

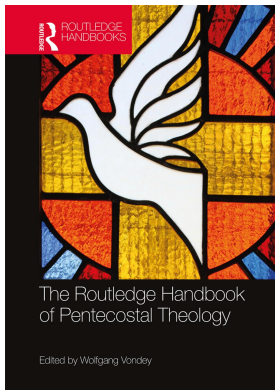
This article was downloaded by: 10.2.97.136

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Access details: *subscription number*

Publisher: *Routledge*

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: 5 Howick Place, London SW1P 1WG, UK



The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology

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Scripture

Publication details

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780429507076-9>

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Published online on: 20 Apr 2020

How to cite :- Scott A. Ellington. 20 Apr 2020, *Scripture from: The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology* Routledge

Accessed on: 22 Mar 2023

<https://test.routledgehandbooks.com/doi/10.4324/9780429507076-9>

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6

SCRIPTURE

Finding one's place in God's story

Scott A. Ellington

Pentecostals identify their own story with those recorded in Scripture. They hold in common a grounding in experiences that shape and direct their understanding of Scripture and its revelatory action in their own lives. The formative experiences of the Spirit that mirror accounts attested to by believers in the book of Acts, together with the manifestation of charismatic gifts in the lives of those who share this encounter throughout history, provide a focused sense of identification with the biblical witnesses, so that Pentecostals read Scripture attuned to points of contact and continuity with the lives of those they find there. In this chapter, I argue that shared experiences of encounter with the Spirit, often through concrete expressions such as miraculous healings, speaking with tongues, and prophetic words, actively shape a Pentecostal's understanding of the nature and function of the Bible and, as such, remain essential to any articulation of the doctrine of Scripture. I begin by affirming the importance of experience, orality, and story in Pentecostal theology. Next, I consider the dynamic relationship between the past revelation of writing Scripture and the contemporary encounter with the Spirit experienced in the hearing of Scripture for Pentecostals. I then examine three significant influences that continue to shape Pentecostal perspectives on Scripture: evangelical theology, Word of Faith theology, and reader-oriented postmodern reading strategies.

Experience, orality, and story

The privileging of experience does not mean that Pentecostals are irrational or arbitrary in their approach to the Bible (Moore 2013, 11–13), but it does mean that their conception of Scripture is transformed in a way that colors every aspect of their readings. John McKay (1994, 39), already established as a biblical scholar prior to his own experience of Holy Spirit baptism, describes reading the Bible in light of that new experience, finding it radically transformed as a result of his Spirit encounter, so that it became a new book through a paradigmatic change in interpretive perspective that results from such a charismatic encounter with God's Spirit: Pentecostals base their understanding of Scripture “on what they discover themselves thinking after they have been baptized in the Holy Spirit.” At times such experiences challenge approaches to the Bible that rely principally on reasoned argument, so that Pentecostals value “knowing by perception over knowing by proof” (Davies 2009, 221).

A dispensational approach to the Bible, for example, that confines tongues and miracles to a past dispensation of God's revelation, or a "demythologizing" of biblical language that seeks to harmonize it with an exclusively Enlightenment understanding of reality by excluding the miraculous, fails the existential test of validity as Pentecostals experience God's presence and activity in ways that reflect those attested to in Luke-Acts. Reason is not eclipsed by experience (see Chapters 7 and 8), but it is found at times insufficient to account fully for the reality attested to either by the biblical writer or by the contemporary interpreter.

As a result of their experience of sharing in the Spirit's outpouring at Pentecost, Pentecostal theology is "significantly directed by a focused reading of Luke-Acts" (Mittelstadt 2009, 137). This primary focus colors the reading of the whole of Scripture with a sense of immediacy, so that Pentecostals can accept readily and uncritically testimonies of divine power and presence, even when they themselves have not yet directly shared in all of those specific experiences. There is a strong sense of accepting the "plain meaning" of the text, so that Pentecostals expect to be able to identify closely with the lives and experiences of the first Christians. For those Pentecostals immersed in a context that holds a positivist view of history, encounters with the Spirit transcend a restricted perspective on historical events, with the result that the sense of distance between the biblical world and that of the reader is reoriented and radically reduced. God encroaches and that incursion into the lives of his people today facilitates their entering the world of the text. Frank Macchia (2002, 1122) has referred to this as a kind of "Biblicism" by which Pentecostals "believed themselves capable of entering and living in the world of the Bible through the ministry of the Spirit without the need for consciously engaging the hermeneutical difficulties of reading an ancient text from a modern situation." The speaking, acting, and guiding of the Spirit are no longer confined to the distant past, with the result that the world of the Bible seems suddenly much more accessible.

In addition, there is an oral rather than literate orientation among Pentecostals that is more at home with truths communicated through stories as opposed to propositional abstraction or rhetorical argument (see Chapter 4). While this may arguably be less true among North American Pentecostals today than it was in the early days of the movement, orality still characterizes much Western preaching and is the dominant means of communicating Scripture in the majority world. To be oral in orientation is not to be illiterate or uneducated but refers instead to the way in which knowledge and truth about life are acquired and processed. Tex Sample (1994, 6) contends "that about half of the people in the United States are people who work primarily out of a *traditional orality*, by which I mean a people who can read and write—though some cannot—but whose appropriation and engagement with life is oral." Knowledge in oral cultures, says Sample (1994, 3–5), is transmitted through stories and proverbs, being validated by the trust established through relationships. Certainly, confidence that the Bible is the divinely inspired word of God rests for Pentecostals more on their trust in their relationship with the Spirit (see Chapter 19) than it does on reasoned argument or doctrinal assertion.

This comfort with oral articulation and preference for narrative expressions of truth impact both the genre to which Pentecostals are more likely to turn for understanding their experience of Pentecost and the types of truths that they are likely to derive from those texts. Roger Stronstadt (2012, 5–9) has called attention to the Pentecostal propensity for drawing theology from narrative rather than didactic portions of Scripture. Stories of divine encounter and activity, of theophany and miracle, that have sometimes proven awkward and untenable to the modern reader, are read by Pentecostals with a sense of immediacy and easy accessibility. They see their own stories of divine encounter as a continuation of those

attested to by the faith community in the Bible. “We find ourselves,” says John Goldingay (1997, 8), “by setting ourselves in that other story In fact, we all tell our individual stories in the light of a worldview, a ‘grand narrative.’” Pentecostals more easily find a place in the biblical narrative because the point of access is not in a particular reading but in a sense of belonging to and participation in the community of believers described in those narratives. The story of the individual believer becomes part of the biblical story and the common practice among Pentecostals of offering public testimony to experience asserts and reinforces that connection.

The Bible as a living word

Scripture is understood by Pentecostals to be a lively rather than a sedentary speaking of God’s word, in that the Spirit both spoke to and through the inspired authors and speaks anew to the contemporary hearers of the word. And because, for Pentecostals, the emphasis is decidedly on the latter, a right hearing of the word depends not simply on bridging the gap between the world of the original author and that of the present day hearer, but on being yielded to a Spirit who is able to speak into both worlds, drawing on the words of the original revelatory encounter and also speaking a new word that addresses a fresh context. Often, Pentecostals lack interest in finding the ancient author’s intended meaning, which then requires translation and adaptation to their own situations, pointed out by Frank Macchia (2000, 55), who suggests that “the hermeneutical gap for Pentecostals has not been historical or cultural but spiritual, namely, between the spiritual message of Scripture and the unspiritual mind.” Pentecostals affirm that the word of God in Scripture is inaccessible apart from the ongoing revelatory activity of the Spirit who inspired that word. As Allan Anderson (2013, 122) asserts: “Pentecostals do differ from fundamentalists in that the text does not have authority *in itself*—rather, it is the Bible as interpreted by the inner working of the Spirit that is authoritative” (emphasis original). It is not possible, Pentecostals maintain, to sever the testimony to inspiration recorded in Scripture from the inspiring Spirit and still to hear Scripture as God’s word. The word of God is found in the encounter with Jesus Christ that the Holy Spirit facilitates in the hearer, so that “revelation as charismatic and prophetic event does not emerge from the written text itself, its letters, grammar, or syntax, but from what occurred and continues to occur in the community as God’s presence seen, heard, spoken, and experienced” (Vondey 2010, 74). The essential point, then, is that for Pentecostals the locus of revelation in Scripture is open-ended (Mittelstadt 2010, 164) and can never be a purely past event, because the inspirer of that word is speaking through and is being encountered again in the hearing of that word in the present.

Pentecostals affirm that the Holy Spirit speaks today and does more than simply repeat the biblical text (Archer 2009, 199). Rather, Pentecostals are committed to the belief that the Spirit as the communicator of God’s word both spoke to those who wrote (and edited) the Scriptures and speaks in the community of faith reading (and interpreting) the Scriptures. Pentecostals see themselves as “people of the Spirit” as well as “people of the Book” and are led by both (Arrington 1992, 25). For our purposes, though, the question becomes how best to understand Scripture as divine revelation in light of the continued presence and speaking of the inspiring Spirit (see Chapter 5). For the majority of Pentecostals, prophecy is viewed as subordinate to and to be judged by Scripture (Kay 2004, 75). For example, Grant Wacker (2001, 70) points out that “Pentecostal writers often used carpentry metaphors . . . to reinforce the notion that the Bible came first. All private visions or inspirations by the Holy Spirit, they said, must be ‘plumb-lined by the Word,’ placed on the ‘square of God’s Word.’”

Pentecostals would not, however, consider prophecy to be simply redundant. The reason not all agree on its relationship to the biblical canon rests on the dynamic sense of continuation attributed to divine revelation in and beyond Scripture. We continue to find different interpretations of the understanding of Scripture, and not all are shared by all Pentecostals.

Wolfgang Vondey (2010, 63) criticizes the adoption by classic Pentecostals of a dispensational understanding of revelation that resulted, he argues, in the “objectification” of Scripture and the dissolution of the ongoing dynamic interaction between the written and spoken words of the Spirit, with the result that,

Pentecostals replaced their oral-affective participation in the self-disclosure of God with a historical-grammatical interpretation of the biblical texts. The result was a “textualization” of revelation that reserved primary status to the written canon and suppressed the function of the imagination in the charismatic community and its affective-prophetic way of being.

Early Pentecostals, says Vondey (2010, 62), found in biblical revelation “not a record or performance of a completed act but an expression of the continuing possibility of revelation as an encounter with God that calls for a response in the present.” Although it is questionable if Pentecostals have maintained this perspective everywhere, this understanding of Scripture as a living word, a place of ongoing divine encounter, is at the heart of what distinguishes a Pentecostal appreciation of and approach to Scripture.

James K. A. Smith (1997, 66–67) argues for an understanding of Scripture not as the location of divine presence, but rather as offering testimony pointing and attesting to that presence in the church. For Smith, it is neither prophetic experience nor Scripture, if either is devoid of the ongoing presence and revelation of the Spirit, that is the final authority for the community of faith.

The canon – that which keeps our weaving straight – I would propose, is the Holy Spirit, not a collection of writings. The Spirit of Christ is the norm or standard for faith, and that Spirit stands in authority over *both Scripture and prophecy*. It is not Scripture that is the ultimate norm, but Christ.

(Smith 1997, 68)

This continuing presence of Christ in the midst of the charismatic community, Smith believes, is the best protection against relativism and subjectivity (Smith 1997, 69). He does not make clear, though, how the charismatic community, which is often divided in its understanding and perception of what the Spirit is saying, can best perceive and evaluate the Spirit’s presentation of Christ to that community.

John Wyckoff (2003, 35) argues that the activity of the Holy Spirit, far from diminishing or supplanting the authority of Scripture, serves to establish its authority in ways that reasoned argument and doctrinal assertion alone cannot. Specifically, it is through the experience of encountering God in Scripture, revealed by the Spirit, that Scripture is clearly understood, and its authority is affirmed. To speak of Scripture as a locus for encountering God is not, then, to suggest that it is simply a vehicle that can be abandoned once that to which it points has been realized. Rather, the Spirit serves to facilitate present conversation with the canonical witness through words that measure and act as a standard for our own experiences of that encounter. As such, the prophetic word is offered in conversation with, and thus can never eclipse, the Scriptures of the faith community.

In seeking to understand and articulate a Pentecostal doctrine of Scripture, two extremes are to be avoided and a balance between written and spoken Spirit-word maintained. On the one hand, locating revelation exclusively in the past and unrepeatably event of the Spirit's inspiration of the biblical writers, so that the Spirit's role is limited to assisting in the exegesis of the ancient texts in a way that steps back from the immediacy of divine encounter, limits God to a purely custodial role with regard to revelation. On the other hand, the Spirit's speech and activity recorded in the Bible has been recognized as canon and tradition provides the essential dialogue partner in hearing the Spirit in the context of the community of faith today (see Chapter 9). The Spirit stands aloof from neither reader nor text but facilitates a dialogue between them. The Spirit connects the contemporary community of faith with the historical community that has experienced first-hand the covenant promise to Abraham, the Exodus, the building and destruction of the temple, the birth, life, crucifixion, and resurrection of Emmanuel, and the life of the first Christian community. It is that dialogue that the Spirit enlivens rather than supersedes.

Strange bedfellows: evangelicalism, word of faith, and postmodernism

It would be fair to say that historically Pentecostalism has been an experiential movement in search of a doctrine to describe its character. The lack of a leading theological figure like a Thomas Aquinas, a John Calvin, or a John Fletcher to grant classic Pentecostalism a clear theological trajectory, has meant that some of the theological alliances made by Pentecostals are at times very much at odds with their core beliefs about the nature and character of Scripture.

Two influences in the second half of the twentieth century, in particular, have permeated Pentecostal thinking about the Bible, while at the same time undermining their foundational understanding of Scripture as a place of divine encounter. One has a readier appeal to academic ways of articulating a theology of Scripture, while the other vies for support at the grassroots level of the church. The former is classical evangelicalism, with its commitment to modernist notions of truth and the perfection of a series of inspirational moments that center on the authors and their autographs, and the latter is the "Word of Faith" doctrine founded on the teachings of E. W. Kenyon, with its embrace of universal laws of creation that God has established in his word to be activated by the discerning reader. So far reaching has been their acceptance and appropriation that for many they have become part of the very fabric of global Pentecostalism. It remains to be seen how far these influences that shift the focus away from immediate encounter and engagement with the Spirit in Scripture may eventually reshape the movement.

Initially, the evaporation of the distance between the reader or hearer and the biblical writers, together with a centering of experience on divine encounter of the Spirit, led to an elemental suspicion among classic Pentecostals of the brand of modernity prevalent at the time. Modernism, with its dependence on reason and scientific method, either marginalized such experiences of encounter, often relegating them to a past dispensation, in the case of conservatives, or in the case of Protestant liberalism, simply denied them outright. Any understanding of the Bible that directly denied the root experience encounter with the Spirit was seen by Pentecostals as flawed at its heart.

But as the twentieth century matured, Western Pentecostals began to come of age in a modern context, so that much of their theological reflection shifted from oral to written, from experiential to propositional, and from present encounter to past revelation, predominantly, if not exclusively, through the pages of Scripture. This shift introduced an essential

rift between those reading the Bible in the parish and those working in the academy (Cargal 1993, 170). Through their association with the wider evangelical world, Pentecostal scholars formed an alliance with Christians determined to resist the liberal dismissal of Scripture as divinely inspired, but in doing so they adopted a view of revelation that is in tension with the foundational experiences of Pentecost (Ellington 1996). Speaking of this association, Jacobson (1999, 100) concludes that Pentecostals could not avoid “being overwhelmed by the homogenizing influence of the more organized and articulate mainstream evangelical movement Pentecostals (the culturally weaker partner) could not help but be, in a sense, colonized by the stronger.” Vondey (2010, 63) argues similarly that adopting the evangelical dispensational understanding of Scripture,

directed Pentecostals to an objectification of Scripture that dispensed the biblical narratives into the realm of history and equated the notion of revelation with the idea of historicity. Revelation now *contained* the Word of God, and Scripture was no longer seen as a charismatic event but fully embodied as text.

Full and final authority was placed in the autographs of Scripture, that is, in the past and unrepeatable speaking of God. Encountering the divine word became an exercise in exegetical excavation to recover a revelatory moment that is now wholly past, instead of a new encounter with the revealer and inspirer as the Scripture is experienced afresh. In its final consequence, James K. A. Smith (1997, 58–59) contends that Pentecostals’ entry into the modernist debate has the potential to nullify that which is uniquely Pentecostal: the textual rather than oral emphasis in evangelical theology has resulted in “a framework which at the same time destroys the foundation.” The uneasy adolescence of Pentecostals has not been fully resolved, leading to a tension, even an open conflict, between those holding divergent views of revelation and scriptural authority. On the one hand, an association with evangelicalism has led to the adopting of formulations such as the verbal inspiration, infallibility, and inerrancy of Scripture that closely identifies truth with that which science and historical method access and affirm. So, for example, Edgar R. Lee (2003, 106) maintains that

being wholly and verbally God-given, Scripture is without error or fault in all its teachings, no less in what it states about God’s acts in creation and the events of world history, and about its own literary origins in God, than in its witness to God’s saving grace in individual lives.

Truth is universal and is expressed in terms of historical and scientific accuracy (Cargal 1993, 167). From this perspective, biblical narratives, with their open-endedness and ambiguity, tend not to be well-suited to expressing the heart of the biblical message for Pentecostals.

On the other hand, there are Pentecostal scholars who argue against reading the Bible through a positivist view of history, opting instead for a narrative understanding of revelation. John Goldingay (1997, 6) makes the case that Christian faith should not be understood in terms of abstract statements, such as “God is love” or “God is three and God is one,” but rests instead in terms of narrative statements, such as “God so loved the world that he gave . . .,” so that narrative is the appropriate form for doing theology. Pentecostals read Scripture with the conviction that biblical truth points to and is affirmed by the inspiring Spirit who continues to speak and act. From this perspective, texts are valued for their ability to characterize and envision God’s activity and presence today, with less concern for defending this or that understanding of history. With the questioning and dismantling of many of the assumptions

of modernism, it remains to be seen whether Pentecostals will continue to be influenced by the questions and concerns that shape evangelical understandings of Scripture.

The Word of Faith doctrine of Scripture shares with classic Pentecostalism the belief that the charismata recorded in the book of Acts can and should be experienced by believers today. But like evangelical theology, this truth is often understood propositionally even when expressed as narrative. More specifically, biblical truth is seen in legal terms. According to Allan Anderson (2004, 157), E. W. Kenyon taught that God's word operates according to "predetermined divine principles," so that a Christian need only to use God's word correctly in order to achieve prosperity, healing, and blessing. "In Africa's new, fast-growing Pentecostal (or faith gospel) sector," for example, "the Bible is understood as a record of covenants, promises, pledges, and commitments between God and his chosen" (Gifford 2011, 179). Divine encounter moves from being presented with a living, actively involved, and sovereign God to releasing previously stored-up power that God placed in his words of the past for our use today. For Kenyon, it was the biblical word rather than the Spirit that provides our only access to Christ, because "it imparts Faith to my Spirit, builds Love into it. God's only means of reaching me is through His Word. So the Word becomes a vital thing" (Kenyon 1945, 3). The encounter with Christ for Kenyon is realized literally through speaking and acting upon the words of Scripture.

The Word is God present with us, speaking the Living Message of the Loving Father God. The Word is always NOW. It is His Word to me today. It is His voice, His last message. It becomes a Living thing in my heart as I lovingly act upon it. It becomes a Living thing on the lips of Love. It has no power on the lips of those whose lives are out of fellowship with Him, who live in the reason realm.

(Kenyon 1945, 4)

This understanding of the nature of Scripture implies a functional deism. Strictly speaking, God need no longer be actively involved in the hearing and enacting of Scripture. God has placed the power of creation itself in the written word and need no longer be directly and personally involved in the release and use of that power.

This contradiction has led in some teachings readily adopted by Pentecostals to a separation of the person of God in the Spirit of Christ from the power of God seen to operate independently of that presence. In Pentecostalism in parts of Africa, for example, where the prosperity gospel is particularly prominent, this disconnect between power and person is evident.

In contradistinction to this Western liberal position, African Christians, particularly those who belong to the independent indigenous charismatic streams, celebrate the divinity and supernatural status of the Bible. African Christian use of the Bible as a symbol of sacred power – as for example, when it is placed under the pillow of a sleeping infant to provide protection from evil – does not in any way undermine its didactic use.

(Asamoah-Gyadu 2013, 167)

Paul Gifford (2011, 188) describes these practices as a performative or declarative use of the Bible in which the promises of God, in order to be released and become active in the lives of its hearers, must first be declared by a person of spiritual authority: "In many cases the impression (the very non-Protestant impression) is given that the Bible is the preserve of anointed preachers who can effect it by reason of their gifts." Hence, to suggest that an

evangelical theology that focuses on the inerrancy of the biblical autographs or a Word of Faith teaching that stresses the release of divine power are simply alien to Pentecostalism would be naïve. Their wide dissemination and frequent acceptance make their influence on Pentecostal views of the Bible substantial. It remains to be seen, therefore, whether a continued emphasis on the Bible as a place of divine encounter where the Holy Spirit breathes new life into the text will be sufficient to blunt and modify these movements' static views of Scripture, or if it is the foundation stone of divine encounter which is destined to be shifted in the interest of assured stability and a measure of objectivity (evangelicalism) or a guaranteed outcome and level of direct control over God's activity in our lives (Word of Faith).

A third and more recent influence, which both has points of contact with Pentecostal understandings of Scripture and is fundamentally at odds with one of its core assumptions, is postmodernism reader-centered reading strategies. The shift from a modern to a postmodern approach to the Bible with the unfolding of the twenty-first century has informed the Pentecostal understanding of Scripture. Pentecostals are at home with the valuable place given to subjective experience and the validation of story and testimony as means of expressing and appropriating Scripture's meaning championed by postmodern hermeneutical approaches (Noel 2002, 17, 42). Also, the emphasis given to subjective encounter in postmodern readings is in harmony with the Pentecostal tendency to focus on immediate context, with less of a predisposition to abstracting or universalizing such experiences. On the other hand, Pentecostals have a dialogical understanding of the Bible that transcends and, in some cases, challenges directly a reader-response approach to the text. Both the experiences recorded in the Bible and their reflections in the lives of Pentecostals are experiences of encounter with God, the active agent who places limits on their readings and who makes exclusive claims on their beliefs. It is precisely these encounters with God that invalidate for Pentecostals a bedrock conviction of postmodern readings, namely, the denial of absolute, universal truth and, by extension, of an authoritative and exclusionary metanarrative (Johns 1995). A dialogical understanding of Scripture that sees the inspiring Spirit as still actively involved in the author-reader conversation requires, regardless of how differently the Bible may be understood from one cultural context to the next or how great the cultural distance may be between the writer and reader, that every reading be seen as part of a larger narrative. The Spirit who transcends every culture provides a universal and unifying voice, so that there can be no purely contextual and exclusively local understanding of Scripture because there can be no reading in isolation, detached from the larger community of faith, the body of Christ (Archer 2001, 124). Put differently, Scripture invites the Spirit's voice that both speaks the native tongue of every culture and that is free therefore to challenge, to call, and to transform that culture's readers.

Conclusion

The globalization of Pentecostalism, together with the new prominence enjoyed by the reader in determining a text's meaning, invite and even compel Pentecostals to rethink their theology of Scripture. Modernism, with its identification of truth with objective history, has proven itself limited in its attempts to grasp and articulate the interplay of Spirit, text, and reader in the hearing of Scripture (Cargal 1993). The Enlightenment has provided a measure of stability, uniformity, and safety to Bible reading, but at the cost of maintaining the illusion that divine revelation can be quarantined to a distant and unchanging past. Pentecostal experiences of the Spirit and the text will also need to be articulated in a postmodern milieu, one that steers clear of any claim to universal authority and holds in suspicion any unifying

metanarrative while nonetheless valuing such things as subjective experience and personal story. In addition, the globalization of Pentecostalism will mean that a new variety, breadth, and depth of charismatic experiences of engagement with the Spirit and text will need to be incorporated in the Pentecostal understanding of Scripture. Any Pentecostal articulation of a “doctrine” of Scripture, though, must keep at the forefront the experience of divine encounter that is essential to hearing the word of God. Testimonies to divine encounter by Pentecostals must continue to be offered in dialogue with the testimonies of Scripture.

Rickie Moore (2016, 152) speaks of Scripture as “a kind of sacred space that we are graciously invited to enter.” To retreat from divine encounter in Scripture tempts the reader toward a subtle idolatry, to the placing of an object, ironically in this case the Bible itself, between ourselves and the Spirit. Such an idolatry seeks to extract truths and authority from the stories found there while at the same time withholding part of ourselves from the Spirit to whom those stories draw us. “In the church, particularly in its studious quarters,” says Moore,

we have reached for a *high view of Scripture*, but a *deep view of Scripture*, it seems to me, has scarcely crossed our minds. We have wanted a Scripture that is high enough to give us high authority, but not one that is deep enough to reveal the secrets of our hearts.

(2016, 159; *emphasis original*)

Moore underscores the temptation, native to so many models of Scripture, to seek control rather than encounter. But any reading that is truly open to the Spirit resists by its very nature control and manipulation by the reader. Nor can it be expected that each reader who encounters the living Spirit will hear the voice of the biblical writer in the same way. To be led by the Spirit as one hears the text is to step midstream into a conversation that has yet to reach its conclusion.

Scripture for Pentecostals, then, is a story with many participants, one that has been told by those who gave us the Bible and one that we are all invited, perhaps compelled, to take up and to carry forward. “By grafting our lives into the biblical narrative,” says Craig Keener (2016, 167), “we become part of the extension of that narrative.” Goldingay (1997, 10) contends that “the biblical narratives . . . invite us to bet our lives on the truth of their sweeping but slightly-less-than-grand-narratives, to live our lives by them and prove their truth by proving that they can be lived in.” Pentecostals go to the Bible not simply to learn someone else’s story, but to discover their own place in the story that God tells about their lives. Testimony, when it grounds itself in the stories of the Bible, does not simply repeat and affirm ancient words, rather it continues the narrative. Scripture, for Pentecostals, is the place where their own story finds its home with those told by the communities of faith that have gone before.

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