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Reading St. Luke's Text and Theology: Pentecostal Voices

Essays in Honor of Professor Roger Stronstad

EDITED BY Riku P. Tuppurainen

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READING ST. LUKE'S TEXT AND THEOLOGY: PENTECOSTAL VOICES

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Chapter 9

St. Luke's Text and Postmodern Pentecostal Hermeneutics

BRADLEY TRUMAN NOEL¹

The way how Pentecostals have read and used the Lukan texts has changed over the years. This chapter will trace the journey of Pentecostal hermeneutics from the Bible Reading method, through the embracing of the historical-grammatical method, to recent and distinctively Pentecostal contributions to hermeneutics that demonstrate an awareness of Postmodern influences and possibilities. We will conclude with an examination of the contributions of Pentecostal hermeneutics to our present reading of the Lukan material.²

Pentecostal Hermeneutics

Early Pentecostalism, it may be said, did not have a carefully structured hermeneutic—or at least one of which they were aware. With the passing of the old “common sense” consensus, Protestants moved in one of two directions: Modernists or Liberals argued that the Bible’s authority did not rest upon historical or scientific claims;

1. I consider it as a great privilege to pen this chapter in honor of Roger Stronstad. I did not have the pleasure of being his student, but I did discover his work early in my graduate studies. As a Pentecostal, studying at a Baptist institution, my professors took great care to ensure that I was thoroughly familiar with my own tradition. When the discussion turned to a topic for my thesis, my supervisor proposed that I examine the contribution of Gordon Fee to Pentecostal hermeneutics. This crucial suggestion initiated a life-long interest in Pentecostal theology in general, and our hermeneutics in particular. Not long into my research, I became aware of Stronstad’s prescient work, *The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke*, one of the first to answer directly Fee’s challenge concerning the importance of authorial intent in determining normative Pentecostal theology. In so doing, Stronstad made an early and inestimable contribution to Pentecostal understandings of Scripture.

2. This chapter draws directly and without constant referencing from Noel, *Pentecostal and Postmodern Hermeneutics*. Published by permission.

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.³ It has been argued that 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. Their concern ran deeper than simply proving facts from the Bible treated as a scientific textbook; Pentecostals sought to authenticate their Christianity via religious experience. “The Pentecostals said yes to both the authority of Scripture and the authority of experience. . . . Pentecostalism’s lived experience was coloring their understanding of Scripture and Scripture was shaping their lived experience.”⁴

Archer made a significant contribution with his detailed analysis of the interpretive process used by first-generation Pentecostals: “The Bible Reading Method was an inductive and deductive commonsensical method, which required all of the ‘biblical data’ on a 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.”⁵ Frank Ewart’s historiography of Pentecostalism notes: “Their adopted method was to select a subject, find all the references on it, and present . . . a scriptural summary of what the Bible had to say about the theme.”⁶ 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.⁷

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.⁸ Again, this approach testifies to the widespread use of the *Bible Reading Method* among the earliest Pentecostals.

3. Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 40.

4. Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 63–64.

5. Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 91.

6. Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 75, quoting Ewart, *Phenomenon of Pentecost*, 60.

7. Parham, *Life of Charles F. Parham*, 52.

8. Parham, “Earnestly Contend for the Faith,” 82.

The Modernization of Pentecostal Hermeneutics

As Pentecostals established training institutions and interacted with scholars of other Christian backgrounds, a shift occurred. Whether it was motivated by a desire for increased acceptance among the larger evangelical community or influenced by the training the new Pentecostal educators had received at the hands of their professors from the wider University and Seminary world, Pentecostalism began to shed its reliance upon the Bible Reading Method. As Pentecostals were trained academically, 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.”⁹

By 1994, for example, in an article on Pentecostal hermeneutics, Gordon Anderson observes that there is indeed a place for “an identifiable, unique, and legitimate Pentecostal hermeneutic.”¹⁰ He notes, however, that, “Careful Pentecostal interpreters agree with other mainline evangelicals that the best way to interpret the Bible is to work to uncover the intended meaning of the text through the use of historical-grammatical methods.”¹¹

A decade earlier, Gordon Fee’s popular *New Testament Exegesis* observes that “exegesis is primarily concerned with intentionality: What did the author *intend* his original readers to understand?”¹² Elsewhere 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 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.¹³ As anyone familiar with Pentecostal hermeneutics and theology will quickly realize, the preceding “guidelines” challenged the Pentecostal position on Subsequence and Initial Evidence, each based on the assumption that Luke intentionally taught those doctrines from the related narratives in Acts. Further, the guidelines are grounded in the standard starting point of Evangelical hermeneutics: the search for authorial intent.

9. Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 131.

10. Anderson, *Pentecostal Hermeneutics*, 3.

11. Anderson, *Pentecostal Hermeneutics*, 5.

12. Fee, *New Testament Exegesis*, 27.

13. Fee, *Gospel and Spirit*, 92.

Three scholars, in particular, provided appropriate responses: William Menzies,¹⁴ Roger Stronstad,¹⁵ and Robert P. Menzies.¹⁶ The reader will quickly observe 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 set out by Fee, and work to demonstrate Luke’s charismatic intent. In this discussion of Pentecostal theology, the embracing of “Evangelical hermeneutics” was well in hand.¹⁷

Several Pentecostal scholars 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 century. In its more negative forms, it leads to a total rejection of Pentecostal phenomena.¹⁸

As a result, within the past 20 years, a variety of Pentecostal academics have proposed a Pentecostal hermeneutic that (1) takes seriously the strides made in biblical exegesis via historical and grammatical criticism; (2) places high priority upon the distinctive elements of the Pentecostal worldview, and (3) seeks to interact with trends in culture affected by postmodern thought—a subject we must now explore briefly.

Basic Tenets of Postmodernism

At its essence, Postmodernism¹⁹ is a worldview consisting of anti-foundationalism,²⁰ disbelief in pure objectivity, and deconstruction of “certain” knowledge, primarily characterized by a reaction to the prevailing worldview of Modernism. There are many facets of Postmodern thought; for the purposes of this chapter, I will provide a cursory look at four common themes.²¹

14. Menzies, “Methodology of Pentecostal Theology.”

15. Stronstad, “Biblical Precedent for Historical Precedent.”

16. Menzies, *Empowered for Witness*.

17. For a summary of this debate, see Noel, “Gordon Fee and the Challenge.”

18. McLean, “Toward a Pentecostal Hermeneutic,” 37.

19. For a sample of sources attempting to define Postmodernity, see Finger, “Modernity,” 353–68; Gitlin, “Postmodern Predicament,” 67–76; Percepe, “Unbearable Lightness of Being Postmodern,” 118–35; Van Gelder, “Postmodernism as an Emerging Worldview,” 412–17; Kelly, *Understanding Postmodernism*.

20. “Foundationalism” may be defined as “Philosophical or theological approaches affirming specific truths as bases and criteria for all other truths” (McKim, *Westminster Dictionary*).

21. We are indebted in part for the breakdown of categories to Jaichandran and Madhav,

Anti-Foundationalism

In the Postmodern mind, knowledge is uncertain. It, therefore, abandons foundationalism²²—the idea that knowledge can be built upon the basis of irrefutable first principles and basic truths which lead ultimately to God, and upon which rational thought and progress can be based.²³ Postmoderns discard the Enlightenment assumption that truth is certain and therefore entirely rational.²⁴ 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.”²⁵

Deconstruction

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 minority communities.”²⁶ Overarching universal narratives that connect with all of humankind (such as the biblical story of creation) are discarded out of hand. All meaning is created by the individual; the reality of one is as authentic as the reality of another, for we create our own realities. Though rejecting the universal stories of humanity, many Postmoderns accentuate the place of oral traditions, narratives, and stories within the community as essential.²⁷

“Pentecostal Spirituality,” 45–49.

22. Carl F. H. Henry considered anti-foundationalism “the one epistemic premise shared by all postmodernists” (Henry, “Postmodernism,” 42).

23. See Erickson, *Truth and Consequences*, 252–72, for an excellent discussion on foundationalism, Postmodernity, and Christianity. Also, Depaul, *Resurrecting Old-Fashioned Foundationalism*.

24. 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” (Wallace, “Real Issue,” 8).

25. Grenz, *Primer*, 7.

26. Jaichandran and Madhav, “Pentecostal Spirituality,” 46. Grenz 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” (Grenz, *Primer*, 168).

27. 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” (Grigg, “Spirit of Church,” 7).

Denial of Absolute Truth and Importance of Experience

In the Modern mind, absolute truth is objective and available for discovery by the persistent truth-seeker. For the Postmodern, truth does not exist outside of subjective experience; therefore, no version of the truth is more significant than any other. Postmodernism is inherently pluralistic—some postmodernists believe absolute truth does not exist. The Postmodern mind rejects the Enlightenment notion that knowledge is objective.²⁸

Decimation of Individuality / Promotion of Community

For Richard 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 favor of the importance of community. Rorty’s strong emphasis on community and society denies humanity its traditional place within Modernism as the center of the universe. Grenz notes that in many cases,

the postmodern worldview . . . 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.²⁹

Pentecostal Contributions to Hermeneutics

I join with those who believe that Pentecostalism was weakened considerably when it moved to an uncritical acceptance of a hermeneutic more in line with accepted Evangelical practices.³⁰ Further, reflecting upon the inroads postmodern thought is making in culture, we have called for a distinctively Pentecostal hermeneutic.

Kenneth Archer, for example, feels that if Pentecostalism is to remain the relevant missionary force that it has been, elements of Postmodernism are essential.³¹ He notes with approval the efforts of some scholars to bring their Pentecostal spirituality and pneumatology to bear in their hermeneutical work.³² Archer would blend the post-modern emphasis on the interpreter’s context with classical Pentecostal spirituality.

28. Grenz, *Primer*, 7.

29. Grenz, *Primer*, 8.

30. Noel, *Pentecostal and Postmodern Hermeneutics*, esp. 96–121.

31. See, for example, Archer, “Pentecostal Hermeneutics.” This line of thinking is found throughout Archer’s work.

32. For example, Thomas, “Women, Pentecostals, and the Bible,” 41–56. Thomas’s work will be

Today some Pentecostals attempt to express themselves with a purely modern-istic 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.³³

Although continuing to focus on authorial intent, Stronstad proposed hermeneutical guidelines, more in keeping with the early traditions and experience of Pentecostalism. On the role of experience within hermeneutics, for example, he has recommended that it must enter the process at the beginning, rather than the end as suggested by other Pentecostals scholars.³⁴

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.³⁵

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.

Harlyn Purdy's 2015 effort endeavors to bring balance between those who would insist on maintaining Pentecostal allegiance to the historical-grammatical interpretation of Scripture, and those who would abandon it in favor of more reader-centered approaches. Acknowledging the Pentecostal debt to evangelicalism, Purdy holds that that this form of hermeneutics provides a bulwark against some of the more creative readings now advocated. He is, however, opposed to solely using the historical-grammatical approach, and insists that a distinctive Pentecostal hermeneutic is needed, with an eye towards postmodern thought, and open to a variety of critical methods including narrative, canonical, and rhetorical criticism. His contribution includes a quadratic approach that embraces scripture, the Spirit, the community, and interestingly, trained leadership. Although his use of Spirit-scripture-community mirrors proposals found elsewhere, the inclusion of trained leadership (to which Purdy devotes only ten pages, unfortunately), is a contribution to Pentecostal hermeneutics worth pursuing more deeply.³⁶

explored in greater detail below.

33. Archer, "Pentecostal Hermeneutics," 80.

34. See MacDonald, "Classical Viewpoint," 58–75; Menzies, "Methodology," 1–14.

35. Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 143. See Stronstad, "Pentecostal Experience and Hermeneutics," 16–26.

36. Purdy, *Distinct*.

In *Spirit Hermeneutics*, Craig Keener surveys the manner in which believers read Scripture “in the Spirit,” and offers suggestions for improvement. He sets out to articulate what it means to interpret scripture in light of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit was poured out on the Church. Keener proposes a hermeneutic that takes experience seriously, but not without criteria that help keep it grounded. He wishes, therefore, to emphasize the importance of authorial intent, and the horizon of both original author and reader, but is determined to bring a Spirit-filled epistemology to bear that allows the reader to discern the pneumatic reading of texts.³⁷

Eschewing the contribution of a particular hermeneutical method, Chris Green instead proposes “suggested practices in hopes of provoking the imaginative and affective sensitivities needed to read Scripture sanctifyingly.”³⁸ Rather than beginning with the usual questions about Scripture’s usefulness in revealing God and doctrine, Green instead begins with reader-focused concerns: how does the experience of reading Scripture contribute to our own sanctification? The answer comes in part via our own struggle with the difficulties of the biblical text. “The complexity and impenetrability of the language of the Scriptures, therefore, afford us sanctifying diversity. . . . The Scriptures teach us endurance not so much by providing us with examples of patience as by requiring us to persevere in the work of interpretation.”³⁹ Through suggested practices such as “(Re) Reading in the Spirit, (Re) Reading with Community, (Re) Reading for Christ, and (Re) Reading from the Heart,” Green desires to “construct an authentically Pentecostal hermeneutics [*sic*] and theology of Scripture that holds together in the tightest interplay the Spirit’s work in prophecy and scriptural interpretation. . . . We have to read Scripture so that we are made wise with God’s own wisdom, transformed as Christ’s co-sanctified co-sanctifiers, meditators with him of God’s divine-human beauty.”⁴⁰ Green argues that his Pentecostal and charismatic readers need to shift from epistemological to soteriological conceptions of Scripture, and admirably succeeds in leading the way.

William Oliverio’s recent monograph provides the reader with a useful survey of five types of Pentecostal hermeneutics since Azusa Street. (1) The original Pentecostal hermeneutic used by Parham, Seymour, Mason, and Haywood; (2) the “early evangelical-Pentecostal hermeneutic” availed of by stalwarts such as P. C. Nelson and Myer Pearlman; (3) the contemporary “evangelical-Pentecostal hermeneutic” observed above to be the choice of Fee, R. Menzies, and Stronstad; (4) the contextual-Pentecostal hermeneutic recently employed by Amos Yong, Chris Thomas, Jamie Smith and Ken Archer; and (5) what Oliverio describes as “the ecumenical-Pentecostal” hermeneutic favored by Mel Robeck, Frank Macchia, and Simon Chan.⁴¹

37. Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics*.

38. Green, *Sanctifying Interpretation*, 142.

39. Green, *Sanctifying Interpretation*, 136.

40. Green, *Sanctifying Interpretation*, 119, 124.

41. Oliverio Jr., *Theological Hermeneutics*.

Focusing on both #3 and #4, above, Oliverio notes that the contemporary evangelical-Pentecostal hermeneutic stayed true to Hirsch's insistence on authorial intent, while the contextual-Pentecostal hermeneutic followed more in line with Gadamer's focus on mediating the reader's conceptual horizon with that of the text. In Oliverio's estimation, the latter phase commenced a distinctively Pentecostal approach to theology. Following Smith's "creational-pneumatic" model,⁴² Oliverio proposes a hermeneutic that emerges not from human fallenness, but from God's blessing pronounced in Eden. Hermeneutics, therefore, proceed out of God's blessing on our creaturehood, flowing out of God's creational goodness.⁴³ As such, Oliverio concludes that "the best way forward for Pentecostal theology [is] a hermeneutical realism which allows for multiple productive hermeneutics to emerge that can faithfully account for the reality of the faith [including] new beliefs and practices that will surely emerge as a result of the continuing growth of Pentecostalism."⁴⁴

Contributions of Pentecostal Hermeneutics to Readings of Luke-Acts

Having explored the trajectory of Pentecostal hermeneutics, noting recent offerings in light of basic Postmodern thought, I will now conclude by exploring how the hermeneutics of Pentecostalism may contribute to a reading of Lukan texts. I will comment briefly on two areas, before unpacking a third in greater detail.

The Pentecostal Story

Much has been made about the importance of both the metanarrative and personal stories within Pentecostalism, and rightly so. "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."⁴⁵ Faupel's work on Pentecostalism⁴⁶ is an important step in determining the Pentecostal story; indeed, he has demonstrated that the Latter Rain movement provides the "primary organizational structure for the Pentecostal narrative tradition."⁴⁷ This motif provided Pentecostals a framework by which they could interpret Scripture and determine their place within the narrative

42. Smith, *Fall of Interpretation*.

43. See Rice, "Bill Oliverio."

44. Oliverio Jr., *Theological Hermeneutics*, 361. Readers may also wish to consult Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community; Hermeneutical Spirit*; Noel, *Pentecostal and Postmodern Hermeneutics*; Archer and Oliverio Jr., *Constructive Pneumatological Hermeneutics*.

45. Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 94.

46. Faupel, *Everlasting Gospel*, esp. 19–43.

47. Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 100.

of Scripture. “The Pentecostal hermeneutical strategy at the foundational interpretive level was a unique story.”⁴⁸

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 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.⁴⁹ Having gleaned the “distinctive doctrines” of Subsequence and Initial Evidence from the narratives of Acts, Pentecostals as a whole embraced the importance of the story long before the recent Postmodern focus. This alone has contributed significantly to our reading of Luke’s theology, shared intentionally via narratives.

The Miraculous Work of the Holy Spirit

Early Pentecostals strongly believed that they were the restoration of the New Testament church, the most precise expression of that which God intended the church to be since the days of the Apostles. As proof, Pentecostals often looked to the manifestation 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 *working 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. For these earliest Pentecostals, their manner and method of scriptural interpretation was not only correct, but it was also 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.

Recent offerings from Pentecostal scholars continue this focus on preserving the miraculous within a Pentecostal reading of Scripture. Almost to a person, those who bring a Pentecostal dish to the hermeneutical feast wish to preserve the early Pentecostal ethos that viewed the Spirit’s working via the miraculous with the utmost appreciation. The application of this focus to readers of the Lukan text is quite apparent. From the many miracles of Jesus recorded in Luke, to the manner in which the Holy Spirit led the early Church through a variety of supernatural acts, the Pentecostal concern with reading Luke-Acts through eyes appreciative of the miraculous has never been more relevant. My own work has argued that for the sake of younger

48. Archer, “Pentecostal Story,” 154.

49. Erickson, *Truth or Consequences*, 202.

generations in particular, receiving now the full impact of Postmodern influence and openness to the supernatural via human experience, Pentecostals must actively resist any reading of Scripture that fails fully to appreciate the miraculous.⁵⁰ Any tendency towards a hermeneutic, be it historical-grammatical or otherwise, that diminishes our focus on the early Pentecostal ethos of supernaturalism, imperils our discipleship and evangelistic efforts among our own sons and daughters.

Pentecostal Hermeneutics and the Importance of Experience

For the Pentecostal, Scripture must primarily speak to the modern reader; simply focusing on what the text may have originally meant is not enough. Archer notes: "A hermeneutic that focuses only upon what the original inspired author meant . . . will not completely satisfy the requirements of a Pentecostal hermeneutic. The essence of Pentecostalism asserts that 'the spiritual and extraordinary supernatural experiences of the biblical characters are possible for contemporary believers.'"⁵¹ French Arrington observes: "The real issue in 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*."⁵² The Holy Spirit enables the reader to bridge the gap between the ancient authors of Scripture and the present interpreter.⁵³ Pentecostals contribute most substantially to hermeneutics in the area of experience and verification; some argue that Pentecostals and Charismatics, therefore, enjoy an edge in their reading of Scripture. Readers may be surprised to discover how many Pentecostal scholars have written in support of such a notion; a sampling will suffice.

John McKay

McKay is highly critical of the tendency towards critical/analytical methods of scriptural study often found within academia, which does little to impart the truth of God to the student of the Scriptures.⁵⁴ Instead, he argues that charismatic readers must not let their involvement with the academy negatively impact their own interpretation of Scripture. McKay's personal experience with the baptism in the Holy Spirit changed his view of Scripture significantly, to the point that instead of embracing both "rational" and "spiritual" insight into Scripture as complementary, he chooses the more radical approach of suggesting the latter is superior to the former.

50. Noel, *Pentecostal and Postmodern Hermeneutics; Pentecostalism*, esp. 176–82.

51. Archer, "Pentecostal Hermeneutics," 75.

52. Arrington, "Use of the Bible," 101 (emphasis added).

53. Arrington, "Use of the Bible," 105.

54. McKay, "When the Veil is Taken Away."

It is not that charismatics cease 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.⁵⁵

William W. Menzies

William Menzies suggests three levels of a Pentecostal hermeneutic. The first is the *inductive* level, which is comprised of three varieties of inductive listening. The second is the *deductive* level, observing that after one has availed of inductive hermeneutics, certain patterns or theological motifs begin to emerge. Finally, he describes the *verification* level; if a biblical truth is to be promulgated, then it certainly ought to be verifiable and demonstrable in life. While others chide Pentecostals for their dangerous practice of “exegeting” out of the experience, Menzies argues that it is dangerous to develop theology and hermeneutics from *non-experience*.⁵⁶

Howard M. Ervin

Ervin suggests a *pneumatic* hermeneutic, “with a phenomenology that meets the criteria of empirically verifiable sensory experience (healing, miracles, etc.) and does not violate the coherence of rational categories.”⁵⁷ A pneumatic epistemology also “provides a resolution of (a) the dichotomy between faith and reason that existentialism consciously 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 fidei*.”⁵⁸ Because Pentecostals allow the experiential immediacy of the Holy Spirit to inform their epistemology, this contact with the *pneumatic* enlightens their hermeneutics in a way that may be considered beyond the traditional view of illumination. Ervin writes:

Pentecostal experience with the Holy Spirit gives existential awareness of the miraculous in the biblical worldview. These events as recorded are no longer “mythological,” 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,

55. McKay, “When the Veil is Taken Away,” 38–39.

56. Menzies, “Methodology of Pentecostal Theology,” 1–14.

57. Ervin, “Hermeneutics,” 23.

58. Ervin, “Hermeneutics,” 23–24.

and interaction with the presence of this spiritual continuum is axiomatic in a Pentecostal epistemology that affects decisively its hermeneutic.⁵⁹

John Christopher Thomas

Thomas seeks to develop a Pentecostal hermeneutic from the Acts 15 record of the Jerusalem Council, noting this passage records an example of hermeneutics based on the collective experience of the community, the Scriptures, and the primary role of the Holy Spirit in mediating these Scriptures to the context of the believers.⁶⁰ Contrary to the typical use of the historical-critical method, which regards authorial intent as a deciding factor in determining scriptural truth, he suggests that the tridactic method used in Acts 15 might better satisfy Pentecostals in their search for suitable hermeneutical principles.⁶¹ Thomas's efforts clearly seek to present "hermeneutical approach that attempts to be consistent with early Pentecostal ethos and resists the complete adoption of an Evangelical and modernistic Historical Critical method."⁶²

Regarding the role of context and community, Thomas notes that "the methodology revealed in Acts 15 is far removed from the historical-critical or historical-grammatical approach where one moves from text to context. On this occasion, the interpreters moved from their context to the biblical text."⁶³ Participants in the Jerusalem 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 admit.

Roger Stronstad

I conclude by examining the work of our honoree. Stronstad believes there are five components to a Pentecostal hermeneutic: charismatic experiential presuppositions, the pneumatic, genres, exegesis, and experiential verification.⁶⁴ 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.⁶⁵

59. Ervin, "Hermeneutics," 35.

60. Thomas, "Women, Pentecostals, and the Bible," 50.

61. Thomas, "Women, Pentecostals, and the Bible," 54–55.

62. Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 146.

63. Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 50.

64. See Stronstad, "Pentecostal Experience and Hermeneutics," 28–29.

65. In his recent work, Stronstad again lists five interdependent aspects of interpretation:

Stronstad is convinced 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 Spirit in Acts better than the non-Pentecostal.”⁶⁶ Clark Pinnock writes, “We cannot consider Pentecostalism to be a kind of aberration born of experiential excesses but a twentieth-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.”⁶⁷ 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.⁶⁸

Conclusion

Recent Pentecostal hermeneutics, penned with an eye towards Postmodern realities, have much to contribute to a modern reading of the Lukan texts. 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. I believe Pentecostal hermeneutics ought to move towards the center of this debate, acknowledging and relying upon the historical-critical method with its objectivity on one hand, while remaining open to the more subjective verification of Pentecostal experience on the other. Does this openness to the role of experience leave the Pentecostals in a dangerous position as they read Luke-Acts? Hardly. William MacDonald declares: “Does this holy experience result in an experience-centered theology? Hardly. The better way to label it is this: Christ-centered, experience-certified theology.”⁶⁹

translation, exegesis, consideration of contexts, formation of biblical theology from exegesis, and applying the relevant application to the reader’s life. We observe the charismatic dimension of hermeneutics is more muted. See Stronstad, “Some Aspects of Hermeneutics,” 32.

66. Stronstad, “Some Aspects of Hermeneutics,” 15. Badcock, *Light of Truth*, 139–44, agrees.

67. Pinnock in Stronstad, *Charismatic Theology*, viii.

68. Stronstad, “Pentecostal Experience and Hermeneutics,” 17. This concept is not new. Indeed, some scholars believe that the reference to “private spirits” in the Westminster Confession of Faith refers to charismata in terms of interpretive help. See Curtis, “Charismata,” 1–20.

69. MacDonald, “Classical Viewpoint,” 64.