

Spiritual Pragmatism in Pentecostal Hermeneutics

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Introduction

The modern principles of hermeneutics give more emphasis to technical expertise than the spiritual life of interpreter. For example, In *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth*, Fee and Stuart make a distinction between what the text meant in its original context (*then and there*) and what it means in the reader's context (*here and now*). The first task is 'exegesis' and the second one is 'hermeneutics.'¹ Then the natural question is where we place the role of the Holy Spirit in the interpretation. Hence Pentecostals argue that the role of the Holy Spirit in the life of interpreter is more important in interpretation than his/her expertise in critical theories of interpretation.² This article explores spiritual pragmatism in Pentecostal hermeneutics, which is taken in this article as a way to decipher the voice of the Spirit from the text.³ Spiritual experience and spiritual illumination are the two wings of spiritual pragmatism.

¹ Gordon D. Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth*, 3rd edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 23.

² F. L. Arrington, "Hermeneutics," *Dictionary of Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1988), 376.

³ Pragmatism is a concept that is engaged with various fields of study since the seminal works of C. S. Pierce and John Dewey. This concept in social science deals with an approach that moves beyond the limitations of empiricism and positivism. I use this concept in this article to go beyond the "scientific" exegesis and realise a continuum to bridge the dualism between 'spiritual' and 'material' to quench the spiritual thirst of humanity. Cf. Ananta Kumar Giri (Ed.), Special Issue on Pragmatism and Spirituality. *3D: IBA Journal of Management*, 5/2 (January-June 2014).

Importance of Pentecostal Hermeneutics

Is there a Hermeneutics for Pentecostals? Often the criticism comes against the Pentecostals, as in the words of Gordon Fee: the Bible is seen as a “Promise-Box.”⁴ What is deficient in the contemporary hermeneutics, according to Pentecostals? The role of the interpreter is not taken into serious consideration. In the words of Bruce Waltke, ‘most books on hermeneutics deal with the grammatico-historical method and neglect the role of the Holy Spirit and spiritual qualification of the interpreter.’⁵ A typical Pentecostal reads the Bible not to enhance the knowledge, learn the history of Israel, the development of early Christology or even the life of Christ, but to meet God in the text, and provide an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to speak to our spirits. Most pastors of Pentecostal churches continue to follow pre-critical hermeneutics within the sermons and Bible study. The phenomenal growth of the Pentecostal movement worldwide in the recent past attests the fact that their interpretation of the scripture is well-accepted among ordinary people.⁶

What is the hermeneutical context of Pentecostalism? One cannot forget the socio-economic context of any religious movements, and so also of Pentecostals. But still one cannot exaggerate the role of socio-economic context at the cost of the religious one. Five aspects of hermeneutical orientation are important for our discussion. First, the upbringing in the local

⁴ Gordon D. Fee, “Hermeneutics and Historical Precedent, --A Major Problem in Pentecostal Hermeneutics,” in Russel P. Spittler (ed.), *Perspectives on the New Pentecostalism* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1976) 124.

⁵ Bruce Waltke, “Hermeneutics and the Spiritual Life,” *Cruz*, XXIII/1: 5.

⁶ Statistics show that Pentecostalism is the second largest segment of Christianity after Roman Catholicism, representing a quarter of all Christians. At least three-quarters of Pentecostalism today is found in what is commonly called the Southern Hemisphere. Allan Anderson, *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 14; Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 5-6.

Pentecostal church gives the first-hand information about the Pentecostal experience and hermeneutics. Second is the interaction with the rest of the churches in the Christendom that enables a believer to reflect upon the primary experience from the local church with the experience and biblical interpretations of other denominations. The third one is the interaction with wider culture and other religions which attune the Pentecostals to introspect the relevance of Pentecostal experience amid wide varieties of religious experience. Fourth, one cannot forget the existential reality of poverty, sickness, and the impoverished community around us. And finally, Pentecostals hold on to the spiritual dimension of human existence (cf. Gen 1:26). Thus, it is inevitable to reflect on the perspectives of spiritual pragmatism in Pentecostal Hermeneutics with respect to its wider context. Spiritual experience and spiritual illumination are important in deciphering the voice of the Holy Spirit.

Spiritual Experience

Experiencing something which is beyond the comprehension of the five senses, mind and intellect constitutes a 'spiritual experience'. Classical Pentecostalism (in contrast to the new charismatic movements) considers the spiritual experience as pragmatic hermeneutic. An interpreter who believes supernatural events in the churches such as miracles, tongues, prophesy, visions, etc., would give proper importance to the supernatural events in the Bible than who do not believe such things. McClean explains that Experiencing God is defined in terms of internal renewal through experiences of encounter as well as external experiences through the manifestation of God's miraculous speech and action in the form of healings, deliverance, etc.⁷ Similarly, Harvey Cox also supports this argument when he writes that "the experience of

⁷ Mark D. McClean, "Toward a Pentecostal hermeneutics", *Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies* 6/2 (1984), 49, online, https://brill.com/view/journals/pneu/6/1/article-p35_5.xml?language=en.

God has absolute primacy over dogma and doctrine” among Pentecostals.⁸

For instance, how does one read the spirit’s activity in Acts 2? Any typical believer from a Classical Pentecostal church would confidently say their charismatic experience and the experience narrated in Acts 2 have continuity. Carl Brumback declared that Acts 2:4 is the scriptural pattern for believers of the whole church age.⁹ The contemporary experience in the Spirit particularly, speaking in tongues and other manifestations of Spirit (1Cor 12:7-11) are taken as the evidence that the Spirit still works the way the Spirit worked with apostles in the early church.

Reading the text experientially does not mean that it is unrelated to grammatical analysis or reading out of the textual sense. So far as the Spirit inspired the writers and conveyed a meaning through the text, one cannot go against it. Then, reading experientially means ‘believing to the depths of our being what we find in the text.’¹⁰ For example, rational affirmation of ‘God is love’ is different from welcoming God’s love into our hearts and feels its implications. Human feeling is part of experience that is to do with faith and subsequent actions that it demands.

A common critique is that Pentecostals read their experience into the Scripture and disregard scientific exegesis. That is, whether a contemporary experience can establish a theology. Menzies answers that though experience does not establish

⁸ Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: the Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-first Century*, 1995, 71, as quoted by Jacob Mathew, “Pentecostu Faith Movement and Indegenous, Contextual Realities & Relevance: A Theological Analysis”, SATHRI Journal 9/2 (October, 2015), 48.

⁹ Carl Brumback, “What Meaneth This?” *A Pentecostal Answer to a Pentecostal Question* (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1947), 192.

¹⁰ Craig S. Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture in Light of Pentecost* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016), 25.

theology, it does verify or demonstrate, theological truth.¹¹ It means verification of biblical truths in the light of our experience (cf. Rom 6:11). Similarly we can read and develop our experience in the light of the Scripture. For instance, John Wesley deemed experience the strongest evidence for Christian faith apart from Scripture, and by this he meant that he experienced what Scripture described.¹² According to Menzies, if a biblical truth is to be promulgated, it ought to be demonstrable in life. It means the apostles were able to say based on their experience on the day of Pentecost, ‘this is that,’ (Acts 2:16).

Those who believe and experience miracles often find the Scriptural evidences of miracles plausible than those who have not. If one brackets supernaturalism away from Scripture, it is reductionalism. Keener says, “Experiences similar to those in Scripture make Scripture more believable or close to us than it feels to those who do not have such experiences.”¹³ For example, one of the major contributions of Pentecostal movements is the restoration of spiritual gifts as an experiential reality, from which we read Scripture. Pentecostal movements invite people to read Scripture devotionally and illustrate Bible through our experience.

Experience and Normativeness

Most often Classical Pentecostal churches insist the manifestation of the Spirit as normative. Then the question is how far one can take a historical narrative¹⁴ in the Acts as

¹¹ Menzies, *The Methodology*, 12; cf. Stronstad, *Spirit*, 16.

¹² For Wesley, experience is subordinate to Scripture—subsequent interpreter called it as one part of Wesleyan Quadrilateral. Cf. Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics*, foot note 25, page 312.

¹³ Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics*, 26.

¹⁴ Dichotomy between history and theology prevailed in the twentieth-century biblical criticism. Narrative was the most common genre in the Bible. Narrative is the report of dialogues, speeches, and episodes. Some narratives are formulaic; others are historically particular facts. The narratives also express the writer’s theology, i.e., why did the author

normative—whether one historical precedent can be taken as a pattern intended to be paradigmatic. Two positions are espoused by two Pentecostal theologians. First, Gordon Fee answers that biblical precedents may be regarded as repeatable patterns—even if they are not to be regarded as normative.¹⁵ For Fee, the *intent* of the author determines the normative value of the narrative.¹⁶ That is, if it can be shown that the purpose of a given narrative is to establish precedent, then such precedent should be regarded as normative. Second position is proposed by William Menzies who rejected Fee’s proposal of repeatability and emphasized the normativeness of historical narratives (in the Acts). He does this by taking the theological intentions of Luke and proposing the intention of Luke as not just narrating an event but recorded it with a normative intention to be followed.¹⁷ In the discussion of the function of Luke-Acts, David E. Aune affirms, “Luke-Acts provided historical definition and identity as well as theological legitimation for the author’s conception of normative Christianity.¹⁸ Nevertheless, Fee does not altogether reject the validity of experience. According to Fee, the religious experience does have value both for the edification of the individuals (1Cor 14:2-5) and, edification of the church with the interpretation of the scripture.

record the event, what message the author intend to convey. Cf. Craig S. Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics*, 22, foot note 11.

¹⁵ Gordon D. Fee, “Hermeneutics and Historical Precedent-A Major Problem in Pentecostal Hermeneutics,” in *Perspectives on the New Pentecostalism*, edited by Russell P. Spittler (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1976), 128-129.

¹⁶ Fee comments that the major task of the interpreter is to discover the author’s intent in recording the historical narrative. Gordon D. Fee, “Baptism in the Holy Spirit: The Issue of Separability and Subsequence,” *Pneuma*, 7/2 (1985): 126 .

¹⁷ William W. Menzies, “The Methodology of Pentecostal Theology: An Essay on Hermeneutics,” in *Essays on Apostolic Themes: Studies in Honor of Howard M. Ervin*, edited by Paul Elbert (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1985), 1-14. as quoted by Stronstad, *Spirit*, 14.

¹⁸ David E. Aune, *The New Testament in its Literary Environment* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1987), 137.

Normativeness also includes the usefulness of interpretation. For instance, how do we know what we interpreted is well? How do we know we have attained genuine meaning? In this regard, Pentecostals would say there is no 'one and only possible' meaning rather there are levels of meaning and one has to accept the fluid nature of texts. Pinnock suggests that the criterion of 'fruitfulness' of interpretation helps in this regard.¹⁹ Fruitful interpretation, according to Pinnock, is the interpretation that lets the text speak and lights up the faith of the community. A good interpretation energizes believers and launches them for self-sacrificing behavior.

Spiritual Formation

The primary purpose of Pentecostal reading is to encounter God. Pentecostals believe that God's presence is experienced and mediated through the biblical text among other ways. As a result, Pentecostals prefer to interpret the Scripture by encounter more than exegesis.²⁰ For example, reading 1Corinthians is not to learn about Paul's challenges during his missionary journeys, nor to grasp the working of the Holy Spirit in the early church, rather Pentecostals are inspired to fulfill their function in the Body of Christ, and also to listen to the voice of the Spirit from the pages of the Scripture. Pentecostal readers bring their own context, such as financial needs, sickness, job loss, children's needs, family problems, etc., to the text, and through it to the Lord, and allow him to bring a solution/God's will in their pertinent issues. While interpreting little attention is given to the intention of the author or the reception of first readers rather the text is used to meet the needs of the contemporary readers— it is a distinctive appropriation of the text to the present readers. According to Andrew Davies this appropriation of the text is

¹⁹ Clark H. Pinnock, "The Work of the Spirit in the Interpretation of Holy Scripture from the Perspective of a Charismatic Bible Theologian", *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 18 (2009), 168.

²⁰ Andrew Davies, "What Does it Mean to Read the Bible as A Pentecostal?" *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 18 (2009), 221.

far closer to the liberal progressive wing of biblical scholarship than the traditional evangelicals.²¹ It is a reading process not to grasp the text but to grasp God through the text. Internalizing the text is like having fire in bones and transforms the lives.

Spiritual Illumination

Pentecostals take it as granted that the God is the ultimate author of the Scripture, in which human agencies are used to convey the divine message. Pentecostals do not deny the study of the historical background as long as the Scripture has its textuality. The textual nature of the Scripture demands a careful study as there is a historical gap between the writer and the readers. The distance between creator and creation also adds the ambiguity of the Word along with the distance between the writer and the readers. However, Pentecostals argue that one cannot underestimate the divine author at the cost of human author of God's word so as to overemphasize the human thought world of the human author alone. Here comes the help of the Holy Spirit to bridge the intension of the Scripture and the contextual need of the community.

The Holy Spirit that searches the depth of God and human heart (1Cor 2:10) mediates our limited understanding. According to Stronstad, 'the Spirit that is immanent with believers establishes both existential and pre-suppositional continuum between the written word in the past and the same word is the present.'²² It is because the vertical and horizontal dimension of the Spirit is important in the Pentecostal Hermeneutics.

It is a tendency among Pentecostal readers that they approach the text with the help of the Holy Spirit to get its significance of it in their personal life. They look for the impact of the text

²¹ Davies, "What Does it Mean..." 222.

²² Stronstad, *Spirit*, 14.

in their specific context. Allan Anderson makes a similar observance in the African Pentecostal context: “it is meaningless to discuss the interpretation of the text by itself.”²³ Similarly, Andrew Davies comments, “if we do not encounter God within it then it is little more than a cultural artifact of principally antiquarian significance—interesting but ultimately (and in every sense) meaningless.”²⁴ They catch up the text in faith in the process of reading with the help of the Holy Spirit to make meaning. Once they find meaning in the text, then quite naturally they spend so much time with the text. Pentecostals believe that while reading in faith they fine-tune with the first readers because they share the same Spirit that worked with the writer and the first readers. The Holy Spirit illuminates the heart of present readers and therefore, they believe themselves in harmony with the first readers. In this regard, typical Pentecostal believers never think about the gap between themselves and the first readers (unless one informs them the modern rules of exegesis).

Spiritual Intuition

A usual criticism against Pentecostals is that they take what the text means now than what the text meant then. The question again remains the same about the reception of the text than its authorship. The question has to do far more with the tool of interpretation of the Pentecostals. What a common man uses to interpret a text is the rich Pentecostal experience he/she inherited. Believers in the Pentecostal churches inherit a general framework of interpretation with respect to their regular worship services. There is a general belief that the Holy Spirit will directly speak to the believer as per their *preparation* to listen. Often they approach the Bible with fasting and prayer. What the message they derive out of their reading in their heart is believed to be the message of the Holy

²³ Allan Anderson, “The Hermeneutical Processes of Pentecostal-type African Initiated Churches in South Africa,” *Missionalia* 24/2 (1996), 1.

²⁴ Davies, “What Does it Mean...” 224.

Spirit to their particular context. They never cross-check whether they understand is in harmony with the modern commentators' opinion/interpretation about the text. It is because they believed to have "heard" from the Spirit and satisfied with what they "heard." According to Gerald T. Sheppard, Pentecostals interpret scripture from a spiritually informed discernment and intuition.²⁵ It is a form of interpretation open to ordinary people.

This method is somewhat similar to what Severino Croatto offers to hermeneutics. He argues, 'all interpreters condition their reading of a text by a kind of preunderstanding arising from their own life context... and then the interpreter enlarges the meaning of the text being interpreted.'²⁶ Pentecostals' preunderstanding is their Pentecostal upbringing and familiarity with typical interpretation they internalize from spiritually gifted people. The enlargement of the meaning of the text is to do with their application, that is, what do the individuals do with what is heard from the Spirit.

Text as Medium

Indian Pentecostals conduct fasting-prayer at regular intervals to have spiritual edification and to keep in touch with the voice of the Spirit. Spiritually gifted personalities—such preachers are usually addressed as Prophets—share the word during such sessions. People with particular needs also attend the meeting and get enriched by the worship service and listening of the Word.

During such meetings, it is the belief that the 'Prophets' discern the spiritual and physical condition of the participants with the help of the Spirit. The preachers also share the same belief that the text that they select by the inspiration of the Spirit would reveal the spiritual condition of the participants—

²⁵ Gerald T. Sheppard, "Word and Spirit: Scripture in the Pentecostal Tradition", 19 as quoted by Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, 315.

²⁶ J. Severino Croatto, *Biblical Hermeneutics* (New York: Orbis, 1987), 1.

individually and collectively. Such confidence gives them the courage to shift from one passage to the other to address various needs of the participants. A portion of biblical episode or a portion of a verse is their concern because their aim is not to systematically interpret the whole episode but to address the needs of participants. Participants who listen to them take the message directly to their heart as if God directly revealed their condition to the preachers in the selection and interpretation of the text. If someone asks the Prophets about the secret of this knowledge, then the 'Prophets' would reveal their discernment through the Word. Thus, in a way the text functions as a medium to reveal the spiritual condition of the participants.

It may be the reason a variety of interpretations of the same text is appreciated in the Pentecostal churches—to meet the variety of contextual needs. The text has different meaning as each one approaches the text from various contexts and life experiences. It is the common belief among Pentecostals that every time something new is available in the Scripture. Pentecostals also share the belief that there is no such thing as a universal interpretation.

Voice of God and Community Validation

Listening to the voice of God is the heart of Christian spirituality (cf. Psalm 81:8; John 10:27). In Pentecostal churches, the message from the preacher is taken not as preacher's own voice but as the voice of God. As a biblical example, the believers in Thessalonica had taken the words of Paul and his associates as God's voice. Paul says: *And we also thank God constantly for this, that when you received the word of God, which you heard from us, you accepted it not as the word of men but as what it really is, the word of God, which is at work in you believers* (1Thess 2:13).

At the concluding remarks of the first church council, they made it clear, "For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and

to us to lay on you no greater burden than these requirements” (Acts 15:28). By this command, they set aside a good deal of Old Testament cultic commands. As one listens to the voice of the Spirit, the text becomes dynamic in our situation.

As per the above view, who decides the interpretation as God’s voice? Whether whatever the interpreter does is accepted as God’s voice is a pertinent question. One has to understand the role of the community here. It is the Pentecostal norm that the community who listens to the message should “feel” the presence of God and the ‘voice of God’ in the interpretation. It is an accepted fact that the silent voice of the Spirit in the heart of the worshiping community validates the voice of the interpreter as God’s voice.

Text as Agent of Spiritual Warfare

Pentecostal believers in India look at all life issues from a spiritual point of view²⁷ and it is true with the interpretation of the scripture as well. Pentecostals hold on to a metaphysical world-view that a spiritual realm is dormant behind every material reality (cf. Heb 11:3). A change in any one of the realms affects the other as well.²⁸ It is the hermeneutical key is that one can influence the material realm by influencing the spiritual realm through the Holy Spirit. One can term this as ‘Spiritual Warfare’ in a popular way. As a result Pentecostals looks for spiritual conflict in the text and context.

As a derivation of the above metaphysical world-view, Pentecostals have a few presuppositions while sharing the word: (1) All crisis is part of the influence of the satanic realm; (2) As Christ has taken victory over Satan, so also believers

²⁷ James K. A. Smith, “Thinking in Tongues,” 2008, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2008/04/thinking-in-tongues>.

²⁸ For Edmund Leach, “Mediation between opposites is precisely what religious thinking is all about...” Edmund Leach, *Structuralist Interpretations of Biblical Myth*, edited by Edmund R. Leach and D. Alan Aycock (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 16.

have victory over Satan in Christ; and (3) Preaching the word with the help of the Holy Spirit involves a fight against satanic realm, which releases people from the evil bondage. Thus, preaching the word leads to deliverance.

Pentecostals identify the life-threatening and dehumanizing contexts of India—both structural and individual—such as illiteracy, poverty, addictions, lack of employment, gender-inequality, religious and ethnic conflicts, corruption, etc. are the works of devil so that the full potential of humanity is not realized. One can attain the full potential of humanity ‘in Christ’ and experience it with the help of the Holy Spirit.

For example, “binding and loosing” (Mt 16:19) is taken as an important aspect of spiritual warfare. Pentecostals take both phrases—“gates of Hades” and “binding and loosing”—metaphorically to signify the ongoing spiritual warfare of the church. While sending disciples for mission, Jesus entrusted them with spiritual authority to share the good news and cast demons out (Mt 10:1). Similarly, in relation to the exorcism, Jesus is represented as a “stronger man” to “tie up the strong man” (Mt 12:29). Howard Clark Kee noted that Jesus’ authority over the power of Satan was conveyed to his disciples as well.²⁹ Thus, Pentecostals connect the phrase “binding” with binding of Satan/evil forces who work against the well-being of people and “loosing” with the release of people from the bondage of evil forces. Hence Pentecostals understand the phrase “binding and loosing” in relation to the spiritual authority a believer possesses in the spiritual warfare.

²⁹ Howard Clark Kee, “Medicine and Healing,” *ABD*, edited by David Noel Freedman (New York: Doubleday, 1997), CD ROM.

Implications of Spiritual Pragmatism

Spiritual Life of Interpreter

Interpreter as a person with devotional life and good testimony is valued more than his/her theological expertise in Pentecostal churches. It is to be understood in the context of critical theological interpretation where ‘the necessity of the Spirit’s involvement is explicitly denied’³⁰

Along with the textuality of Scripture, the Spirit gives the right utterance as interpretation. Prayer, personal devotion, purity, spirit filled life, etc., are mandatory for every Pentecostal interpreter. Empowerment by the Holy Spirit, preferably with speaking in tongues and other spiritual gifts is mandatory. It means the life of interpreter is more important than the method of interpretation. The interpreter should appreciate the hermeneutical world view that includes the Spirit’s direct involvement in the process of interpretation, which in turn creates an openness to a variety of aspects that other interpreters downplay such as exorcisms, miracles, healing, prophesy, and other activities of the Spirit.³¹ Thus, every authentic interpreter ought to have a close communion with God in such a way that the interpreter is open to the voice of God from Scripture and in turn, the community would be able to attest it.

Being Part of Worshiping Community

Pentecostals believe that spiritual maturity comes by being part of the worshiping community. Paul’s advice in 1 Timothy 5:22 (Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands) is interpreted by Pentecostals in this sense. Shared experiences in the light

³⁰ Henry M. Knapp, “Protestant Biblical Interpretation,” *Dictionary of Theological Interpretation of the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 634.

³¹ John Christopher Thomas, “Pentecostal Interpretation”, *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Biblical Interpretation*, edited by Steven L. McKenzie (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 94.

of scriptural evidence validate an individual's spiritual experience. Johns C. Thomas explains its reason, "for it is within this context that one inherits the "full Gospel" as a way of life."³² The interpreter is formed by being part of the worshiping community which discerns/filters the activity of the Spirit in individual's life.

As an example, Peter's experience in Cornelius' house and his dining with the Gentile converts were questioned by a group when he returned to Jerusalem (Acts 11:1-3). The worshiping community heard from Peter and validated Peter's activity with their experience on the day of Pentecost and in the light of Lord's command (Acts 11:15-18). Similarly, Paul was accountable to explain his 'law-free gospel' to the Jerusalem church and they evaluated Paul's activities/interpretation with respect to their experience and Scriptural evidences (Acts 15:1-35). The worshiping community has the authority to discern what an individual interpreter does. Thus, the individual's Scriptural interpretation and worshipping community's authentication go hand in hand.

Church Growth

There is an intension behind every interpretation and so also the Pentecostals' interpretation. According to Craig S. Keener, "The method that one uses for interpretation depends on one's goal in interpretation."³³ Then what is the goal of Pentecostal hermeneutics?

The first goal is the edification of the church community. People have an intense desire to listen to the voice of God in their concrete situation. They want an answer or meaning of what they are going through. In such situation, Pentecostal interpreter makes the word of God translated into people's life

³² For Thomas, the full Gospel is fivefold proclamation: Jesus is savior, sanctifier, Holy Spirit baptizer, healer and soon coming King. Thomas, "Pentecostal Interpretation", 94.

³³ Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics*, 139.

situation in such a way that they feel God speaks to them. The goal of Pentecostal exposition is God's concern for people. God's concern includes both justice and love.

The second aspect is the mission of the church. The Spirit descended on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2) is to empower the community to witness (Acts 1:8). The Spirit experience of the community is ultimately to witness Christ among the people with whom we come in contact with. The church growth of the Pentecostal churches globally and locally witnesses this aspect.

Finally, revival is a concern of interpretation. Revival is the inner renewal of persons towards the likeness of Christ (cf. Rom 8:29). Pastors in their sermons neither focus much on the systematic doctrine of a subject, nor give a comprehensive theological development of a topic but selectively take a few Bible portions to bring revival in their community. Any typical Pentecostal pastor in India would say preaching the Word brings revival. The manifestation of revival includes renewed spiritual interest, reading of the scripture, spending time in prayer and meditation, and regular church attendance.

Non-Duality

Pentecostals oppose the categorisation into physical and spiritual. The integrated view of human person in Pentecostal theology is closer to the Hebrew way of thinking.³⁴ The Pentecostal affirmation of materiality is intimately linked with an understanding of the human person as embodied spirit. James Smith says, "For Pentecostals, while we are more than our bodies, we are also never less than our bodies."³⁵ Pentecostal worship involves body, soul, and spirit. Singing with outstretched arms, dancing, waving hands, laying hands on sick, etc., are common activities in worship. In these

³⁴ J. K. Chamblin, "Psychology," *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters* (Illinois: IVP, 1993), 767.

³⁵ Smith, "Thinking in Tongues,"

activities, the underlying assumption is that God's Spirit is active through material phenomena. Similarly, both men and women are allowed to interpret God's word and participate in ministry. God's Spirit works within the fragility and sinfulness of creation. And therefore, the interpretation of the scripture in Pentecostal churches is to take care of both physicality and spirituality of human person.

Eschatological Reversal

Eschatology gets its impetus from redemption, stemming from a distrust of this world and a longing for the future overthrow of the present order.³⁶ Eschatological reversal means the reversal of social and spiritual status, identity concept, and expectations in the last days because of the coming of Christ and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Eschatological reversal is understood within the understanding of the Church as an eschatological entity. For example, the infancy narratives in the Gospel of Luke give special emphasis to the eschatological reversal (cf. Luke 1:46-56).

The restoration of the gifts of the Spirit (*latter rain*) commonly in the early part of twentieth-century is again reiterated the eschatological character of the Church and the imminent return of Christ. Pentecostal hermeneutics emphasize the eschatological character of God's Kingdom. Keener observes that Pentecostal reading is unquestionably eschatological.³⁷ Pentecostal interpretations always have an edge on the marginalized community and their transformation.

Conclusion

Pentecostals approach the Bible not just as an ancient text but as the Christian Scripture inspired by the Holy Spirit as the guide for our redemption. Deciphering the voice of the

³⁶ Dan G. McCartney, *James*, Baker Exegetical Commentary on the New Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academics, 2009), 288.

³⁷ Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics*, 21

Spirit along with the consideration of textuality of the Scripture is the authentic way of interpretation. The life of interpreter is an important element in the process of interpretation. Therefore, Pentecostal interpretation of Scripture is not a mere intellectual exercise rather allowing the readers to get rooted in God's word and active participants of mission. Theologically trained and Spirit filled peoples' interpretation along with the attestation of worshiping community can avoid possible errors in Pentecostal hermeneutic.

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- Anderson, Allan *An Introduction to Pentecostalism: Global Charismatic Christianity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 14; Ogbu Kalu, *African Pentecostalism: An Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).
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