<sup>537</sup> Lewis concludes:

Pentecostal experience is fundamental to the whole process. It necessitates the need to focus upon the original authors, and thereby, the text...Further, Pentecostals presuppose the authority of the Scripture due to their Pentecostal experiences. Thereby, Pentecostals are placed in a unique position as Biblical exegetes, for Pentecostalism promotes the prophetic gifts and finds no philosophical problem of the inspired authors foretelling events prior to their occurrences (e.g. Daniel, Isaiah). .. therefore, the Pentecostal can enter the discussion with a more balanced perspective on the origins, aspects, and features of Biblical texts.<sup>538</sup>

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<sup>535</sup> Lewis, “Pentecostal Epistemology,” 112.

<sup>536</sup> Ibid., 114.

<sup>537</sup> Ibid., 116-117.

<sup>538</sup> Ibid., 117.

### 7.6.7 John McKay

John McKay takes this concept further than many other scholars in his wedding together of charismatic Christianity and current hermeneutics.<sup>539</sup> Highly critical of the approach often found within academia which tends towards critical / analytical methods of scriptural study which does little to impart the truth of God to the student of the scriptures, McKay argues that charismatic readers must not let their involvement with the academy negatively impact their own interpretation of Scripture. According to McKay, his personal experience with the Baptism of the Holy Spirit effectively changed his outlook on Scripture from a purely academic interest to one that was subjective and life-changing. Spirit-baptism thus changed his view of Scripture significantly, to the point that instead of embracing both “rational” and “spiritual” insight into Scripture as beneficial and complementary, he has chosen the more radical approach of suggesting the latter is superior to the former.

It is not that Charismatics have ceased to think theologically; quite the contrary. However their theological perspective has changed, and changed so radically that they find their views no longer fit with those of the majority of today’s biblical theologians, and furthermore that they fail to find much satisfaction from participating in their debates. It is my convinced opinion that a charismatic’s view of the Bible must be different from everyone else’s be they fundamentalists, conservatives, liberals, radicals, or whatever.<sup>540</sup>

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<sup>539</sup> John McKay, “When the Veil is Taken Away: The Impact of Prophetic Experience on Biblical Interpretation,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* (1994): 17-40. The following analysis has benefited greatly from R. May’s article on the Spirit’s role in hermeneutics.

<sup>540</sup> McKay, “The Impact of Prophetic Experience”, 38-39.

### 7.6.8 Kenneth Archer and Arden Autry

Others take a less extreme position than McKay's, recognizing the importance of both reason and the Spirit in hermeneutics. Kenneth Archer, building upon the work of John Christopher Thomas, suggests that while the traditional Evangelical emphasis on the historical-critical method is important, it alone is insufficient. Readers may gain access to the original historical / cultural meaning of the text, but help is not available in terms of meaning for the present. "The traditional Evangelical historical-critical methods would be utilized in the hermeneutic process but would not monopolize the process. Contemporary Christian experience must also be included in the hermeneutical process."<sup>541</sup>

Arden Autry agrees with Archer's line of thinking in his focus on the Spirit's role in bringing the individual into encounter with God. For Autry, correct reading of the scriptures must involve more than an accurate rendering of the author's intention; it must bring the reader to the knowledge of God. The reading of the Biblical text should bring the reader into contact with the transcendent reality that is God. Like Archer, Autry see both the historical-critical methods of biblical study and spiritual experience at play in hermeneutics. The critical methods will objectively control the reader's conclusions and lead to a *correct reading*; and *creative readings* which are context specific and may surpass the original authorial intent, will also be derived through the help of the Holy Spirit. "[T]he language of the Bible does seem to have a dynamic quality not always

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<sup>541</sup> Archer, "Pentecostal Hermeneutics: Retrospect and Prospect," 77.

exhausted by the author's original intention....The 'correct' reading serves the 'creative'; and the 'creative' measures itself by the 'correct'.<sup>542</sup>

### 7.6.9 Summary

It is the opinion of this thesis that while the excessive subjectivism often prevalent in the reader-response model of hermeneutics is not desirable within Pentecostalism, neither is the frequently detached and sometimes esoteric objectivity found within the historical-critical method. Pentecostal hermeneutics ought to move towards the centre of this debate, acknowledging and relying upon the historical-critical method with its objectivity on one hand, while maintaining an openness to the more subjective verification of Pentecostal experience on the other. Referring to the title of Roberts Menzies rebuttal to Timothy Cargal, May concludes: "It is the post-modern bandwagon of rampant subjectivism that we should jump off and not the possibility of the Christian experience of the transcendent."<sup>543</sup> William MacDonald agrees: "Does this holy experience result in an experience-centered theology? Hardly. The better way to label it is this: Christ-centered, experience-certified theology."<sup>544</sup>

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<sup>542</sup> Arden Autry, "Dimensions of Hermeneutics in Pentecostal Focus," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 3 (1993), 37, 49.

<sup>543</sup> May, "The Role of the Holy Spirit", Chapter One, 6.

<sup>544</sup> W.G. MacDonald, "Pentecostal Theology: A Classical Viewpoint," 64.

## 7.7 CONCLUSION

This chapter has shown the important connection between Scripture and the Spirit of God. Active both in its inception and transmission, the Spirit has ensured that the Word of God, the testimony to the Incarnate Christ, has been written down and preserved for all generations. As scholars and interpreters of Scripture in the twenty-first century we need to be ever cognizant of the integral role the Holy Spirit has already had in the transmission of Scripture. But further than that, we must acknowledge the cardinal link between the Author of the Scriptures we study, and the illumination of their meaning, which can only come from him. Without the Holy Spirit working in our lives and our hermeneutics, we are blind and truly unable to ever grasp the truths contained in Scripture.

This is little doubt that Pentecostalism has changed significantly in the time since closer ties with the larger Evangelical community began. Although we acknowledge the increased acceptability of Pentecostalism and the maturing of Pentecostalism academically, we must inquire as to the price paid. This thesis agrees with Lewis' suggestion that the:

...stark contrast between the more cognitive, Enlightenment influenced Evangelicalism and orality-pneumatologically based Pentecostals has diminished since the 1950s due to the 'Evangelicalization' of the Pentecostals. The real issue was that the Pentecostals capitulated in several areas in order to be accepted, among other factors, in the conservative Evangelical community of the National Association of Evangelicals.<sup>545</sup>

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<sup>545</sup> Lewis, "Pentecostal Epistemology," 119. In terms of specific areas in which Lewis believes we have capitulated, he lists pacifism, decline of eschatological vision, rejection of ecumenical concerns, development of racism, the move from the Holiness background and implied ethics, revision of our doctrine of Scripture, reversal of the role of women in ministry, and the demise of the belief of the Spirit's presence and work in the present age. While we may wish to debate certain of these examples, there is a strong case for the impact of Evangelicalism upon Pentecostalism in many of the above areas. See also Peter Hocken, "A Charismatic View of The Distinctiveness of Pentecostalism," in Wonsuk Ma and Robert P. Menzies, eds., *Pentecostalism in*

Pentecostalism now appears to be in full debate over the necessity of a distinctive Pentecostal hermeneutic and what that entails. Those who have embraced the traditional Evangelical hermeneutical approaches are apprehensive about the subjectivism some suggest is required within a Pentecostal hermeneutic. Conversely, those who embrace the possibilities of a truly Pentecostal hermeneutic caution against the toll the traditional Modern approaches will take on distinctive Pentecostal theology. Pomerville laments,

...the excessive impact of the western worldview and scholastic theology on Evangelicalism. Some Evangelicals may be content with the unhappy combination of a warm conversion experience and a cold intellectual doctrine and apologetic, but the Pentecostal cannot afford that tension. The very centre of his distinctive is jeopardized, the dynamic, charismatic experience of the Spirit in the Christian life.<sup>546</sup>

For Pentecostals, the link between hermeneutics and experience is well-established; their contribution to the larger Evangelical hermeneutical world is perhaps just beginning to take shape. At issue is whether Pentecostals ought to solidify their affiliation with traditional Evangelical methods that rely so heavily on modernist presuppositions, or chart a new hermeneutical path that strikes a balance between text-centered and reader-centered approaches. For many

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*Context: Essays in Honor of William W. Menzies*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplementary Series, eds John Christopher Thomas, Rickie D. Moore, and Steven J. Land, no. 11 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 96-106; James K.A. Smith, "The Closing of the Book: Pentecostals, Evangelicals, and the Sacred Writings," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 11 (1997): 49-71;

<sup>546</sup> R. Pomerville, *The Third Force in Missions* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1985), 67. See also Del Tarr, "Transcendence, Immanence, and the Emerging Pentecostal Academy," in Wonsuk Ma and Robert P. Menzies, eds., *Pentecostalism in Context: Essays in Honor of William W. Menzies*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplementary Series, eds John Christopher Thomas, Rickie D. Moore, and Steven J. Land, no. 11 (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 195-222.

Pentecostal scholars, a new approach, encompassing a new view of the role of the Holy Spirit, is needed. Robert May declares:

Few evangelicals would deny that part of the Spirit's role is to bring believers into a relationship with and knowledge of God. This function for most is seen to be predominantly through prayer and Bible study. Questions about whether this is the Spirit's primary role in hermeneutics – the knowledge of God – or whether the Spirit's role is in relation to the mind or the will or the reader's context need to be placed to one side for now. The clear challenge that is being brought by Cargal, Thomas, McKay, Autry and others is that this particular aspect of the Spirit cannot be, on the one hand, freely acknowledged, and yet, on the other hand, restricted to human rational and objective categories. The Spirit can clearly use rational means to communicate and bring people into an encounter with God. But this should not be seen as the only level of action.

For many Pentecostals, the Holy Spirit is active in a supernatural dimension and is quite capable of acting in ways that break the rules of more rational approaches and still bring people into a deeper knowledge of God. Pentecostal approaches to hermeneutics are well-placed to accept this dimension. The extent to which others within Pentecostalism are willing to actively recognize this element is debatable. It seems clear that there are those within Pentecostalism who are little different in their methods from more conservative scholars and feel just as uneasy with this subjective element. However, there is an increasingly competent voice that is willing to acknowledge a more subjective and active role for the Spirit yet is also happy to recognize the role played by scholarship and more traditional approaches. For Pentecostalism, synthesis rather than polarization and therefore, alienation, seems the better path to choose. They would all argue that conservative scholarship certainly needs the insights that they bring.<sup>547</sup>

It is the position of this thesis that Pentecostalism must embrace a distinctly Pentecostal hermeneutic, along the pattern established by Archer's proposal, though not necessarily embracing Archer's proposed hermeneutic as a

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<sup>547</sup> May, "The Role of the Holy Spirit", Chapter One, 7.

whole. Pentecostal interests are best served by an approach to the interpretation of Scripture that combines recent advances in hermeneutical scholarship with a Pentecostal sensitivity to the roles of narratives, community and experience in our hermeneutical methodology.

Further, Pentecostal scholars must recognize the possibilities of a distinctly Pentecostal contribution to the greater world of Evangelical and Protestant hermeneutics. As has been demonstrated in chapter seven, significant numbers of Pentecostal scholars believe that Pentecostalism has something to offer Evangelical hermeneutical methods by way of experiential verification. This author agrees. Pentecostals must embrace a hermeneutical method which strikes a balance between the text-centered and reader-centered approaches currently in vogue. As Archer has demonstrated, it is possible to adhere to a hermeneutical structure which does not eliminate either of these important parameters. In so doing, Pentecostals will contribute significantly to the hermeneutical methodology of other Protestant groups who are also facing an increasingly Postmodern society which is less inclined to accept any presentation of the Gospel truncated by Modernity. As Pentecostalism of the past served the Christian church by renewing her awareness of the Holy Spirit, both in theology and practice, Pentecostals today may contribute much to a methodology of hermeneutics that holds to the best of the Historical–Critical method, yet is open to the role of experience, narratives, and community in the interpretive process.

## Chapter VIII

### CONCLUSION AND CONTRIBUTION

Where do we go to find a Christianity that speaks meaningfully to a Postmodern world?...[O]ur challenge is not to reinvent Christianity, but to restore and then adapt classical Christianity to the Postmodern cultural situation.<sup>548</sup>

Robert E. Webber

This is a generation of young people whose current involvement in religion is appreciable. Further, their terms for greater involvement in groups are reasonable; if they can find their participation “worthwhile,” they are open to it. In light of their widespread interest in meaning and mystery, the supernatural and the spiritual, religious groups who have something to bring need to bring it – and, to put it bluntly, stop complaining about the apathy of youth.<sup>549</sup>

Reginald Bibby

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<sup>548</sup> Robert E. Webber, *Ancient-Future Faith: Rethinking Evangelicalism for a Postmodern World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999), 24.

<sup>549</sup> Reginald Bibby, *Canada's Teens: Today, Yesterday, and Tomorrow* (Toronto: Stoddart, 2001), 131-132.

## 8.1 Summary and Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to suggest that Pentecostalism must refrain from embracing a fully Modern approach to hermeneutics, but instead interpret Scripture with an ear to Postmodern thought. This approach would allow for a full recognition of the “supernatural”<sup>550</sup> inherent within the gospel message, and would enhance the relevance of the Pentecostal (and Gospel) message to the newest generations of North American youth.

To accomplish this task, it was first necessary to define Postmodern thought, particularly as it relates to the anti-Modern tendencies in early Pentecostalism. The work of four key philosophers was examined – Lyotard, Rorty, Derrida, and Foucault – as having provided the philosophical underpinning for the majority of Postmodern thought. The major varieties of Postmodernism were acknowledged, as well as five common Postmodern themes including anti-foundationalism and deconstruction of language. Chapter two concluded with a critique of Postmodernism from an Evangelical /Pentecostal perspective. Chapter three sought to demonstrate that early Pentecostal methods of interpreting the Scriptures contained many elements of Postmodern thought, some seventy-five years before these ideas became commonplace in academic circles. This was true particularly in terms of the importance of narratives, role of experience in determining what is true, and the significance of community. While Pentecostals employ the decidedly non-Postmodern use of the metanarrative to inform their self-understanding and biblical interpretation, they have also relied

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<sup>550</sup> As noted in chapter one, various scholars have observed that the term “supernatural” has been imported into theology from philosophy, and did not gain widespread acceptance into the theological world until the sixteenth century.

heavily upon the personal stories of those within the congregation. Pentecostal reliance upon their shared experience as a tool in the interpretation of Scripture is an oft-derided, but key component of Pentecostal praxis.

Further, in chapter four, I sought to show that during the course of time since Azusa Street, Pentecostal scholars, and in turn, Pentecostalism, became increasingly Modern in their approach to hermeneutics. The debate between Gordon D. Fee, an Assemblies of God scholar, and other Pentecostal theologians, was highlighted as an example of the increasingly Modern tendencies of hermeneutics among Pentecostals. Fee's approach to interpretation, which includes strong focus upon authorial intent, by necessity led him to challenge traditional Pentecostal belief in Subsequence and Initial Evidence. Interestingly, the Pentecostal scholars who engaged Fee also used similar Modern hermeneutical techniques.

Via our exploration of the demythologization urged by Rudolph Bultmann, chapter five explored current youth culture. Representing Modern hermeneutical principles taken to the extreme, Bultmann's work (and modern followers such as *The Jesus Seminar*), argues for the removal of "myth" from the Scriptures, insisting that humanity today would more quickly welcome a Gospel message devoid of the myths that Modernity views as scientifically implausible. Our study has shown that as younger generations have increasingly accepted Postmodern thought, they are looking for a gospel message which features God's action in the world prominently. By its very nature, Pentecostalism has been well suited to present this message. Our increasing acceptance of Evangelical hermeneutics,

however, may serve to limit our ability to present properly the key doctrines and practices of early Pentecostalism to future generations.

Although many Pentecostals are aware of the need for the movement to address Postmodern thought within their hermeneutical methodology, few have proposed a truly Pentecostal hermeneutic, which incorporates aspects of Postmodern thinking. Kenneth Archer, a Church of God in Christ theologian, has done so, and chapter six examines his contribution to the current debate. Archer has proposed a new Pentecostal hermeneutical strategy, which promotes a tridactic negotiation between the Spirit, Scripture, and the Pentecostal community. Archer's work is highlighted as an example of the manner in which Pentecostals must continue to explore new approaches to scriptural interpretation which are true to our roots, and enable us to speak to current generations with relevance.

Chapter seven concluded this thesis by first examining the role of the Holy Spirit in hermeneutics. The work of a variety of scholars was surveyed as we attempted to understand more completely the process by which the Spirit illuminates Scripture for believers. Four options were considered as we explored whether Pentecostal hermeneutical concerns should be wedded to Postmodern thought, thus creating a distinctively Pentecostal hermeneutic. Further, we explored the debate concerning whether Pentecostals have a hermeneutical advantage over non-Pentecostals via their attitudes towards personal experience. Though with notable exceptions, a number of Pentecostal scholars feel that Pentecostalism has an edge hermeneutically, particularly in those

passages of Scripture which speak of an experience of the Holy Spirit, which many Pentecostals claim to have experienced in this day.

## **8.2 Contributions of this Study**

Though acknowledging Archer's insightful distinction between Postmodern and *paramodern*, this thesis has demonstrated that in three key areas – the role of experience, role of community, and rejection of the hegemony of reason – early Pentecostalism thinking and practice clearly resembled current Postmodern thought. Though early Pentecostals would have never considered themselves Postmodern, their early thinking (as evidenced both in their writing and in their approach to Scripture), demonstrates some remarkable consistencies with Postmodern thought, particularly in the three areas delineated above.

Second, this thesis presented the tendency of post 1960s Pentecostalism to accept an increasingly Modern approach to hermeneutics via their participation in Evangelical hermeneutical principles. Through our survey of the debate between Gordon Fee and his Pentecostal colleagues, this thesis demonstrated that Fee's challenge of Pentecostal distinctive doctrines via the historical-grammatical methods of Evangelicalism, was met with similar methods by his Pentecostal detractors. For the most part, the Pentecostal scholars who responded to Fee's challenge did so by using similar hermeneutical methods as did Fee. Neither response to Fee included the suggestion that distinctive Pentecostal theology could not be supported by accepted Evangelical hermeneutical methods; neither

suggested a distinctive Pentecostal hermeneutic as the way forward from the challenge presented by Fee.

This thesis has made the significant observation that in terms of connecting with younger generations, Pentecostalism is not well served by our indiscriminate acceptance of Evangelical hermeneutics. The preservation of early Pentecostal belief and practice is necessary to reach today's Postmodern youth with the Gospel of Christ, as understood and practiced by Pentecostalism. This cannot be fully achieved by the wholesale embracing of the historical-grammatical method. For Pentecostalism to continue its tremendous growth in Western countries as it is now witnessing in other areas of the world, it must not fail to present the transcendent God of the Scriptures to a world open to experiencing the supernatural activity of a caring Creator.

Through the work of Kenneth Archer, we have observed that there are viable options for Pentecostals wishing to employ a hermeneutic that considers both the world of the text and that of the reader. Though Pentecostalism has become increasingly drawn to Evangelical hermeneutics, there are Pentecostal scholars who remain convinced of the need for a distinctive Pentecostal hermeneutic, and who are endeavouring to provide the same.

Finally, this thesis has argued that Pentecostals must not view themselves as the uneducated cousins of Evangelicals, having nothing to bring to the hermeneutical table. Rather, Pentecostalism must recognize the unique contributions it has to offer in terms of an experiential component to hermeneutics. Pentecostals have always believed that Scripture is as concerned

with orthopraxy as it is with orthodoxy; verifying scriptural teaching through the lived experience of believers may not only be advisable, but necessary for a proper interpretation of Holy Writ.

### **8.3 Implications of the Study and Areas of Needed Research**

This thesis has presented concerns relative to Pentecostalism's acceptance of Evangelical hermeneutics, and the resultant consequences in terms of our ability to connect with youth influenced by Postmodern thought. While Postmodernity has without doubt made a significant impact on the minds of youth throughout North America and Western Europe, the same cannot be assumed for other areas of the world. Further study would assess a) whether Pentecostalism has been significantly impacted by Modernity in other parts of the world; b) whether Postmodernity has made substantial inroads in the thinking of non-Western youth; and c) depending on the answers to (a) and (b) above, whether Pentecostalism must be wary of incorporating Modern hermeneutics into Pentecostal hermeneutics in the non-Western world.

While this thesis has argued that Pentecostals have much to contribute to Evangelical hermeneutics relative to experiential verification, further work can be done on the specific format of this contribution. Though Archer's proposal and others have taken steps to ensure that Pentecostal hermeneutical concerns regarding the work of the Holy Spirit and the role of community have been beneficial, more is needed to consider the experiential component of Pentecostal hermeneutics also.

Additional research is needed to determine specific areas of diversity between those considered GenX and the Millennials. As time progresses, differences in these two groups will become more apparent, particularly as the younger generation grows into adulthood and exhibits characteristics either convergent with, or incongruous with, GenX.

Finally, one may consider the extent to which Pentecostalism has been complicit in spreading the Postmodern mindset. Given that there are now almost 600 million Pentecostals worldwide, each of whom holds to several philosophical suppositions considered viable by most Postmodern thinkers, it is axiomatic that with one-tenth of the world's population exhibiting thought and practice characteristic of the Postmodern mindset, Pentecostalism itself may well be responsible in part for the spread of Postmodernity. Further study could confirm the role Pentecostalism may have had, and may be having, in the rise of Postmodern thought.

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