

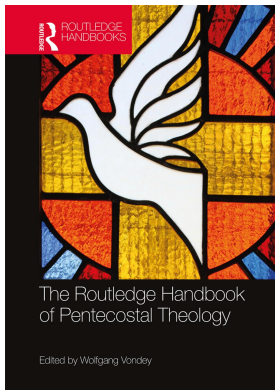
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## The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology

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# 12

## BIBLICAL HERMENEUTICS

### Reading Scripture with the Spirit in community

*Jacqueline Grey*

For the last few decades, the subject of biblical hermeneutics has been of intense interest and debate among Pentecostal scholars. While hermeneutics generally refers to the “art and science of interpretation” (Archer 2015, 319), central to this discussion is the question: what makes an interpretive approach Pentecostal? More specifically, how does the charismatic experience of the Spirit impact the way that Pentecostals read Scripture? In this chapter I suggest that a Pentecostal biblical hermeneutic is primarily focused on a reading of Scripture with the Spirit in community. First, this chapter surveys historically the reading practices of the Pentecostal community from its birth among premillennial revivalists to the later theological reliance upon (and alliance with) Protestant Evangelicalism. Second, Pentecostal scholars increasingly, from the 1980s onwards, began to call for a reading approach that would reflect the theology and values of the Pentecostal community. I offer an overview of key issues and scholars engaged in the consideration of a possible uniquely Pentecostal hermeneutic. Within this debate, there have emerged four elements of a Pentecostal interpretive method that can be considered essential: Scripture, experience, Spirit, and community, which I examine subsequently. Finally, the chapter concludes with some challenges and opportunities for the future development of Pentecostal biblical hermeneutics. These challenges center primarily on unpacking the role of the community in the interpretive process and how to be faithful to the origins of Pentecostalism while being critical of the prejudices and interests that emerge in Pentecostal hermeneutics.

#### **A historical overview of Pentecostal hermeneutics**

From its origins, classical Pentecostalism emerged as a restorationist movement with roots in the various holiness revivals of the late nineteenth century. This emphasis was also reflected in the hermeneutical approaches of the early Pentecostal community. The first generation of readers tended to prioritize the literal, plain message of Scripture. The Bible was considered a book of truth and facts, which the community must only believe and apply. However, for Pentecostals, the truth of Scripture included the manifestation of spiritual gifts, miracles, and the continued work of the Holy Spirit in their contemporary context. Just as God had spoken in the past through the biblical authors, God continued to speak through both Scripture and inspired speech to the community of their day (see Chapter 5). This continued experience

of the Spirit speaking to the community affirmed their belief in the inspiration of Scripture in contrast to the emerging fundamentalism that emphasized the authority of Scripture in its past inspiration (Archer 2014, 35–40).

A consideration of the origins of Pentecostalism also helps to account for the sense of premillennial fever in which the movement was birthed, which subsequently impacted their reading practices. The community considered itself living in the last days before the second coming of Christ. They were experiencing the latter day outpouring of the Holy Spirit to empower the church for missionary endeavor that would usher in the return of Jesus Christ. Therefore, when the early Pentecostals read their Bible, they generally considered it not a historical artifact but a living document that could be applied literally to their context. They considered the narrative of Acts to be incomplete; the present community was the continuation of the story of the New Testament. In this sense, early Pentecostals saw themselves as restoring or recovering the “full gospel” of the early church (see Chapter 16). They bypassed much of the tradition and history of the church (particularly that considered inconsistent with this theology) and jumped straight back to Pentecost (Oliverio 2012, 19). As Lee Roy Martin (2013, 4) writes, “early Pentecostals viewed the Bible as a single unified narrative of God’s redemptive plan, whose central message may be summarized in the Five-fold Gospel.” Most read the Bible narratologically as story (see Chapter 4), as though they were also continuing or living out the acts of the Apostles.

There appears to be a general, common approach to methods of reading Scripture utilized by the early Pentecostal community, particularly in the USA. Archer (2014, 65) describes their reading approach as both pre-critical and an adaption of the text-proof method, not dissimilar to the reading approach demonstrated by the New Testament writers. In fact, the early Pentecostal community could be said to mimic the hermeneutic utilized in the Lukan narrative, using a form of “*peshet*” interpretation. This approach would allow interpretation beyond the plain meaning of the text to include a new significance of the words as revealed by the Holy Spirit (Purdy 2015, 73). Scripture reading was not restricted to the intention of the historic author but was spiritualized and contextualized for the contemporary community. However, as some scholars question, just because the early Pentecostals interpreted Scripture in this way does not make it normative for the Pentecostal community today. Yet, these reading practices of the early community do highlight the high view of Scripture that has generally been a consistent feature of Pentecostalism (see Chapter 6).

The high view of Scripture within Pentecostalism is generally based on their experience of the Spirit. It meant that Pentecostals read the Bible ahistorically; the text could be applied to their current situation regardless of the cultural and historical gap. However, unlike the fundamentalism of the time, Pentecostals did not primarily defend the authority and inspiration of Scripture based on assumptions of cessationism. Fundamentalists promulgated the inerrancy of Scripture, which could only be retrieved through historical-grammatical exegesis. For Pentecostals, the Holy Spirit was active in both the production and reading of the texts, prophetically inspiring the contemporary community in its interpretation. This process did not require the assistance of professional exegetes or academics—the community had to simply read it and believe it. Yet, both Pentecostals and fundamentalists held in common a literalistic approach to Scripture (albeit understood differently) in contrast to the higher criticism and its “anti-supernatural” presuppositions that were emerging in liberal theology (Archer 2004, 43–45).

The Pentecostal community, particularly in North America, was also caught up in the fundamentalist/modernist debate since the 1920s. Like most conservative sectors within Christianity during this time, Pentecostals have continued to emphasize the authority and

reliability of the Bible. However, to explain their high view of Scripture, classical Pentecostals tended to adopt the language and theological statements of conservative Christianity, such as fundamentalism and Evangelicalism, including their theological statements regarding the authority and interpretation of Scripture. The developing alliance with, and theological reliance upon, Protestant Evangelicalism after World War II impacted the interpretive approaches of the Pentecostal community at that time. There were some social factors that also influenced this shift, as the second generation of Pentecostals tended to move toward social conservatism and institutionalizing the movement. However, theologically, the influence of dispensationalism on the Pentecostal community in North America from the 1930s to the 1980s (peaking in the 1950s) was significant (Oliverio 2012, 113). It tended to shift some of the focus of the purpose of reading Scripture from encountering God to the purpose of establishing doctrine. Greater emphasis was placed on proper principles of hermeneutics, including increased focus on the historical and cultural contexts in which the texts were written. Safeguarding from improper doctrines was a motivating factor in developing these principles for interpretation (Oliverio 2012, 120). Since the 1980s, the use of historical-grammatical methods for interpreting Scripture has continued to be advocated among various Pentecostals (Fee 1991; Menzies 1994). Yet, also during this time, the seeming “evangelicalization” of Pentecostal hermeneutics began to be questioned (Thomas 1994; Archer 2004; Moore 2016). This criticism has led to increasing discussion over the nature and future of Pentecostal hermeneutics.

### **Developing a unique Pentecostal hermeneutic**

While part of the discussion on a unique Pentecostal hermeneutic has focused on understanding the distinct features of the Pentecostal community generally, much of the debate has been centered on describing the community’s ideal reading practices. This interest reflects primarily an internal Pentecostal debate played out in the conferences and journals of the scholarly community in Western contexts. However, despite the evolving discussion, there has been little consensus among scholars on a single reading approach which reflects their community’s reading practices. Instead, the debate continues to circle, as various scholars advocate for particular emphases they consider essential for a sustainable hermeneutic. Yet, the discussion has raised some important questions and criticisms for consideration, and although the complexity of the entire debate cannot be fully represented here, some key issues and scholars can be highlighted as representative of the broader concerns.

Gordon Fee has emphasized the need for Pentecostal readers to engage in responsible exegesis to avoid excessive interpretation. He has argued for the adoption of a historical-critical method, requiring authorial intention as crucial (Fee 1991, 42). Similarly, Robert Menzies argues that the central goal of hermeneutics is in establishing the historical meaning. That is, meaning is found in what the actual text provides (in terms of words, grammar, and genre) to reconstruct the probable intention of its author or editor. Menzies asks: “If we lose the meaning of a text from its historical moorings, how shall we evaluate various and even contradictory interpretations? How shall we keep our own ideologies and prejudices from obliterating the text” (Menzies 1994, 117)? While this is a legitimate question, it raises broader issues of what makes a reading valid or invalid, and importantly, who decides such matters.

While the quest for the historical reconstruction of biblical texts may limit the meaning and dynamic quality of a text, it may also provide some important safeguards for Pentecostal scholars to consider. Many proponents of a reliance on historical-critical approaches are nervous of divorcing the biblical text from its historical context because of the inherent relativization and extreme subjectivity of meanings it potentially produces (Grey 2011, 47).

Yet, this dominance and dependence on historical-critical methodology has been heavily critiqued within the intra-Pentecostal debate. Some (Ellington 1996; Bridges Johns 2014) have posited their critique in the name of postmodernity, calling for a greater emphasis on the role of the reading community. Others (Thomas 1994; Grey 2011) have postured that Evangelical approaches are inconsistent with Pentecostalism and to limit the reader's encounter with the text to a rational, historical approach contradicts the significance of pneumatic illumination valued by the Pentecostal community.

Unique approaches to interpretation that are consistent with the theology and spirituality of Pentecostalism have been proposed by scholars such as John Christopher Thomas, Ken Archer, and Rickie D. Moore who represent the varying perspectives and nuances within the scholarly discussion. These three scholars all belong to what is sometimes called the "Cleveland School," yet while there is some synergy between their approaches, they each offer unique contributions. Common to all three is an emphasis on the role of the reading community in the interpretive process.

Using the council of Jerusalem as a model, Thomas (1994) unpacks the method of decision making utilized by the New Testament community as described in Acts 15. Central to the council's deliberations on the inclusion of the gentiles were the three components of Scripture, the Spirit, and the community. The situation in Acts was sparked by the experience of the community observing the Spirit at work in converting non-Jews to Christ. As the council heard the testimonies of the converted gentiles, it discerned this activity of the Holy Spirit and affirmed it through an interpretive selection of a scriptural text. The debate was resolved, and the gentiles subsequently accepted into the community in a decision that "seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us" (Acts 15:28). The Spirit is identified by Thomas (1994, 49) as being active in all stages of the interpretive process. He then applies this model to the current debate of women ministers in the Pentecostal community.

The model developed by Thomas has been highly formative in the development of Pentecostal hermeneutics. Based on a narrative reading, it affirms the high view of Scripture. Yet, it also emphasizes the role of the community in the process of interpretation. Thomas notes that James's selection of a text to affirm the decision was arguably influenced by the community's experience in discerning the activity of the Spirit. However, it was not an individualistic rendering of the situation; the decision was made within, by, and for the community. Thomas highlights that it is the community that guards the interpretation of both Scripture and pneumatic experience from rampant individualism and relativization. This model by Thomas does allow for the study of the historical context of the passage (prioritized by Evangelical scholars) but is not limited to those concerns (Grey 2011, 58). It also grants a substantial role to the community in the process of interpretation.

What is significant about this model, particularly in the period of its publication in the 1990s, is that it integrates important values of the Pentecostal community: Scripture, pneumatic experience, oral testimony, and community interaction. This model then provides a prescription for the Pentecostal community on how to approach Scripture in a way that is consistent with the community's values and spirituality. It also demonstrates practically the role of the community in discerning the experience of the Spirit as an antidote to the individualism of the Western world. Thomas's model has continued to provide the foundation for scholars seeking to understand and develop a unique method of Pentecostal biblical hermeneutics. This influence includes the important monograph by Archer that provides one of the most definitive descriptions of Pentecostal reading methods to date.

Archer (2004) provides three basic tenants for a unique Pentecostal hermeneutic: Scripture, Spirit, and community. However, to ground this triadic model within the tradition, he

looks back to the reading approaches of the early Pentecostal community and identifies their interpretive approach as based on the “Bible reading method.” This approach was a harmonizing and deductive method that combed all Scripture references on a topic and then synthesized the passages (Martin 2013, 3). In practice, it meant scant recognition of the historical context of each individual text, since the narrative of God-at-work within the canon of Scripture was prioritized. While this same Bible reading method was used by other Protestant groups, the burgeoning Pentecostal community used it to develop the new doctrinal understanding of baptism in the Spirit (Archer 2004, 4). It led to a unique way of reading Scripture forged by the early Pentecostal community, based on their narrative tradition. From this foundation, Archer outlines a Pentecostal hermeneutical strategy suggesting “a narrative approach to interpretation that embraces a triadic negotiation for meaning between the biblical text, Pentecostal community, and the Holy Spirit” (Archer 2004, 5). The outworking of these three elements within a concrete Pentecostal hermeneutic are discussed below, particularly the role of the community in safeguarding readings of Scripture from harmful interpretive practices.

Finally, the transformative role of Spirit is also emphasized in the writings of Rickie D. Moore, who was one of the first to highlight the role of Spirit, Word, and community (Moore 1987). Among his recent contributions is his development of the idea of an “altar hermeneutics” (see Chapter 5). For Pentecostal readers, the sacred zone of encounter with God alters (or “altars”) the interpretation of Scripture (Moore 2016, 149). The altar is the place of sacrifice; the sacrifice of the reader’s own agenda, self-interests, hurts, fears, and hopes (Moore 2016, 155). These agendas are laid down on the altar before the Lord to allow the living Word to examine and heal. The goal of this process is not information about God, but deeper relationship *with* God. It allows the “God of the altar” to transform the reading community. At the symbolic altar, readers are freed from their bondage to self-interest into “the freedom that comes with being crucified with Christ” (Moore 2016, 156) and liberty of the Spirit. This approach emphasizes the valuing of Scripture as a prophetic voice to the Pentecostal community.

The central tenets of a Pentecostal hermeneutic, as developed by these scholars, have been applied to biblical texts by others, providing examples of this method in practice. Robby Waddell (2006), for example, applies a Pentecostal hermeneutic to the reading of the book of Revelation. His proposed hermeneutic draws out features of the text that are of interest to Pentecostal readers, such as the opening terminology that orients readers toward an experience of a revelation of Jesus Christ (Waddell 2006, 124; cf. Thomas 2009, 229). Similarly, Scott Ellington (2007) has applied some of the central tenets of a Pentecostal hermeneutic to the Psalms, namely the re-experiencing of historical testimonies from the biblical text in the present. This application is based on a model of “truth-as-testimony” by which the truth claim of Scripture is not in its declaration of “historical facts” but in the original testimonies themselves (Ellington 2001, 255). A final example is found in the work of Lee Roy Martin (2008) who develops a Pentecostal “hearing” of the Book of Judges to underscore hearing, rather than reading, as the hermeneutical goal of the Pentecostal community. These applications highlight the challenges and opportunities in applying a descriptive methodology to specific texts. They also emphasize the continued commitment to the development of some common features of Pentecostal biblical hermeneutics.

### **Essential elements of a Pentecostal biblical hermeneutic**

While there has been much debate over the validity of developing a unique approach to Pentecostal hermeneutics, there are arguably certain elements to an interpretive method that have emerged as essential, among them the collective emphasis on Scripture, the Spirit,

experience, and community. Although there is yet no consensus on the place and importance of these elements as part of a Pentecostal biblical hermeneutic, these categories emerge regularly in discussions and are worth considering in their own right as formative of a Pentecostal biblical hermeneutic.

### Scripture

Any discussion of a viable approach to Pentecostal hermeneutics places value on a high view of Scripture (see Chapter 6). While the other elements of a Pentecostal hermeneutic may be debated, the essentiality of Scripture (not just as a proof-text) is undisputed. Generally common to all Pentecostal scholars is the necessity of respecting the context of the biblical text. A responsible reading does take the historical and social context of each passage seriously. However, not all scholars agree on the level to which the historical context should be used to determine the validity of a reading (Grey 2011, 41–49). Similarly, while most scholars agree on the authority of Scripture, they differ in their understanding of the theological foundations for its authority. This assessment is not to caricature scholars into different “camps” but to recognize that the underpinnings for this value differ within the Pentecostal community. For some, the historical context is essential for reading because it safeguards interpretations from relativism. In this view, the historical-critical method provides the basis for determining a valid reading. For Craig Keener (2017, 99), the original context is not dispensable. He writes, “The ancient meaning, however, does matter, and ... that ancient, canonical meaning must be the anchor and arbiter for claims to interpret the text today” (119). Yet, Keener also affirms that “... we should recognize the historical contingency of both the ancient and modern horizons” (120). In contrast, John C. Poirier and B. Scott Lewis (2006, 21) insist that the *only* meaning of the text is the author’s intention.

For others, the historical situation of the text is important because it values the context in which God spoke to the earlier community. If God speaks to us today, then we should respect the situation and context in which God spoke to previous individuals and communities. As Ellington (1996, 36) highlights, Scripture is considered to be authoritative for Pentecostal readers because the Holy Spirit is found to be active in and through Scripture experientially in the lives of each member of the community. Yet, the text still holds a privileged position, even if a historical-critical approach to interpretation does not. The Bible is both the standard by which all experience is measured and interpreted, and a resource for the community—one that can be mined for its treasures within (Davies 2013, 256), including pneumatic experiences.

Although Pentecostal experience may occur outside of reading the biblical text (such as through prophecy and other such Spirit encounters), that experience is still evaluated and corrected by Scripture. As Chris Green (2015, 134) reminds us

while we often claim that the Spirit (in the manifestations of the charismata) will never contradict the Scripture, we often fail to see that if we hope to come into alignment with ‘the mind of Christ’, then the Spirit *must* contradict *us* – and that includes, perhaps above all, our readings of Scripture.

The role of Scripture in the dialogical construction of meaning helps to temper those who give their own spiritual experiences, revelations, or interpretations canonical significance, including those based on historical-critical methodologies. This critical insight emphasizes once more the authoritative role of Scripture within Pentecostal hermeneutics.

## ***Spirit***

While recognizing the high view of Scripture within the Pentecostalism, some argue that the authority of the Spirit comes before the authority of Scripture. Nel (2018, 181) suggests that Pentecostals read with an agenda, namely the Pentecostal experience of the Spirit. It is the Spirit who empowers the community that relies on the Spirit to provide revelatory guidance in the reading of Scripture. Particularly, the Spirit points to and reveals Christ because the Spirit is Christ's Spirit (Nel 2018, 158). In other words, the Spirit guides the community to read Scripture Christologically and transforms the reading community into Christ-likeness (Grey 2011, 99). This emphasis is also consistent with the readings of the early Pentecostal community, as Green (2015, 115) notes, since "first, they came to the Scriptures expecting to encounter *Christ* and, second, they came to the Scriptures expecting to *encounter* Christ." This formation of the interpreter within the worshipping community transforms the reader's experience and affections which further orients the interpretive process (Thomas 2011, 117).

Nevertheless, Scripture is not just an object to be studied, but is also the living Word, enlivened by the Spirit that both tests and transforms the reader. As Andrew Davies (2013, 221) notes, the Spirit also brings an agenda to the reading process: the prophetic transformation of the individual, community, and creation. Hence, for Pentecostals, the Bible is not simply a tool to reinforce the reader's own prejudices and interests, but through the revelatory activity of the Spirit is a prophetic voice to speak challenge and change to the reading community. According to John McKay (1994, 26), reading the Bible as prophetic persons impacts our reading. In particular, he emphasizes the reading process as a shared experience within the community of the "prophethood of all believers."

While the majority of scholars writing on Pentecostal hermeneutics affirm the role of the Holy Spirit in guiding and illuminating the reader, what is not clear is the actual role the Spirit plays in the interpretive process. Pentecostals do not want to domesticate the mysterious work of God's Spirit, yet they do want to reflect upon how the Spirit brings revelation and meaning to the biblical text. However, this revelatory role of the Spirit is understood in different ways. For some scholars, the role of the Spirit is to reveal the original intention of the author. They suggest that a Spirit-inspired reading will be consistent with the original meaning uncovered through the process of study (Nel 2018, 187). Others emphasize the role of the Spirit in applying the original meaning of the text to today (Keener 2017, 213). McKay's (1994, 21) reflections upon his own practice of Bible reading emphasize the role of the Spirit in inspiring "revelation" that comes from more than academic study. This experience can be likened to the "aha" moment of in-breaking insight that transcends the horizons of ordinary ways of thinking (Loder 1989, 18). For Pentecostals, the experience of the Spirit does not discount the role of intellectual reasoning (see Chapter 7) in the reading process but suggests that the Spirit can illuminate passages of Scripture in new ways. Hence, Martin (2013, 6) contends that the role of the Spirit in the interpretive process goes well beyond the Reformed theology of "illumination." Instead, the Spirit is active to guide the community into new meanings of the text originally inspired by the same Spirit. The Spirit rests on the interpretive moment as a creative act.

## ***Experience***

Experience is an important element of Pentecostal biblical hermeneutics and an active part of the interpretive process (see Chapter 8). While the level of importance of experience in the reading process is heavily disputed among scholars, most recognize it as an essential factor.



As Keener (2017, 287) notes, “what has been most distinctive about classical Pentecostal hermeneutics has been its explicit invitation to read Scripture from the standpoint of believing and experiencing that we live in the era of spiritual gifts long neglected by the church.” Pentecostal theology does not limit an encounter with God to reading biblical texts but allows for dynamic encounter with the Spirit in contemporary life. It is a dynamic interaction that is mutually informing: Scripture informs contemporary experience and experience informs the reading of Scripture. This cycle is grounded in the Pentecostal impetus to recover, restore, and experience the activity of the Spirit for the present day in continuity with the narrative of Scripture.

In a descriptive study of the Bible reading methods of Pentecostal communities in Australia, experience was identified as a key component. Readers often began with a spiritual experience and sought the Scriptures to find resonances with, and understanding of, their parallel pneumatic encounter. The language and symbols of the biblical text provided Pentecostal readers with the vocabulary to express their ineffable experience (Grey 2011, 114). As Nel (2018, 187) comments, “The community testifies to the experiences attributed to the Spirit and then engages Scripture to validate or repudiate the experience or issue, necessitating a dynamic balance between individual, Spirit, Scripture, and the faith community.” The role of the community is essential in this process of discernment of a normative experience of the Spirit.

In adopting the language of the biblical text to verbalize their Spirit experience, Pentecostal readers invite the possibility of the transformation of the interpreter. This is because pneumatic experience is not only the beginning of the reading process of the Pentecostal community but also the end result. The goal for many Pentecostal readers is to encounter the divine “author” and be transformed as a result of that encounter (Grey 2011, 114). In this sense, readers approach Scripture as sacred “altar” space (Moore 2016, 152). This space creates new possibilities for the contemporary community as they seek to be altered (or “altared,” to use the language of Moore) by the text and apply it to their particular contexts. Pentecostals emphasize orthopraxy (correctness in practice and life style) rather than orthodoxy (Nel 2018, 159). The application and contextualization processes are important for Pentecostal readers; they want their identity and behavior to be shaped by both the Spirit and Scripture as a means for individual and community transformation. This emphasis on the Spirit in the reading process is a significant element in the development of a uniquely Pentecostal biblical hermeneutic.

### *Community*

Common to the majority of approaches to Pentecostal hermeneutics is also the central role of the community. While an emphasis on the reader is often identified with more postmodern approaches, the role of the Pentecostal reader is emphasized because they see themselves as participants and actors in the story of Scripture, not just observers (see Chapter 4). The community is (and also should be) emphasized in the reading process as a corporate entity, rather than a focus on individual readers. While every individual is Spirit-gifted and part of the body of Christ, their gifts serve particular functions for the edification and health of the corporate body (Yong 2002, 32). Spirit-gifting is not given for the promotion of individualism or elitism, including elitist readings of Scripture. Instead, baptism into the body of Christ reconciles people across former dividing lines, such as race, gender, ethnic and social differences (Yong 2002, 33). Green (2015, 183) suggests poignantly that the true home

of the Spirit–community and its scriptural engagement is not the academy but the church, particularly its worship and mission.

Yet, how exactly does the Pentecostal community function in the dialogical construction of meaning? What is the role of the community in protecting against the dangers of subjectivism? Certainly, the role of the community is to discern the activity of the Spirit in both experiences and readings of the text. As Thomas (1994, 49) highlights, it is the community gathered together that is involved in the interpretive decision-making. It is the community gathered that hears the testimonies from members within the body of Christ of the Spirit's activity and assesses those reports. The role of community is particular rather than universal. In this sense, the immediate group that discerns the direction of God's Spirit in both experience and reading is the local community, albeit informed by and connected with the wider regional and global community. To disconnect from the ecclesial community (whether at local, regional or global levels) is to be isolated from the body of Christ. Instead, each individual and group must be willing to humbly submit before the body that is of Christ for discernment and guidance. In a sense, Christians (and their interpretive agendas) must go through the purifying fire of the Spirit, with whom Jesus baptizes, to emerge with new life. Yet, how this role of the community functions practically, particularly in overcoming the lingering divisions of race, gender, ethnic and social differences, is still a matter for discussion.

Currently, many Pentecostal scholars are looking beyond the categories of Evangelical and postmodern theories to develop their distinct hermeneutic. This perspective includes those that seek to understand Pentecostal hermeneutics beyond the dominance of Western contexts to represent those in the global South. There are various challenges and new directions that these scholars present to the discussion of Pentecostal hermeneutics, particularly regarding the role of the community. There is also an increasing recognition of the diversity within Pentecostalism and the role of the context of the community in the reading process. This includes scholars who have sought to describe and discuss the reading processes of the actual grass-roots community outside the USA (Grey 2011 in Australia; Purdy 2015 in Malawi; Autero 2016 in Bolivia; Nel 2018 in South Africa). These studies have challenged various presuppositions, particularly academic idealism and elitism, the impact of geographic-social context and socio-religious experience, and the limitations of Western individualism. They also highlight the challenge of addressing some neo-Pentecostal groups that insist on remaining outside the global family of Pentecostalism and the safeguarding of discernment it offers while privileging reading approaches that are ethically and theologically suspect (Nel 2018, 20–28).

Similarly, factors such as race and gender have emerged as important considerations in Pentecostal hermeneutics. Rodolfo Galvan Estrada III (2015) highlights the role of the community's identity within a Pentecostal hermeneutic in his case study of a Chicano and Latino community in North America. He demonstrates that other dynamics, such as ethnicity, are essential components in hermeneutics. Rosinah Mmannana Gabaitse (2015) connects the marginalization of women with interpretative practices of proof texting by the Pentecostal community in Botswana. Cheryl Bridges Johns (2014) offers a Spirit-filled feminist approach to Pentecostal hermeneutics in which women can find liberating space. Her approach shares commonalities with other feminist readings in that it begins with a hermeneutic of suspicion and remembrance; however, it does not abandon women to grief. Instead, the brooding of the Spirit over brokenness is like a gestating work of the Spirit that births a new order marked by healing, justice and transformation.

## Conclusion

Biblical hermeneutics presents opportunities for the maturing of Pentecostal theology as the roles of Scripture, the Spirit, experience, and community are expanded and clarified. The social location of Pentecostal communities continues to offer an important dynamic in developing future interpretive approaches. Because the community is not static, these debates highlight internal and external challenges for the global Pentecostal community as it increasingly moves into the mainstream, middle-class segments of society. If the role of the community is an important element of its Pentecostal identity, then it is possible that its changing social context will also change its hermeneutic. As Pentecostalism continues to grow, there may also be increased occasion for ecumenical dialogue with groups outside the Pentecostal family and scrutiny by government agencies on the ethical implications of community practices and Pentecostal readings of Scripture. Undoubtedly, the need to articulate a clear interpretive method for those both inside and outside of Pentecostalism will continue to propel the Pentecostal community to develop a viable and responsible biblical hermeneutic.

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