

Note: This Work has been made available by the authority of the copyright owner solely for the purpose of private study and research and may not be copied or reproduced except as permitted by the copyright laws of Canada without the written authority from the copyright owner.

Noel, Bradley Truman. *Pentecostal and Postmodern Hermeneutics: Comparisons and Contemporary Impact*. Eugene: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2010.

Pentecostal and Postmodern
Hermeneutics

Comparisons and Contemporary Impact

BRADLEY TRUMAN NOEL

WIPF & STOCK • Eugene, Oregon

PENTECOSTAL AND POSTMODERN HERMENEUTICS
Comparisons and Contemporary Impact

Copyright © 2010 Bradley Truman Noel. All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations in critical publications or reviews, no part of this book may be reproduced in any manner without prior written permission from the publisher. Write: Permissions, Wipf and Stock Publishers, 199 W. 8th Ave., Suite 3, Eugene, OR 97401.

Wipf & Stock
An Imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers
199 W. 8th Ave., Suite 3
Eugene, OR 97401
www.wipfandstock.com

ISBN 13: 978-1-60608-905-7

Manufactured in the U.S.A.

All scripture quotations, unless otherwise indicated, are taken from the Holy Bible, New International Version®, NIV®. Copyright ©1973, 1978, 1984 by Biblica, Inc.™ Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide.

This work is dedicated to my nieces and nephews:

Jordan Noel

Christian, Joey, James, and Katelyn Morgan

Ryan and Drew Whalen

Maria and Claire Roberts

It is for you and your generation that I write.

Contents

Acknowledgments ix

Preface xi

1 DEFINING THE ISSUES 1

Problem Stated

Definitions and Limitations

Pentecostalism and Postmodernity: A Desirable Partnership?

Thesis Defined

Postmodernity: A Summary

2 POSTMODERNITY: A BRIEF SUMMARY 16

Postmodernism: An Overview

Postmodern Philosophers

Varieties of Postmodernism

Postmodernity: The Key Tenets

Postmodernism and Evangelicalism: A Critique

Conclusion

3 THE ROLE OF EXPERIENCE, RATIONALISM, AND NARRATIVES IN EARLY PENTECOSTAL HERMENEUTICS 44

Early Pentecostal Experience and Rejection of Rationalism

The Pentecostal Story: The Latter Rain Metanarrative

The Pentecostal Story: The Importance of the Testimony

Summary

4 LATE TWENTIETH-CENTURY PENTECOSTAL HERMENEUTICS: MORE “EVANGELICAL” THAN “PENTECOSTAL”? THE TEST CASE OF GORDON FEE 73

General Hermeneutical Principles of Gordon D. Fee

Hermeneutics and Pentecostal Theology

The Pentecostal Response

Conclusion

- 5 POSTMODERNITY, PENTECOSTALISM: AND RUDOLF
BULTMANN 96**
- The Life and Times of Bultmann
 Demythologization
 Bultmann's Legacy: *The Jesus Seminar*
 The Bultmannian Legacy and Postmoderns
 A Pentecostal Conclusion
- 6 PENTECOSTAL HERMENEUTICS FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST
CENTURY: KENNETH J. ARCHER'S PROPOSAL 122**
- Introductory Remarks for the Readers
 Defining Pentecostalism
 Shifting Paradigms
 Early Pentecostal Biblical Interpretation
 Pentecostal Story
 Current Pentecostal Hermeneutical Concerns
 A Contemporary Pentecostal Hermeneutical Strategy
 Evaluation and Conclusion
- 7 THE ROLE OF THE HOLY SPIRIT IN HERMENEUTICS:
THE PENTECOSTAL EDGE? 146**
- The Role of the Holy Spirit in Hermeneutics:
 A Deafening Silence
 Why must the Holy Spirit be Involved?
 How does the Holy Spirit aid in Illumination?
 A Distinctive Pentecostal (and Postmodern) Hermeneutic?
 Experiential Verification: The Pentecostal Edge?
 Conclusion
- 8 CONCLUSION AND CONTRIBUTION 176**
- Contributions of this Work
 Implications of this Work and Areas of Needed Research
- Bibliography* 183

Acknowledgments

THIS WORK IS THE partial fulfillment of my calling by God to be a student of his Word first, a student of culture second, and then a teacher of theology and praxis to Pentecostals. I thank God for his great plan of salvation, the study of which is inexhaustible. This study is taken in his service and for his glory alone.

Special love and thanks to my wife Melinda, who has endured many hours of conversation about Pentecostal hermeneutics and Postmodernity, and my mental absences while writing. She has become something of a theologian in her own right! Many thanks are given to the rest of my family for their encouragement and support during this process.

The material herein is an adaptation of that which was submitted to the University of South Africa for the Doctor of Theology degree. Deep appreciation is extended to my promoter, Dr. Jacques P.J. Theron. His encouragement and expertise have been significant, and the kindnesses shown to me during this project are forever appreciated. In addition, several others read through this manuscript and offered helpful comments, including my mother, Gail Noel, Julia Budgell, one of my students, for carefully proofreading the footnotes, and my always diligent and professional copyeditor, (and friend), Burton K. Janes. I appreciate greatly the help received.

Warm thanks are extended to my former students at International Biblical Online Leadership Training (IBOLT), (Edmonton, AB), and Master's College & Seminary (Toronto, ON). Appreciation is also extended to current students at Acadia Divinity College (Wolfville, NS), and Tyndale University College (Toronto, ON). One learns far more by teaching than by studying, and I appreciate the insights and depth of knowledge I have gained from so many of you since I began teaching. I trust you will continue to walk faithfully in the calling God has given to each of you.

My intended audience is varied, to be sure. I pray that my Pentecostal colleagues in higher education will be encouraged to carefully consider the role of hermeneutics in our efforts to evangelize the youngest Western youth. As academics, we may write the most magnificent tomes on the most important theological questions, but I pray that the Church, including youth, will never be far from our minds.¹ Far from writing for academics alone, however, my goal here is to speak to the Pentecostal Church, for it is on the front lines of the battle for the souls of youth and young adults. I trust that I have kept the style and language of this work appropriate to that end. Finally, I hope this book speaks a word of caution to the students of Pentecostalism, who may be in the beginning stages of their own exploration of Pentecostal hermeneutics and theology. May all of your theological efforts edify Christ's Church!

Bradley Truman Noel
Springdale, Newfoundland, Canada
Thanksgiving, 2009

1. Clayton has just released an important book, *Transforming Christian Theology For Church and Society*, in which he argues that theologians must cease writing for the academy alone, and begin to consider the Church in all they do and write. See also Cobb, *Reclaiming the Church*.

Defining the Issues

As a postmodern paradigm increasingly dominates the thinking of our culture in general, any hermeneutic which cannot 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.¹

TIMOTHY B. CARGAL

A strict adherence to traditional evangelical/fundamentalist hermeneutical 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.²

MARK D. MCLEAN

Get your learning but keep your burning.³

J. O. PATTERSON

1. Cargal, "Beyond the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy," 187.
2. McLean, "Toward a Pentecostal Hermeneutic," 37.
3. Cited in Vinson Synan's endorsement of Nañez, *Full Gospel, Fractured Minds*.

PROBLEM STATED

THE PRECEDING QUOTATION BY Timothy Cargal clearly expounds the importance of recognizing the prominence of Postmodernism/Postmodernity⁴ in today's culture.⁵ As is suggested, Postmodern⁶ values are becoming increasingly tied to the values and attitudes of the Western World. The ultimate arbiter of truth for increasing numbers of people is no longer scientific thinking and reason, as was the case during the centuries following the Enlightenment.⁷

The focus of this work is Pentecostalism, and in particular the relationship between Postmodernity, the hermeneutics of Pentecostalism, and the youngest generations of Western youth. Changes to culture directly impact Pentecostalism, for it has been a spiritual movement of the people. Indeed, Pentecostalism's tremendous growth⁸ can be attributed in no small part to its common touch, for the Pentecostal message has spoken a word of truth sorely needed among the outcast and oppressed. The many histories of Pentecostalism testify that from its beginning, it has thrived where other representations of Christianity have struggled,

4. Some scholars clearly differentiate between Postmodernism and Postmodernity. As Postmodernity is a peripheral and supporting concept to the main purposes of the present work, the terms will be used interchangeably. On those who differ, see Adams, "Toward a Theological Understanding of Postmodernism."

5. For an excellent summary of Postmodernism, particularly as it intersects Christianity, see Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*; Veith, *Postmodern Times*; Middleton and Walsh, *Truth is Stranger Than it Used to Be*; and Dockery, *The Challenge of Postmodernism*.

6. As this work refers to the term "Modern" in two senses—one current, the other the thinking resulting from Modernism—it is necessary to distinguish between the two. Thus, Modern, Modernity, and Modernism are capitalized when referring to the philosophical approach known as "Modernity." To be consistent, Postmodern, Postmodernism, and Postmodernity are also capitalized.

7. The Enlightenment was a period of great intellectual growth following the rediscovery of classical thought and art in the late seventeenth 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 Grenz and Franke, *Beyond Foundationalism*; Himmelfarb, *The Roads to Modernity*; and Livingston, *Modern Christian Thought*.

8. Barrett and Johnston count the total number of Pentecostals/Charismatics in 2000 as just over 523 million, some ninety-four years after the beginning of the modern Pentecostal movement in 1906. Their projection for 2025 is 811 million Pentecostal/Charismatic believers worldwide. See Barrett and Johnston, "Statistics, Global," 284–302.

simply by meeting the everyday spiritual needs of the world's most ordinary people.⁹

Postmodernism is an important topic for Pentecostals, for it represents a significant shift in the presuppositions of Western society.¹⁰ The Modern era,¹¹ ushered in with the Enlightenment, promoted scientific rationalism, humanism, and, in the first part of the twentieth century, logical positivism.¹² 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.¹³

As the twentieth century drew to a close, these assumptions of Modernism were increasingly abandoned. Postmodernism is taking its place. It will be demonstrated that many scholars view as very sobering the basic presuppositions of Postmodern thought, although it is somewhat varied in scope and interpretation. 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, Relativism¹⁴ reigns supreme. For Pentecostals, who uphold the revelation of God in Scripture as absolute truth, complete with the Gospel message of the

9. See, for example, Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism*; Dempster et al., *The Globalization of Pentecostalism*; Anderson, *Vision of the Disinherited*; and Wacker, *Heaven Below*.

10. Veith suggests that "postmodernism pervades everything, and none of us can escape it." *Postmodern Times*, 177.

11. The Modern era may be defined as the period beginning with the Enlightenment and continuing in part until the present time.

12. Logical Positivism is a "contemporary philosophical movement associated with the Vienna Circle (1920s), which sought to rid philosophy of all metaphysical statements and to restrict it to only those statements which can be verified by empirical evidence." McKim, "Logical Positivism," 163. See also Madison, *The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity*, x.

13. See Ramm, *Protestant Biblical Interpretation*, 63–69.

14. "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." McKim, "Relativism," 235.

worth of 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 supernatural¹⁵ claims of Christianity (such as the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, miracle stories, and the 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 Modernism believe in absolute truth. From all indications, many Postmodern thinkers do not.¹⁶

DEFINITIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Although I will define each term as it is used, a framework for understanding the core concepts used in this work is beneficial.

By *Pentecostals*, I am referring to *Classical* Pentecostals, who trace their roots to the turn of the twentieth century and the Azusa Street Revival. Essentially, Pentecostals believe that the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the 120 believers at Pentecost, as recorded in Acts 2, should be normative for all Christians. Further, the key sign associated with this Spirit Baptism is *glossolalia*, as it was in Acts.¹⁷ “Classical” was added in about 1970 to distinguish Classical Pentecostals from Charismatics.

Charismatics are those believers 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.¹⁸ *Charismatic* refers to “all manifestations of pentecostal-type Christianity

15. 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.” Gredersen, “What Theology Might Learn (and Not Learn),” 318.

16. See Veith, *Postmodern Times*, 21.

17. For more on the history and impact of the Azusa Street Revival and the subsequent Pentecostal movement, see Robeck, *The Azusa Street Mission and Revival*; Hunter and Robeck, *The Azusa Street Revival and Its Legacy*; Owens, *The Azusa Street Revival*; Hyatt, *Fire on the Earth*; Valdez, *Fire on Azusa Street*; Dayton, *The Theological Roots of Pentecostalism*; and Synan, “Pentecostalism,” 836.

18. See Hocken, “Charismatic Movement,” 477–519.

that in some way differ from classical pentecostalism in affiliation and/or doctrine.”¹⁹

Richard V. Pierard defines *Evangelicalism* as “[t]he 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 Christ.”²⁰ As such, it is important to note that while Pentecostals are themselves Evangelicals, most Evangelicals would not consider themselves Pentecostal.

The principles used to interpret Scripture properly are one’s *hermeneutics*. All those who seek to interpret Scripture have some manner of hermeneutical principles, though they vary in presuppositions. This work focuses in particular on *Evangelical Hermeneutics*. In general,²¹ Evangelicals interpret Scripture from the assumption that authorial intent is significant when determining the original meaning of the text. Substantial study of both the grammatical content of the text itself, and the historical background of the text, author, and original audience, may in part determine this intent. 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, might one begin to offer an exposition of the text from the pulpit, seeking modern application for the people of God.²²

Postmodernism is at best a broad term. As such, this work focuses on the facets of the movement which most directly impact Pentecostalism. Although coined in the 1930s to denote the beginning of a major cultural shift, the word did not gain prominence until the 1970s, when it was first

19. *Ibid.*, 477.

20. Pierard, “Evangelicalism,” 379.

21. As with any movement of this size, most statements concerning Evangelicalism run the risk of generalization. So too does 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 Evangelicalism at large, one may safely state that the historical-critical method plays a key role in the majority of Evangelical hermeneutical efforts.

22. 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 Bruce, “Interpretation of the Bible,” 565.

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.²³

Postmoderns no longer believe in the supremacy of reason as the arbiter of truth. Other valid paths to knowledge include experience, 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 favor of the shared stories of communities and traditions, within which the truth may be found.²⁴

For the purposes of this work, description will need to be given for the youngest generations of North American youth. Taken from Douglas Coupland's best-selling novel of the same name, "Generation X"²⁵ is a moniker applied to the 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.²⁶ 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.²⁷

23. See Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism*, 2–5.

24. See *ibid.*, 7.

25. Coupland, *Generation X*.

26. See Howe and Strauss, *Millennials Rising*.

27. See Bibby, *Canada's Teens*, 165–67. While there are other accepted generational descriptors, I follow Bibby in employing Generation X and Millennials.

PENTECOSTALISM AND POSTMODERNITY:
A DESIRABLE PARTNERSHIP?

With the Pentecostal penchant for abandoning rationalistic Modern principles, some Pentecostal scholars debate whether Pentecostalism should develop a distinctive hermeneutic in line with those Postmodern values.²⁸ 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 been viewed as allowing their experience to help interpret the biblical text. While those who follow a more Modern/Evangelical approach shun the role of experience within biblical hermeneutics, many Postmodern thinkers have argued for increased recognition of the role presuppositions and life experiences of the individual play in textual interpretation.

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. As contemporary culture increasingly embraces Postmodernity in all its various forms, some may wonder if Pentecostalism should not follow suit. Yet, there remains much about Postmodernity that 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 very 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.²⁹

The first response is in the affirmative: We ought to build a distinctive Pentecostal hermeneutic based on Postmodern viewpoints, free from 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.

28. For the connection between Postmodernism and hermeneutics, see Madison, *The Hermeneutics of Postmodernity*; Aichele et al., *The Postmodern Bible*; and Wilkinson, "Hermeneutics and the Postmodern Reaction Against 'Truth.'"

29. The following categories are from Brubaker, "Postmodernism and Pentecostals," 39-44.

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.

The third response suggests that 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.

The fourth response concludes that we should cautiously 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 hermeneutic, 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 will be given significant treatment throughout this work. Postmodern thought is here to stay. Pentecostalism must both acknowledge this and evaluate whether current approaches to evangelism are relevant on a going forward basis.

THESIS DEFINED

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

The aim of this work is to seek to do just that. I will first explore Postmodern thought, particularly as it relates to Pentecostalism, including hermeneutics, and contemplate which of the four approaches to Postmodernism given above is the most advantageous to Pentecostalism.

I will then seek to determine in what manner Postmodernity can—and should—be allowed to contribute to Pentecostal hermeneutics.

To accomplish this task, I will attempt to determine in what sense Pentecostal hermeneutics shared several key Postmodern values. In terms of methodology, this work employs a literary search, examining the early Pentecostal approach to Scripture, and 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,"³⁰ openness to narratives, the role of community, and the essential function of experience in epistemology, Classical Pentecostal writers and theologians shared much with today's Postmodern thinkers.

The goal of this work is to show that in the earliest days, the hermeneutics employed by Pentecostals shared many characteristics of today's Postmodern thought.³¹ Pentecostals were thus roundly criticized by those dedicated to a more Modern approach to Scripture. Indeed, it is my belief that the lack of academic recognition of early Pentecostal theology stems directly from this fact. Modernism 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 derided as theological immaturity by theologians who proclaimed that doctrine could be ascertained from Scripture's didactic portions alone. Almost sixty years after the genesis of modern-day Pentecostalism, John R.W. Stott wrote: "[T]his revelation of the purpose of God in Scripture should be sought in its *didactic*, rather than 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."³² Worse still was the Pentecostal claim that experience, and not reason alone, was an essential component in formulating a vibrant, living theology of the Holy Spirit and his work. To the mind soaked in the precepts of Modernism, here was theology at its worst. For many theologians, experience was seemingly irrelevant in

30. This phrase is borrowed from Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, 147.

31. Writing about the traditional interpretive methods of Pentecostal pastors, Ahn notes, "[T]hese 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. . . ." Ahn, "Various Debates in the Contemporary Pentecostal Hermeneutics," 31.

32. Stott, *The Baptism and Fullness of the Holy Spirit*, 8.

determining true Christian theology. Reason, coupled with the proper study of Scripture, would yield the nuggets of truth deposited within.

The biases of the early twentieth century are largely behind us, and Pentecostal academics are now enjoying unprecedented acceptance in the larger theological world. In part, the aim of this work is to determine 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 personal concern is to determine whether, at a time when increasing numbers of Western youth and young adults 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 work demonstrates 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 adhere to the best of early Pentecostal hermeneutics, without ignoring the tremendous hermeneutical advances of the twentieth century. With the Holy Spirit's help 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 hermeneutic that will bring the masses of Postmoderns into contact with the one true God.

SUMMARY

The following chapter summary provides the reader with the objectives I pursue in this work and the path my research will take as we explore critical issues within Pentecostalism and Postmodernism.

Chapter 2 introduces the basic tenets of Postmodernism. For the purposes of this work, I will examine in particular the philosophical underpinnings of Postmodernity, note the Postmodern rejection of rationalism and metanarrative, and focus upon the role of experience and community. With their strong emphasis on the place of experience and the rejection of individualism, Postmoderns greatly appreciate the narrative aspects of life and history. 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 impacts society at large. Should Pentecostalism in its earliest, Classical form, be found to have much in common with this movement, the ramifications for this growing missionary revival are substantial.

Chapter 3 begins to examine Pentecostal hermeneutics—past, present, and future—leading to the heart of the discussion: Did Pentecostal hermeneutics from the beginning share several Postmodern characteristics? Was the Pentecostal reliance upon experience and narratives, along with the rejection of hermeneutical rationalism, actually a forerunner of 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 my conclusion that, 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 3 shows that Pentecostals understood their very existence in terms of the narrative of “the former rain, and the latter rain” (Joel 2:23, KJV), found often in the Old Testament. Further, early Pentecostals were strongly attracted to a simple reading of the narratives of the book of Acts, where they found their distinctive doctrines clearly taught and supported. For much of their early history, Pentecostals were derided by most New Testament scholars and theologians for their heavy reliance on the Acts narratives. Indeed, the Pentecostal doctrines of subsequence and initial evidence are supported from five narratives (Acts 2, 8, 9, 10, and 19). Traditionally, biblical scholars have refrained from deriving too much theology from narratives, preferring instead to scour the didactic portions of Scripture. For the hermeneutically literal Pentecostals, however, anything put in Scripture by the Holy Spirit, including stories, was intended for learning and instruction.

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 warmly welcomed. In both Postmodernity and Pentecostalism, the hegemony of reason has been toppled by a strong appeal to the senses,

the emotions, and dare we say, faith? As Postmodernists are no longer content to allow reason to be the final arbiter of truth in their lives, so early Pentecostals were unwilling 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 what was discovered. Thus, we observe the convergent viewpoints of Pentecostalism with Postmodernity, in terms of Rationalism, narratives, and the place of experience in life and theology.

Chapter 4 continues with hermeneutical issues, the goal being to explore recent trends in Pentecostal hermeneutics. One question remains to be answered: Have current Pentecostal hermeneutics stayed true to the Postmodern tendencies of their forbearers? 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 hermeneutical practices, have become more Modern in their approach to the Scriptures. While it cannot be denied that Pentecostals have gained remarkable acceptance in 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 in the Western World are speaking the language of Pentecostal hermeneutics, an uncritical acceptance of Modern hermeneutics may prove detrimental to Pentecostal evangelistic efforts.

Chapter 5 seeks to interact with a theological giant seldom engaged by Pentecostals—Rudolf Bultmann (1884–1976). With his insistence upon the 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 his considerable theological contributions, scholars have further applied Modern principles to the Scriptural accounts, culminating in the contemporary work of *The Jesus Seminar*. By engaging Bultmann’s thought, as it pertains to the newest generation of truth-seekers, I show that at its core, a fully Modern hermeneutical approach 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 the Gospel of Christ to the youngest Western generations.

Having demonstrated the importance of a distinctively Pentecostal hermeneutic, I focus in chapter 6 on the future of Pentecostal hermeneutics by exploring the work of Kenneth J. Archer. While much has been written on Pentecostal hermeneutics in the last thirty years, few authors dared to put forth a proposal for a specific Pentecostal hermeneutic. Archer has done so, and thus his work is worthy of closer examination.

Archer begins by defining Pentecostalism in its many varieties, tracing the social and theological influences on this revivalist movement. He characterizes early Pentecostalism as *Paramodern*, a movement that emerged out of, though always existing on the fringes of, Modernity. Pentecostals rejected Modernity in terms of epistemology and sociology, but employed Modern technology, language, and inductive reasoning to advance their cause. Archer 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 different, however, was the unique 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. Must Pentecostals continue to use a modified version of traditional Evangelical historical-critical methods of interpretation,³³ or is it an authentic movement, whose identity cannot be “submerged” into Evangelicalism? If so, should not Pentecostalism have its own hermeneutical approach? Archer chooses the latter position, as will the present author. Finally, we present for Pentecostals a contemporary hermeneutical strategy, which embraces the Pentecostal story and derives meaning from a “dialectical process based upon an interdependent dialogical relationship between Scripture, Spirit and community.”³⁴

Chapter 7 contains practical suggestions for Pentecostals. I begin by exploring the role of the Holy Spirit in hermeneutics. To be sure, the

33. As observed in footnote 21 above, Evangelicalism as a whole has employed several hermeneutical approaches. Pentecostalism, however, when following the hermeneutical approaches of Evangelicals, tends to follow most closely their use of the historical-critical method.

34. Archer, *A Pentecostal Hermeneutic*, 5.

Spirit's role in the inspiration and preservation of Scripture is widely accepted. Apart from a few words in theological texts about illumination, however, there remains no firm understanding in the wider Christian world of the Spirit's role in hermeneutics. Pentecostals are in a key position to develop a proper pneumatological approach to hermeneutics. This work shows that the Spirit's guidance 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.

I will strive towards a more concrete understanding of how the Holy Spirit assists us in understanding Scripture, through a survey of various proposals put forward by scholars. Further, I will examine four responses to the possibility of joining Pentecostal hermeneutical concerns with Postmodern trends. 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 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 their Evangelical or Mainline Protestant counterparts.³⁵ I 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 8 summarizes the findings of this work. The retired 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 Millennials, and others with the Gospel, should they not abandon what was best in early Pentecostal hermeneutics. As the newest generations 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 fulfill their missional mandate, however, they must first reach those in their own homes—Pentecostal youth and young adults. As his⁴

35. See, for example, Pinnock, "The Role of the Spirit in Interpretation," 491–97; idem, "The Work of the Holy Spirit in Hermeneutics," 3–23; May, "The Role of the Holy Spirit in Biblical Hermeneutics"; and Stronstad, "Pentecostal Experience and Hermeneutics," 15.

tory has demonstrated, each generation of believers ultimately succeeds or fails in the relevance of its Gospel presentation to its peers.

It is my 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. We now turn to the introduction of Postmodern thought, and areas of similarity and incongruence with conservative Christianity.