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Erratum
Factual errors were amended on pages 9-10 concerning Oral Roberts' visits to Korea.
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In Celebration of the Life
of
Lillian J. Breckenridge, PhD

October 19, 1941—March 24, 2018

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As I was pulling into campus one recent morning, mulling over the tasks that lay before me for the day, the late Michael Jackson’s song “Man in the Mirror” was blasting through the speakers of my truck radio. The song had a beat that made Michael Jackson famous, but it was the words that caught my attention at that moment. The lyrics are of a more introspective nature than is typically associated with this artist. In them, the singer urges himself to look into the mirror, to take an assessment of himself, and to make a change in himself if he wishes to make the world a better place. It was only later in the day that I would see how this musical episode in the cab of my pickup would impinge on the current issue of *Spiritus*.

That afternoon, I began the task of reading through the accepted submissions for this issue, performing the laborious task of the initial copyedit, when a pattern began to emerge. If what has come to be called “Pentecostalism” got its formal start with the revival at Azusa, that means it is currently a bit more than a decade into its second century. This is clearly more than enough time to discern trajectories within the movement, to assess its current state, and to project its future. As I perused the collection of articles published in this issue, it became apparent that virtually all of them undertake to look at where Pentecostalism has been and where it is going, to call Pentecostals to “look in the mirror,” to adapt Mr. Jackson’s language, to perform an inventory of the present in light of the past in order to shape the future.

In many ways, this issue took shape around an event that happened on the ORU campus in March 2018. Craig S. Keener gave a presentation to the university community on what he termed “Spirit hermeneutics,” drawing on his recent volume of the same name. In his talk, he placed his approach to hermeneutics directly into the ongoing quest of many Pentecostal scholars to develop a distinctive Pentecostal hermeneutic. Keener’s approach, while sharing many of the
concerns of those Pentecostal thinkers, does not explicitly align itself with those Pentecostals who seem to desire a hermeneutical approach that emphasizes that which makes Pentecostals distinctive as opposed to that which they share in common with other Christian believers. After his lengthy presentation that day, two ORU theology professors, Arden Autry and I, gave brief responses to Keener’s paper. Afterward, I approach Professor Keener and asked if he would consider publishing his talk in *Spiritus*. He graciously accepted and even secured permissions to allow its publication in these pages! After consulting with the newly-announced dean of ORU’s College of Theology and Ministry, Wonsuk Ma, we decided to publish Keener’s paper along with the responses given that day. Moreover, Ma suggested enlisting a student present at the lecture to provide a response for the journal. So I recruited Pamela Idriss, a recent Master of Arts graduate, to write a response from a student’s perspective. These four pieces are the heart of the issue and constitute a long look into the mirror in terms of hermeneutics in the Spirit-empowered movement.

The issue opens with a study by Younghoon Lee, who teases out connections between the ministries of Korean pastor Yonggi Cho and Oral Roberts. Coming on the heels of the previous issue, which was entirely dedicated to Oral Roberts on the centennial anniversary of his birth, this study enhances our understanding not only of the influence of Roberts on Cho, but also of Cho’s influence on Roberts. Here *Spiritus* continues its commitment to further our understanding of the place of Oral Roberts in Christian history.

If Keener’s study is a consideration of hermeneutical methods in the Spirit-empowered movement, Andrew Williams’ study on the place of water baptism in Pentecostalism provides an impetus for a (re)consideration of the rite in Pentecostal thought and practice. Williams is here following in the model of his doctoral supervisor, Chris E. W. Green, whose own work on the Lord’s Supper in Pentecostalism is fueling liturgical imagination among congregations today in light of Eucharistic practice among early Pentecostals. Williams provides a “bibliographical evaluation” of the practice of water baptism in Pentecostal history, with an eye toward its place in the future piety of Pentecostal believers, particularly in terms of the historical (both
Pentecostal and early Christian) connection between water and Spirit baptism.

The studies by Mathew Clark and David Hebert, in terms of their subject matters, are quite different from each other. Clark provides a detailed historical study that compares the founding ethos and ecclesiology of early sixteenth-century South German Anabaptists to that of early twentieth-century Pentecostalism, finding several resonances between the two movements in their respective early formations. Clark identifies the following elements of these Anabaptists as present among early Pentecostals: “a radically consistent application of *sola scriptura*, a rejection of the state-church synthesis, a revisioning of sacramental belief and practice that subverts the clergy-laity divide, commitment to the teachings of Jesus as the primary and central guide to discipleship, a sacrificial pilgrim mentality of ‘just passing through this world,’ individual choice and responsibility to follow Jesus, confident personal witness to the goodness and salvation of the Lord, and some level of demonstration of the charismatic gifts.” Entering into its second century, modern popular Pentecostalism, primarily in the West, according to Clark, is diverging from these early features in such a way as to imperil its continuation and its authenticity in relation to its early core beliefs and practices. Clark’s piece is a clarion call for Pentecostalism to reclaim these elements of its early heritage as it goes forth into the future.

Hebert’s study, distilled from his doctoral thesis completed at the University of South Africa in 2009, takes its point of departure from a visionary experience Oral Roberts reported in August 2004 concerning the imminent return of Jesus Christ. Roberts’ vision functions prophetically, in Hebert’s view, to urge contemporary Christians to recall a theme prevalent in historic Christianity and earlier Pentecostal/Charismatic tradition, termed by Hebert the “Perfect and Complete Gospel of Both Comings of Jesus Christ.” Hebert traces historically both the presence of this emphasis throughout Christian, particularly Pentecostal, history and its eventual decline in contemporary proclamation of the gospel. The framework within which Hebert argues for reclamation of this emphasis is unashamedly the dispensationalism of much early and present popular Pentecostalism. Though the
substance of Clark’s and Hebert’s articles is significantly different, the tenor is quite similar: contemporary Pentecostalism must reclaim something of its history if it is to minister effectively in the future. It must gaze into the mirror and then turn to face the world without forgetting what it looks like (Jas 1:23–24).

Emmanuel Anim offers a brief study of the role that migration and population displacement play in the propagation of the faith. Drawing on examples primarily from African nations and churches, Anim demonstrates that refugee crises and population movements are often significant channels for spreading the Christian faith in the African diaspora. This phenomenon is well attested both biblically and historically, and in light of global tensions surrounding issues of immigration policy, it presents a challenge for Pentecostals living both in nations producing refugees and nations having to deal with the influx of immigrants.

This collection of studies forces Pentecostals to ask themselves some probing questions. How do they fit into the flow of Christian history? How do they navigate between the quest for their own distinctiveness and their calling to be a renewing presence in the global church? Are they especially indebted to the earliest days of the Pentecostal revival as they seek a way forward into the future? These questions and more drive Pentecostals to the mirror, to look at themselves as they are, to remember what they once were, and to decide how then to move into the future. Maybe the once-crowned King of Pop has given Pentecostals a nudge in the right direction.

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**Oral Roberts and David Yonggi Cho: A Life-long Relationship in Theology and Ministry**

Younghoon Lee

**Key Words:** Oral Roberts, David Yonggi Cho, Korean Pentecostalism, Th eefold Blessing, 3 John 2

**Abstract**

This article explores the relationship between Oral Roberts, American healing evangelist, and Dr. Yonggi Cho, the pastor of the world’s largest church in Seoul, South Korea. It points out how their similar stories of healings were used in their own healing ministries. It also traces the influence that Roberts’ theology of hope, prosperity, and healing had on the most influential figure in Korean Pentecostalism.

**Introduction**

In April 2006, the author had the opportunity to travel with Dr. Cho, my long-time mentor, to Los Angeles to participate in the Azusa Centenary Conference where Cho was set to be a plenary speaker. Included in his itinerary was a visit to his ailing friend Oral Roberts at his home in Newport Beach, California. On the way, Cho shared with me how Roberts had been a spiritual mentor whose books had a profound influence on him, especially in the formative years of his ministry. He told how his Th eefold Blessing was directly attributed to Roberts’ inspirational teaching of the seed-faith principle. He also described the core of Roberts’ theology.
in a phrase, “God is good!” This theological conviction encouraged Cho to emphasize the effect of verbal confession and positive thinking.

When we arrived at Roberts’ home, I witnessed a Christian giant of our day sitting on a rocking chair. Cho introduced me to Roberts and it was immediately apparent that their friendship was special with warm mutual respect and love. When we were about to leave, suddenly Cho bent and knelt before Roberts and requested a prayer with Roberts’ hands laid on him. I was shocked by this unbelievable scene where the leader of the largest church in the world knelt for prayer. (Another friend of ours, Elder Paul Kim, expressed the same shock.) Roberts laid his hands upon Cho and blessed him and asked for God’s intimate presence and favor to rest upon him. He did the same for me and prayed for God’s blessing to preach the good news all over the world with God’s healing power. This was indeed the last time Cho was with Oral Roberts before Roberts’ death in 2009.

This study seeks to juxtapose the lives of Oral Roberts and David Yonggi Cho, trace the development of their mutual friendship, offer a theological analysis of the two, and explore Roberts’ influence on the shaping of Cho’s theology from the perspective of someone who is his close associate. Born into a fourth-generation Presbyterian family, I moved with my family to a new home next to Full Gospel Church in Seodaemun, where my grandfather began attending the daily dawn prayer meetings and was deeply impressed by the spiritual atmosphere of the church. In April 1964, I started attending and was baptized in the Holy Spirit in February 1966 through Cho’s ministry. For over fifty-five years I have been influenced by Cho’s life and ministry and he has shaped my own theology, particularly regarding the baptism in the Holy Spirit, the life full of the Spirit, the Threefold Blessing based on Christ’s redemptive work, and consequential faith of absolute hope. Along this journey of ministering in various responsibilities at Yoido Full Gospel Church, I have discovered the profound impact Roberts had on my mentor. This legacy led me to read Oral Roberts’ books for myself. Today, after fifty-five years of ministry under Cho, I have inherited his mantle as the senior pastor of Yoido Full Gospel Church and the legacy of Cho and Roberts continues to shape my theology and ministry.
Two Life Stories

Through his healing ministry, Oral Roberts was influential in spreading the Pentecostal movement into historical churches across all continents, including Korea where Roberts’ theology influenced Rev. Yonggi Cho, the founder and senior pastor emeritus of the Yoido Full Gospel Church in Seoul, South Korea, the largest Christian congregation in the world. During the mid-twentieth century both Roberts and Cho became great leaders of the global Pentecostal movement. This article will explore the relationship between Roberts and Cho and the theologies they shared in different contexts within the globalization of Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity.

Although they differed in religious and social contexts, Roberts and Cho shared a common story that influenced their ministries. While in their teenage years, both Roberts and Cho suffered severely from tuberculosis, but had miraculous healing experiences. Oral Roberts was born on January 24, 1918, in Pontotoc County, Oklahoma, the fifth and last child of Ellis Melvin Roberts, a Pentecostal Holiness pastor, and Claudius Priscilla Roberts, of Cherokee Indian descent. His parents, who wanted their last-born to be a competent preacher in the future, named him Oral, which means “spoken word.” Ironically, little Oral was a stutterer who could not even say his own name. During his early years, he hated being a preacher’s son and was defiant towards his father, who disciplined his children in a strict Christian way. Young Roberts’ struggles with his religious and cultural surroundings led him to rebuff his Christian values and beliefs. Instead, as a tall and athletic fifteen-year-old he joined the high school basketball team in search of athletic fame. At seventeen, however, Roberts collapsed on the floor in the middle of a high school basketball game, vomiting blood from his mouth. He was diagnosed as being in the final stages of tuberculosis and was given three to four months to live.

In July 1935, while bedridden and in the depths of absolute despair, his sister Jewel visited him and prophesied, “Oral, God is going to heal you.” He firmly believed that God was calling him to preach the gospel and would heal him for this reason. At that time, a healing evangelist named George Moncey was conducting a revival meeting in the vicinity.
Roberts attended the meeting with the help of his family. When the time came for prayer for healing, Moncey encouraged Roberts that God had healed an Indian boy of tuberculosis the previous night. Moncey rebuked the sickness with these words: “You foul tormenting disease, I command you in the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, come out of this boy. Loose him and let him go free!” Roberts felt as if he had been struck by electricity and instantly he could breathe comfortably without coughing and spitting out blood. He joyfully jumped into the pulpit and ran here and there, shouting without stuttering, “I’m healed! I’m healed!” Roberts would eventually use his healing testimony as a vehicle to propel him to becoming the most notable name in the healing ministry in the twentieth century.

Yonggi Cho was born into the family of a rich farmer in Ulju County, South Gyeongsang nam-do, southeastern Korea, on February 24, 1936. He was the second of nine children of Ducheon Cho and Bokseon Kim, both of whom were devoted Buddhists. His father ran for the Second National Assembly election on May 30, 1950, as an independent candidate, but failed to win. Because of the election failure and the ongoing Korean War, the economic condition of the Cho family worsened and by his teens Yonggi Cho always worried about his meals.

One spring day, as a second-year high school student, Cho was spending his after-school hours playing on the horizontal bar in the gym. He hit his chest against the iron bar and fell off. Cho grew extremely ill and fell to the ground vomiting blood. He was diagnosed as being in the third stage of tuberculosis and was told by a doctor that he would live just three or so months. Diagnosed with terminal tuberculosis, the seventeen-year-old Cho was waiting hopelessly for death when one day a friend of his older sister visited and shared the gospel with him. She also gave him a Bible. Cho began to read the Bible and felt assured that if he accepted Jesus Christ as his Savior, Jesus would heal him of his tuberculosis. Then Cho repented of his sins in front of Jesus Christ and experienced a miraculous recovery from his terminal illness.

Despite their differences in age and global context, Oral Roberts and Yonggi Cho had very similar religious experiences. The experience of miraculous healing, in particular, influenced both Roberts and Cho to change their courses of life completely. After his miraculous
healing from tuberculosis and stuttering, Roberts, who had been very resistant towards Pentecostal belief and lifestyle, answered the call of God to preach and began his ministry under the guidance of his father in the summer of 1935. Similarly, Cho, who was born and raised in a Buddhist family and was indifferent to Christianity, came to accept Christ through his own experience of miraculous healing. Cho then determined to become a pastor and preach the gospel, and so enrolled at the newly-founded Full Gospel Theological Seminary in Korea.

When Cho first encountered Oral Roberts’ teaching in 1961, it changed his life and ministry. As a young minister in 1958, Cho opened a tent church in a slum on the outskirts of Seoul. But after a year of preaching, Cho was frustrated because the church was not growing as much as he expected. Cho’s passion and ambition for the gospel was frustrated in the face of his pastoral challenges. The problem was his messages primarily focused on hell and sin and were not proving effective with his audience who were primarily among the poor. As Cho talked about hell, they would respond, “I am not afraid of hell because the place where I now live is hell.” Then in 1961, Cho was assigned to be the translator for Samuel J. Todd, an American Assemblies of God missionary, who came to Korea to do a healing crusade. Todd’s methods and message of healing were modeled around Oral Roberts’ ministry. Todd shared with Cho several of Roberts’ sermons and the book *The Fourth Man*. The principles he learned from Roberts altered his Pentecostal theology and transformed his message from the negative to the positive aspects of the gospel. Many of these principles of the goodness of God and blessings would eventually be instrumental in helping him build the largest church in the world.

Cho’s success in church growth began to be recognized by Pentecostals and Charismatics in the US in the 1980s. After years of admiration from afar, Cho and Roberts began to spend time together at Charismatic conferences in which they were both invited as speakers. When Oral Roberts began an independent ministerial alliance called the International Charismatic Bible Ministries in 1986, Cho was invited to serve as the “honorary international chairman.” Oral Roberts made two visits to minister in Korea by Cho’s invitation. The first was in 1986. He visited with Robert Schuller and went to Japan after his ministry at Yoido Full
Gospel Church. Then in 1989, he returned to Korea and spoke at a large gathering of Cho’s at the Olympic Stadium. The newfound friendship between Roberts and Cho also led to the mutual theological enrichment of Yoido Church and ORU. Cho also visited Oral Roberts University.

Roberts’ Theological Influence on Cho

Cho attributes his success as a minister in Korea in large part to Oral Roberts’ influence on his life. Cho comments, “While I was reading Oral Roberts’ book, my whole theology changed and I began to have a very optimistic, positive attitude . . . . Whenever I’d pray, I’d begin to believe Something Good is Going to Happen.” Conversely, Roberts mentioned that he had learned many things from Cho, particularly in the areas of growth and leadership. He commented, “Perhaps the greatest is that I have to become ‘PREGNANT’ with an idea from God before I can bring it forth to bless mankind.” While much of Cho’s Pentecostal theology did not necessarily originate with Roberts, some of his best known theological concepts originated from reading works by Roberts. He even wrote several books similar to Roberts in Jesus Carrying Diseases, Threefold Salvation, and Seed of Faith. This section will explore three concepts in Oral Roberts’ theology that significantly shaped Cho’s theology.

God Is a Good God

The first concept that influenced Cho was Roberts’ teaching on 3 John 2. In 1947, Oral Roberts was deeply touched while meditating on 3 John 2 in which he discovered the truth that “His highest wish is for us to prosper and have health in both soul and body.” This verse convinced him that God was a good God who is interested in blessing his people, not just spiritually, but who wants believers to have a life of fullness, physical healing, and material blessing. This message of “a good God” became the central theme of Roberts’ healing and evangelistic ministry, and he preached the message of hope and prosperity. The teaching of “a good God” not only reflects God’s tolerance and mercy, but it also leads believers to expect blessings from God. He asserts that
God, who sacrificed his Son on the cross for his people, cannot be a cruel or fearsome God, but is a good God. Because God is good, he wants his people to experience a prosperous life and enjoy good health in God.

Since both Roberts and Cho were born into impoverished families, the realization that God’s blessing transcended the spiritual to the physical and material was completely transformative. Roberts’ youth was far from easy, being the son of a poor Pentecostal pastor and suffering from pulmonary tuberculosis at the age of seventeen. But, his healing enabled him to realize that God cared about the physical needs of people. Similarly, Cho also knew the pain of poverty and sickness. In the late 1950s—when Cho started his ministry in a slum area of Seoul—Korean society was undergoing despair and poverty in the aftermath of the Korean War. People who lived nearby Cho’s church had a hell-like existence caused by poverty, disease, alcoholism, and domestic violence. People who were living in such extreme conditions were hardly interested in the gospel preached by Cho, and the atmosphere, which was unfavorable to evangelism, drove him to a state of despair and skepticism.

Roberts’ positive message of blessing and abundant life helped Cho realize that he needed to change the way he ministered to the needs of people. Instead of emphasizing salvation as a way to escape eternal hell, Cho began to emphasize how God could help save people here and now. Cho incorporated both Roberts’ thoughts about “a good God” and his own message of hope and prosperity based on 3 John 2. Cho acknowledged, “Interpreting the whole Bible through this verse, I came to understand that God reveals Himself as a living and doing God, who is not only for the past and the future but also for the present.”

This more positive message eventually became the core of Cho’s preaching and ministry in what he developed as the “Threefold Blessing.” He asserted that God, who sacrificed his Son for his people on the cross, cannot be a cruel or fearsome God. Because sin entered the world and affected the spirit, body, and environment, Jesus’ redemptive work on the cross became a foundation of being blessed by Christ. He said, “through the blood of Jesus Christ, we have received the blessing of the threefold redemption in place of the threefold
Because salvation was spiritual, circumstantial, and physical, spiritual problems needed to be solved first before one can receive the blessings of health and prosperity.

The Concept of Blessing

The second concept that Cho gained from Roberts is his understanding of blessing. Roberts’ concept of God as a good God was accompanied by the conviction that God’s goodness was the basis by which a believer could have faith in God that he will provide for the believer’s needs. God is the God who responds with blessings to the earnest prayers of his people in poverty and in need. This message was important to Cho, whose message of the gospel seemed disconnected from the impoverished reality of those he was trying to reach in that small tent church in 1958. After the Korean War, the socioeconomic situation of South Korea was cause for nothing but despair. The war had collapsed almost all industrial bases in Korea and had desolated its farming land. Most Koreans suffered from extreme poverty and even starvation. Cho realized that all his preaching about sin and punishment and the gospel of heaven and hell were not effective for those who were living in such a hopeless situation. He felt that the God he preached was only a God of the future and was far from the lives of the suffering people. Cho realized that those who lived in the reality of despair are indifferent to a God who exists only in the Bible and/or who judges the sins of people after death. What Koreans needed at that time was not a philosophical and speculative theology, but the message that could give them strength and hope.

The message of the Threefold Blessing resonated deeply with the Korean people in their despair, sickness, and poverty and was the key factor that led to Cho’s phenomenal success. Cho reoriented his message to identify the needs of believers and to meet those needs. This message was highly effective because the Threefold Blessing answered the fundamental problems of people suffering from poverty and disease in the aftermath of the Korean War. Allan Anderson identifies Cho’s message of the Threefold Blessing as an example of the effectiveness of contextual theology. He argues that Cho communicated with people in a way that entered into human life through the living Word of God.
Cho was successful because he addressed the problems that Koreans faced, including salvation for the lost, material blessings for the poor, and healing for the sick.\textsuperscript{35}

**Understanding of Healing**

Oral Roberts was one of the most distinguished healing evangelists in the world. His message of healing spread around the world through tent crusades, magazines, television broadcasts, and publishing interests.\textsuperscript{36} Roberts claimed, “I owe my life, my all to healing. I never wanted to be saved until I found out I could be healed.”\textsuperscript{37} In saying this, Roberts attributed the origin and the foundation of his healing ministry to his own experience of divine healing.\textsuperscript{38} At the height of Roberts’ healing ministry, Cho was planting a small church in a poor village on the outskirts of Seoul, along with Jashil Choi, his future mother-in-law, who had both recently graduated from seminary. At the opening service on May 18, 1958, Cho delivered his first sermon on healing, based on Mark 16:17, demonstrating how interested Cho was in the subject.\textsuperscript{39}

Three factors enhanced Cho’s strong belief in healing miracles: his theological education at a Pentecostal Bible college, his personal healing experience, and his exposure to signs and wonders at the revival meetings in Seoul in October 1957, led by Harold Herman, where Cho participated as an interpreter.\textsuperscript{40} Cho became focused on healing ministry because he recognized the only effective remedy for the poor who could not afford to see the doctor was to pray to God to heal their diseases. As the news that people were being healed in his meetings spread around the village, the number of people who attended the church increased. The congregation was still not vibrant, however. Cho still felt sluggishness in ministry when he encountered Roberts’ sermons and books.\textsuperscript{41} In time, Roberts’ teaching helped Cho build and develop his own theology of the Threefold Blessing, Fivefold Gospel, and Fourth Dimensional Spirituality, which is acknowledged as a unique theological system of Korean Pentecostalism, and carried out a holistic healing ministry that included spiritual salvation, physical healing, and material blessing.

The difference between Cho’s view and Roberts’ was that where Roberts emphasized healing as the natural outflow of the goodness
of God, Cho emphasized the direct connection between healing and the atonement of Jesus Christ on the basis of Isaiah 53:4–6. Cho understood healing as having more to do with Christ’s suffering than his atonement. Drawing on Isaiah 53:5, Cho emphasized the suffering of Jesus as the means by which he relates to and alleviates the suffering of humanity from sickness and disease. Rooting healing in the atonement, Cho also connected disease to sin because disease and death entered the world after the fall of humanity. For this reason, Cho insisted that healing requires a process of repentance. Therefore, Cho emphasized confession of sin, forgiveness of others, and holiness as necessary steps for receiving healing in addition to faith and trust in God.

**Conclusion**

This article has explored the significant impact Oral Roberts had upon Yonggi Cho’s theology and ministry. Although they differ slightly in the application of their theological understanding within their own contexts, the theological commonalities between Roberts and Cho are discernable in their shared view of God as a good God. They both had an experience of divine healing and this personal experience of healing shaped their ministries and distinguished themselves as healing evangelists. Their success in their relative contexts had a profound influence that crossed the oceans into each other’s context. Cho was able to contextualize Roberts’ theology of blessing and healing in a way that addressed Korea’s suffering from absolute poverty and despair in the aftermath of the Korean War. Roberts was able to take Cho’s principles of vision and growth into America. The gospel of hope they shared has provided a Christian way of solving the various existential problems of those who face despair, illness, poverty, and death.

Younghoon Lee (nahyk80@gmail.com) serves as Senior Pastor of Yoido Full Gospel Church, Seoul, Korea, and General Superintendent of the Assemblies of God of Korea.
Notes
1 Jeff Oliver, *Pentecost to the Present: The Holy Spirit’s Enduring Work in the Church* (Newberry, FL: Bridge Logos, 2017), 142.
3 Oliver, *Pentecost to the Present*, 143–44.
40 “Korea, Revival or Holocaust?” *Pentecostal Evangel*, 1 June 1958, 10–11.
THE SPIRIT AND BIBLICAL INTERPRETATION

CRAIG S. KEENER

Key Words Spirit hermeneutics, Pentecostal hermeneutics, divine Author, illumination, cultural background, supervene, interpretive horizons, blending horizons

Abstract

We can hear more clearly what an author wishes to communicate when we understand what the author is addressing. In secondary communication—hearing what an author was saying to someone else—knowing the background of that conversation is important, especially if the culture differs from our own. But knowing the voice and spirit of the author is an important element of background, and with the Bible, we must consider an Author additional to, and working through, the human authors. It is important, insofar as possible, to study the ancient contexts that put the message in its cultural perspective. Yet it is no less important to hear the voice of the divine Author, and so “hear what the Spirit says to the churches” today.

Introduction

In this article, originally written for a presentation at Oral Roberts University College of Theology and Ministry, I am condensing material from my book Spirit Hermeneutics and some subsequent discussions. (Further documentation will be found there.) I am leaving out some other discussions treated in the book, such as biblical epistemology,
so as to focus here on two commonly discussed sides of Spirit hermeneutics. At the risk of suspense, I will preface my remarks by noting that I am a charismatic biblical scholar who fully affirms both sides of what I am addressing here.

My forty-hour course on biblical interpretation for seminarians starts with the literary context of the immediate passage and the entire book in which it appears, moves to the context of the inspired author’s style and word usage elsewhere, the biblical-theological context of how a passage draws on earlier biblical revelation, the linguistic context of how the words were used in the author’s setting, and the cultural-historical context that the author was addressing. As my background commentary exemplifies, my personal scholarly focus has been providing the ancient Jewish, Greek, and Roman background for the New Testament to which most Bible readers otherwise lack access. After introducing these elementary principles I turn to special hermeneutics—that is, attention to the particular genres in the Bible.

More concisely here, I shall simply rehearse at the outset my reasons for emphasizing ancient meaning, that is, for trying to hear the message as it is apparently designed to communicate between the ancient author and audience. I will return to this subject at the end when addressing the dangers of neglecting “original” meaning. Between these discussions, however, I will emphasize at fuller length an aspect of interpretation that typically receives much less emphasis in academic settings.

We should consider not only the ancient context of the original message, but also “hear what the Spirit says to the churches” today. I shall not make an argument here for Scripture’s inspiration, a sometimes controversial point on which I might elaborate in the future; for the sake of time constraints I shall simply accept that belief, shared by most Christians through history, as an axiom that most of us here also share.

Reading in Light of the Ancient Contexts

I do concede that God, being sovereign, may speak through Scripture out of context—but I also would contend that this is not the canonical meaning that we have the right to teach others on the authority of
Scripture. God can speak through anything noncanonical he cares to, even Balaam’s donkey or preachers like me. When I was a new Christian convert eager to abandon my homework, which was translating Caesar’s *Gallic War*, in favor of exclusively reading my Bible, I flipped open the Bible and stuck my finger down. I expected it to declare, “Forsake all and follow me.” Instead, to my grave disappointment, it urged, “Render to Caesar what is Caesar’s” (Luke 20:25). I acquiesced and did my homework. But what if I had gone around to churches proclaiming, “God showed me in the Bible that you are all supposed to translate Caesar”? That is simply not the contextual, canonical meaning of the text, the universal basis for all our other appeals to how its authority applies to our diverse situations.

Because God knows the future, Scripture may indeed contain revelation the full import of which is not always evident to interpreters until after the fact—such as pre-Christian readers envisioning Christ coming twice. Yet it would be precarious to make that expectation for a fuller meaning a normative principle for interpretation, especially when we have not already witnessed a fulfillment. If the explanation of not-yet-fulfilled dimensions is in the hands of simply anyone who claims to speak for the Spirit, we return to subjective claims without a canon to anchor us. God can outline new insights related to older promises (e.g., Dan 9:2, 21–27), but they should be consistent with his message, come from trustworthy agents, and should pan out. Most modern “prophecy teachers” have a very poor track record of their interpretations panning out, and they have to recycle interpretations of passages as news headlines change.

When our reuse of biblical language is not consistent with its original point, we owe our hearers the courtesy of letting them know that we are speaking on, at best, the authority of our own experience of the Spirit, not on the authority of Scripture itself. In so doing, we acknowledge that our own finite hearing remains subject to correction if it diverges from the already-tested canon of Scripture. The very point of having a canon warns that we dare not place personal revelation about Scripture, or even a particular group’s claim to revelation about Scripture, above Scripture itself. To do so no longer allows the revelation that we all share to arbitrate other claims to revelation, and leads to the
interpretive and consequently theological chaos that characterizes much of popular Christianity today. We need to be ready to speak correctively to such abuses, to the extent that God gives us a hearing among those willing to listen.

Apart from extraordinary revelations, a full-orbed hermeneutic invites us to take into account the ancient as well as modern contexts. Trying our best to hear the original meaning may be out of fashion in some contemporary hermeneutics, but I believe that it still matters, since that is what we as Christians with a shared canon can be absolutely confident that the Holy Spirit originally inspired. It is important to have that canonical authority over us, especially as we dialogue, about what is true, with members of other interpretive communities, whether Christian or (as in the case of Jehovah’s Witnesses or Mormons) marginal ones.

Certainly not everyone is called to research the ancient milieu firsthand; specialists can provide this background and other teachers can draw from it as needed. Yet readers who have it available should take account of it when needed, and I believe that sometimes, as when even many scholars oppose women in ministry, they often do not know the background well enough to recognize their need for it.

That the Bible comes to us in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek and much of it, such as its history and many letters, recounts or addresses particular historical situations, shows that God is practical, caring about real people in concrete situations. That God gave us the Bible in this form means that we need to attend to the particular shape in which God inspired these documents, shaped to address those concrete realities. The Spirit who speaks to us in Scripture will speak a message consistent with the message that the Spirit originally inspired.

Scripture is more than text, but God did provide it in textual form, which invites us to engage it in part textually. It is more than its constituent genres, but inspired ancient biographies and ancient letters, for example, are still ancient biographies and ancient letters. That is why Paul first names himself and then his audience, in contrast to modern letters. Scripture’s message is eternal, but it was communicated in ancient languages, written in ancient alphabets, uses ancient literary forms, and often refers to ancient events. The Holy Spirit inspired it in these forms.
Understanding these forms helps prevent them from being obstacles to us hearing these texts afresh; their very concreteness in one setting invites us to respond to them in concrete ways in other settings.

Just as we translate the language, we take into account the background it takes for granted. Just as the Word became flesh with a particular ethnicity in a particular time and place, identifying with all of us because we too are shaped in historical particularities, so the books of Scripture came to us shaped by their historical particularities so we will take seriously our own historical particularities. Thus we should value hearing the settings that shaped Scripture with its particularities as well as the multiplicity of settings in which we hear it afresh today.

Such study requires engaging the texts intellectually; Proverbs urges us to seek wisdom and knowledge, so long as they are founded on the fear of the Lord. Contrary to some church traditions and my own resistance as a young Christian, the Spirit is not limited to engaging the affective aspect of our personalities; God is at work in our intellects when we seek to understand a text. Scripture teaches that the Spirit works with and renews our minds (Rom 8:5–7; 12:2; 1 Cor 2:16; 14:15) as well as our spirits (Rom 8:16; 1 Cor 14:14).\(^8\)

Granted, we do not have access to the ancient human authors’ minds.\(^9\) But the text, together with some knowledge of the cultural setting, often allows us to infer to some degree the sorts of issues the text was designed to address. I could use a hammer as a weapon—if I were not pretty much a pacifist—but the shape of my hammer suggests that it was especially designed for pounding (and removing) nails. If I take a biblical warning meant to scare sinners into repentance, and use it to squeeze tithes out of impoverished seminarians, I may not be employing a passage in the sense for which it was designed. If I take Paul’s praise of love outlasting tongues to mean that tongues passed away when the Apostle John died, I am not using the text in the sense for which it was designed.

Further granted, our reconstructions of background vary in degrees of probability and still leave lacunae in our knowledge. The point is not that our background knowledge will be perfect but that we should do the best we can, which is usually considerably better than what we do if we do not try. The text itself, in its literary context, gives us much of what we
need, with available backgrounds supplementing and often confirming. My point is that literary and historical context can help us understand why the text is shaped the particular way that it is, and thus draw from it the sort of inferences consistent with, rather than inconsistent with, its original design. Certainly I do agree that we recontextualize its message as we hear Scripture afresh in a range of contexts; I initiated and coedited a book of global readings. Still, the original context is the foundational context that shaped the texts whose message we seek to recontextualize.

Hearing it helps protect us from the dangers of overcontextualized interpretations. All the slaveholder theologians I have read proof-texted the Bible on slavery without regard for literary and historical context—in contrast to all the abolitionist theologians I have read, who took these things into account. (I treat this material more extensively elsewhere.) More deliberate was the Aryan contextualization supported by Nazi-aligned churches, which tried to supplant the Jewishness of the Jesus who came in the flesh in a very real and different historical context.

Normal textual principles for interpretation remain relevant to Scripture because God inspired the Bible textually, in literary form. All these principles are relevant for texts in general, and most of the genres in the Bible are genres that also existed, in at least a fairly close form, in the biblical world outside the Bible. And I personally regularly find that the Spirit helps me in using such context. I do not find spiritual life in ancient background, but I often find the Spirit using that background in helping me hear the text more clearly.

Some today criticize any appeal to ancient context as “modernist”—despite many thinkers through most of history, including Chrysostom and many Reformers, deeming it merely common sense. I see it as common courtesy: normally we try to understand what someone is trying to communicate to us. If understanding it is crucial to us, we will even learn the language and context of the communicator, or will depend on resources (such as translation and background information) that help us.

Taking seriously the fact that God repeatedly chose to inspire human authors requires us to take seriously the human dimensions of the text—the linguistic and cultural matrices in which the text
is encoded. Such authors sought to communicate, and if we are truly interested in God’s word the way he gave it through these authors, we will seek to hear what they sought to communicate. Even deconstructionists apparently want readers to understand something of their point, and the ancient authors were hardly deconstructionists.

**Hearing the Other Author**

As Christians, however, we also believe in another level of authorship, through the inspiration of the Spirit (2 Tim 3:16). Knowing this Author’s context also matters, inviting us to consider the wider canonical, theological context, and what we know of the Author through our personal and corporate relationship with him. Academics typically screen out this level when discussing texts in an academic forum that lacks consensus about divine activity. But as I have unfortunately learned from experience, methodological naturalism, if not kept in its place, can reshape our own personal approach to the biblical text, with disastrous spiritual consequences.

But when we listen and speak among ourselves as Christians, the divine context is the most important context of all! Without sufficient attention to literary and historical context, we run the risk of distorting what we think the Bible cumulatively teaches theologically. Without sufficient attention to the divine authorial context, however, we risk neglecting the very response that the biblical message invites from us.

One reason that I agreed to write this book was to affirm personal hearing of the Spirit in the biblical text, because some leading colleagues in promoting Bible background have argued against this, and I wanted to be clear that the ancient meaning is not the only thing the Spirit is speaking. At the same time, the Bible is not only about us: it is about God’s purposes in history. All the Bible is relevant for something; we need to study it in context so we can understand what is relevant for what purpose.

Even though God inspired the Bible in textual form, it is not just any text. For us as Christians, it is God’s Word, and it not only spoke in the past but continues to communicate to us God’s message. When I read a work by a friend or mentor I know, such as Gordon Fee, E. P.
Sanders, or Michael Brown, I hear it in their voice. For example, as I
read Gordon’s commentaries, I know when his voice would be rising
because Gordon is preaching this point with conviction. I know when
Ed Sanders pauses for his audience to chuckle. I know when Michael
Brown is underlining a point rhetorically yet ironymically.

When we read the Bible, there is a sense in which we can get to
know many of its authors, such as Paul or John. But because the Bible
is inspired by God, there is a sense in which we can, most importantly,
learn to hear the Author who speaks through these various human
authors in various ways. As we grow to know God’s voice better in
Scripture, we recognize his voice and understand better what he is
saying, and the heart with which he is saying it—because we know that
God is consistent with his character revealed throughout Scripture. This
also keeps us on track in recognizing the voice of God as he speaks in
our lives in other ways.

A Spirit hermeneutic is a thus relational hermeneutic: we know
the God of the Bible and therefore read the Bible from a vantage point
of trust in him. This should not be confused with the way readers
sometimes approach the Bible on a popular level in the name of being spontaneous. If I hear my wife speaking, I can admire her wisdom and
sensitivity even when she is speaking with someone else. But I would
not ignore the context of her speaking. If a dog is chasing her and she
says, “Go away!” I do not take that as a message to myself; that would
be an utter distortion of relationship and trust. In the same way, a
genuine Spirit hermeneutic will be sensitive to the original context in
which God inspired his message in the biblical text.

The Spirit comforts and instructs us through Scripture, as taught in
Romans 15:4 and 1 Corinthians 10:11. This applies not only to when we
are reading Scripture but also to when the Spirit recalls Scripture to us
regularly in our daily lives. Hearing the Spirit through prayer15 and hearing
in Scripture are complementary and often overlapping, but I do insist that
before we tell others that the Bible says something, thus speaking on its
canonical authority, it needs to be consonant with the overall message that
the Spirit already inspired there. God’s Word is not limited to Scripture,
but most Christians recognize that Scripture as tested canon retains a
special role as God’s Word for evaluating all other revelation.
Reading with Faith

We read from diverse cultural starting points, but one special vantage point is uniquely Christian: the vantage point of faith in the living God. Reading the biblical narrative with faith means reading its message as true. The God of the Bible is our God; the Jesus of the Gospels is our risen Lord; the sorts of angels and demons that inhabit the New Testament exist in our world (even if Western interpreters do not recognize it); and the Bible’s verdict on human moral failure is what we see reflected around us continually.

Many ordinary readers of the Bible, recognizing it as God’s Word, intuitively expect to hear God’s voice there. Such expectancy is a sign of faith. Often readers do not know how to approach the text as a text, but God meets them in their study because they have faith. Sometimes they go amiss, because faith is effective only when it has the right object—in this case, what God has actually said. But as academicians we sometimes go to the other extreme. Influenced by the Enlightenment, sometimes our institutions may teach interpretive techniques mechanistically, as if an academic reading were enough. Even after we have finished our contextual study, however, we still need to approach the text in faith, embracing its message for us today.

Chrysostom, Luther, and Calvin all approached the text grammatically and historically, but they also all emphasized our need for faith and the Spirit’s illumination. While taking seriously the human authors of Scripture, Luther insisted that God’s Spirit is present and active in a special way there. “Experience is necessary,” Luther insisted, “for the understanding of the Word,” which must “be believed and felt.” Fifth-century Benedictines developed the meditative approach lectio divina. From church fathers to Pietists, from Reformed to Holiness and Pentecostal Christians, listening to the Spirit’s voice in the text has long been part of devotional practice. It is certainly not a new discovery.

Reading from a standpoint of spiritual experience also helps us hear Scripture; it provides a sort of spiritual context similar to canonical theological context and often ultimately more important for hearing the message than is even the ancient cultural context. Because I have
prophesied, I can resonate with the prophets to some degree; because I pray in tongues, passages about that experience are not foreign to me. Then again, I have to grapple harder to resonate with some other passages that describe experiences that I have not shared, such as visions or encounters with visible angels.

Imbibing the spirit of Scripture also stirs spiritual experience. For example, Psalms inspire in us a spirit of prayer, and reading the prophets the spirit of prophecy. I suspect that those who do not envision much judgment for today’s world could profit from spending a bit more time in the prophets.

**Letter and Spirit in 2 Corinthians 3**

We pay attention to grammar because it helps us to understand the message, but if we care only for textual grammar, we will miss the heart of God that the text is designed to communicate.

Jesus warned the religious elite of his day that they were meticulous about tithing yet neglected weightier matters such as justice; this was like straining a gnat from one’s drink while swallowing a camel, though the latter was more levitically impure (Matt 23:23–24).

In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul shows that his new covenant ministry is greater and more life-giving than the death-bringing old covenant ministry of Moses. The world might deem it less glorious, but that is because new covenant ministry involves especially inner transformation.

In Jeremiah 31, the promised new covenant will be written on the heart rather than on tablets of stone (Jer 31:31–34). In Ezekiel 36, the Spirit will enable God’s people to keep his laws, and give them hearts of flesh to replace their hearts of stone (36:26–27). In 2 Corinthians 3:3, Paul directly alludes to these two passages, even using an expression that in the Greek translation of the Old Testament appears only in this prophecy of Ezekiel. As Deuteronomy makes clear, God had always wanted his people to have a heart to keep his law (Deut 5:29), with circumcised hearts (10:16; 30:6).

As ministers of the new covenant, Paul explains, he and his colleagues are empowered not as ministers of the “letter” but as
ministers of the Spirit, and therefore of life (2 Cor 3:6). The “letter” probably refers to “the mere written details of the law”; Jewish teachers played even with matters of spelling. In antiquity, legal interpreters often distinguished between what we would call the “letter” (the codified written form) of the law and its intention. Paul, however, contrasts the letter not with mere intention, but with God’s own Spirit who inspired the law.

Paul says that just as his people could not withstand the law-connected glory on Moses’ face (2 Cor 3:13–14), their hearts remain veiled when the law continues to be read (3:14–15). Moses had to veil the glory when addressing Israel, but he took the veil away when he was before the Lord (3:16; Exod 34:33–35); he witnessed some of the Lord’s glory in Exodus 33–34. In 2 Corinthians 3:17, Paul compares the “Lord” who revealed himself to Moses in Exodus to the Spirit who reveals himself to Paul and his colleagues. The apostolic message of the new covenant is a message written on the hearts by the Spirit (3:3, 6).

What does this imply for our reading of Scripture? Paul goes on to say that the gospel remains veiled to those who are perishing (4:3), but that God has shone his glory in our hearts in Christ, who is God’s very image (4:4–6). As Moses was temporarily transformed by God’s glory in the context of God giving the law, so are we more permanently transformed by the greater glory of the new covenant, which works within. As Paul declares in 3:18, enjoying God’s image in Christ transforms our hearts to the same image, from one level of glory to another.

For us, no less than for Moses, the veil has been removed (2 Cor 3:14–18). When we read Scripture, we read to learn about the Lord and be transformed by him (2 Cor 3:18). We get to know Christ’s image and character in the Gospels and throughout Scripture.

For example, when Moses beheld part of God’s glory when God was giving his Word at Sinai, God made his goodness pass before Moses (Exod 33:19). God revealed to Moses his character as the God of grace and truth (Exod 34:6). Analogously, the Apostle John later writes about God’s Word becoming flesh, and that John and the other disciples saw Jesus’ glory (John 1:14). This glory, like that at Sinai, was full of grace and truth, but whereas Moses saw only part of God’s glory, in Jesus we see God’s heart revealed fully (John 1:18). And we see this glory most
fully in the ultimate expression of Jesus sharing our fleshly mortality (12:23–24); when Jesus died on the cross, God both executed his just wrath on our sin and gave the ultimate, sacrificial act of love. Here we see his heart, and seeing his heart makes us more like him.\textsuperscript{24}

**Implications for Hermeneutics**

The Spirit points to Christ and to God’s character as we read Scripture (see 2 Cor 3:15–18). The Spirit may draw from texts wider analogies, beyond the direct communication to the first audience, that are nevertheless consistent with the text and with the larger framework of the Spirit’s message in biblical theology. While background studies, grammar, and the like provide essential context for understanding Scripture, the Spirit provides us with the needed *spiritual* context for appropriating it as God’s word to us (1 Cor 2:11–13).\textsuperscript{25}

Grammar matters, but our ultimate interest is the Spirit’s message spoken through that grammar. Exegesis is essential as the foundation for correctly hearing the text’s message, but we dare not *stop* with exegetical observations. When we truly hear the Spirit’s message in the text, we commit to it. Exegesis in the usual sense focuses on the text’s original horizon; today some postmodern approaches focus only on the present horizons. Exclusive attention to a present horizon without attention to the original one leads to overwriting the original inspired meaning with an unrelated one from our own imagination,\textsuperscript{26} risking being like Jeremiah’s false prophets who speak visions from their own unregenerate hearts (Jer 23:16). Yet it is by hearing the Spirit’s inspired message in the text that we can communicate its points most accurately for hearers today.

Connecting the traditional two horizons, without obliterating either of them, is often considered the role of hermeneutics. The Spirit can guide us in exploring and researching both horizons, but we often recognize the Spirit’s activity especially in bridging the gap between them, in applying the principles of the text to our lives and communities.

A Spirit-led hermeneutic is not just making exegetical discoveries in our study and then going on our way, like someone who forgets their own image in a mirror (Jas 1:23–24). We do not just *read* Scripture to
be transformed: *we live our whole lives* in light of Scripture, and in light of what Scripture teaches us, so that we live our lives in light of the cross, in light of our Lord’s resurrection and exaltation over all creation, and in light of God’s presence with us by the Spirit.

**Spirit and Letter in Romans 7:5–6**

Paul depicts the immoral pagan mind in Romans 1, but in Romans 7:7–25 shows that even the law-informed mind fails God. Paul contrasts “the oldness of the letter” in 7:5 with new life in the Spirit in 7:6. The old way provided enough knowledge of right and wrong to limit sin; but in Christ, we have the Spirit who empowers us to live out the gift of righteousness God gives us in Christ. The Spirit is never mentioned in 7:7–25, but is mentioned in Romans 8 more than anywhere else in the Bible.

Paul is not rejecting the inspiration of the Old Testament or the nature of Scripture as something written. God once used a civil law to restrain sin in Israel; it is from God (Rom 7:14; 8:4), and we still may learn lessons from it (as Paul does; 1 Cor 9:9; 14:21). But righteousness comes from Christ, and his Spirit inscribes the heart of the law within us, so that we fulfill the real principles that the law was ultimately meant to point toward anyway (Rom 8:2–4; 13:8–10).

Paul is here correcting a way of approaching Scripture that, in light of Christ, can never again be thought adequate. Thus he says in 3:27 that boasting is excluded, not by the law as approached by works, but by the law as approached by faith. In 8:2 he announces that the law of the Spirit that brings life in Christ has freed us from the law that judges sin with death. In 9:32, Paul warns that Israel failed to achieve the law’s righteousness because they pursued it by works instead of by faith. In 10:5–10, Paul contrasts righteousness based on law with righteousness based on faith, showing from Deuteronomy 30 that the latter was always God’s intention for salvation.

Approaching Scripture for works involves priding ourselves on our rules, doctrines, or perhaps ethnicity; but in God’s presence no one has the right to boast. Approaching Scripture for faith means that reading Scripture always renews our trust in and dependence on God.
Accordingly, as we approach Scripture, it is appropriate for us to pray for understanding, humble, and obedient hearts (see e.g., Ps 119:18, 27, 34, 73, 125, 144, 169).

In Luke 24:45, it was the Lord himself who opened the mind of his disciples to understand the Scriptures; in 24:32 believers’ hearts burned in them as he explained Scripture. Let us pray for this!

A Spirit hermeneutic means that we embrace the message of the text and live it out, not just satisfy our intellectual curiosity or, still less, to boast about our knowledge (Rom 2:23). To those insistent on righteousness by keeping the law, Paul responds in Galatians 5:14 with Christ’s law of love. Using language evoking Old Testament passages that literally speak of “walking” or “going” in God’s commandments, Paul speaks in Galatians 5:16 of “walking” by the Spirit. Such walking is not aimless, for Paul equates it with being “led” by the Spirit in 5:18. In 5:25, he uses similar wording that probably means that we know where to walk by placing our feet where we find the footsteps of the Spirit. In 5:22–23, he insists that there is no law that prohibits the fruit of the Spirit; in 6:2, as we serve one another, we fulfill the law of Christ.

Thus, our understanding of the law is transformed. It may provide moral guidance, but it also reminds us of God’s activity in our own lives. We hide his word not merely on paper but in our hearts; it is God himself working within us who has not only accepted us in Christ but who also produces the moral fruit of his presence.

The Word of God for the People of God

Exegesis rightly and necessarily concerns what the biblical writers were saying first of all to their ancient audiences. But once we understand the texts in their context, we also read them to believe and embrace their message with our whole hearts, and to live accordingly.

Believers may start from various cultural assumptions, but we all can read Scripture as the people of God living in the promised messianic era. We live in the same sphere of spiritual and theological reality as the people in the Bible. We read the Bible as God’s people, addressed in Scripture because God gave it for us:
• Romans 15:4: “For whatever was written beforehand was written to teach us, so that through the endurance and the exhortation/encouragement provided by the Scriptures we should have hope”;

• 1 Corinthians 10:11: “These things happened to them to serve as examples, and they were written down to warn/instruct us, on whom the ends of the ages have come.”

Yes, “these things happened to them”—they are historical events. But they were recorded so that subsequent generations could learn from what happened to them, and especially for us as Christ’s followers, “on whom the ends of the ages have come.”

End-Time Readers

That is why we read:

• Hebrews 1:2: “in these last days, God has spoken to us by His Son”;

• Acts 2:17, on the day of Pentecost: “In the last days, says God, I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.”

If it was already the last days on the day of Pentecost, it can hardly be before-the-last-days now.

Peter’s announcement is consistent with the rest of the New Testament, where believers who share in the Holy Spirit have tasted the powers of the coming age (Heb 6:4–5). In Christ, Paul says, we already have the “firstfruits” (aparchē) of the Spirit (Rom 8:23), using a term that designated the actual beginning of the harvest. He also announces that we have the down payment (arrhabôn) of our future inheritance (2 Cor 1:22; 5:5; Eph 1:13–14), using a term often used in ancient business documents for the first installment of a promised payment. Human sight and hearing cannot anticipate what awaits us, he says, but God has revealed this to us by the Spirit (1 Cor 2:9–10).

We also read of hard times, mockers, and apostasy in “the last days” in 1 Timothy 4:1; 2 Timothy 3:1; and 2 Peter 3:3. The context
of each of these passages refers to the time in which people were then living. First John 2:18 warns, “You have heard that an antichrist is coming; even now many antichrists have come. This is how we know that it is an eschatological hour.”

A Spirit-led reading of Scripture will thus read Scripture from the vantage point of God’s eschatological activity already among us, “on whom,” Paul says, “the ends of the ages have come.” We thus live in the time of fulfillment, the time between the first and second comings of Christ. Jesus is already the firstfruits of the promised resurrection (1 Cor 15:20, 23); the coming king has already come the first time, so the kingdom has come like a mustard seed yet will flourish like a great tree (Mark 4:31–32).

That both Christians in New Testament times and Christians today live in the last days means that we, like they, are the eschatological people of God. We do not read the New Testament as belonging only to them, to a foreign dispensation, but as God’s Word for us today. This is what makes a specifically Christian, Spirit-sensitive reading different from merely a historic reading.

**A Continuationist Reading**

Acts 2:17–18 treats the Spirit’s prophetic empowerment of the church as a sign that “the last days” have arrived. God poured out the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and did not pour the Spirit back afterward! Joel’s prophecy about all God’s people being prophetically endowed belongs to today, to the same era as Joel’s prophecy about calling on the Lord to be saved or Ezekiel’s prophecy about God’s Spirit transforming our hearts.

My wife is from Congo in Africa; there three people who did not know each other prophesied to her at different times that she was someday going to marry a white man with a big ministry. When we got engaged but had not yet told others an acquaintance came to me and said, “I feel that God is saying that you have found the right person, and not to worry that you are from different cultures and continents.”

On the other hand, people often prophesy nonsense! That is why both prophecy (1 Cor 14:29; 1 Thess 5:19–22) and teaching must be
tested; Paul warns in 1 Corinthians 13:9 that in this age we both know and prophesy only in part.

Scripture itself does not distinguish between so-called supernatural and so-called natural gifts given by the Spirit. In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul emphasizes that we need all the gifts to function fully as one body, whether, for example, prophecy or teaching. Ideally, we want our bodies to be whole.

Some churches amputate particular kinds of members, and some other churches want just to collect and connect amputated members. It would be better for us to value and learn from all of one another’s gifts.

Paul’s praise of love in 1 Corinthians 13 corrects errors in the Corinthian church; Paul’s particular language about love not boasting or being arrogant addresses the very errors of Corinthian boasting and arrogance Paul reproves earlier in the letter. But the passage remains relevant today: boasting and arrogance still must be addressed today, whether in spiritual gifts, as in chapters 12–14, or in knowledge, as in 1 Corinthians 8.

Similarly, we continue to need partial gifts mentioned in the passage, such as prophecy, tongues, and knowledge (probably meaning teaching). Such gifts explicitly continue until we see Christ face to face and know as we are known, and therefore no longer need such partial gifts (1 Cor 13:8–12). In context, as most scholars today recognize, this completed time is when we see Christ face to face at his return. And so I believe that we should continue to obey Paul’s concluding exhortations to the section: “be eager to prophesy, and do not prohibit speaking in tongues; but let everything be done in the right way and in order” (14:39–40), probably speaking of the order he has prescribed for these gifts earlier in the chapter.

Continuing prophecy does not contradict or supplement the authority of Scripture. Although Scripture contains many prophecies, it never equates all prophecies with Scripture. The Old Testament historical books mention scores of prophets whose prophecies are not recorded in Scripture, and the New Testament presumes tens of thousands of prophecies in first-century church gatherings that are not recorded in Scripture. (If we estimate just two or three prophecies per week in just a hundred house churches by the time that John wrote the book of Revelation, there would have been roughly 850,000 of them.)
Nor is prophecy the genre of all Scripture, nor were all biblical authors said to be prophets or apostles.

God spoke through prophecy all through biblical history, so it would seem odd to expect the gift to stop, suddenly and without major, explicit biblical warning. In 1 Corinthians 14:3, genuine prophecy is meant to encourage or exhort in new situations, not to provide new doctrine; continuing prophecy no more adds to Scripture than does continuing teaching. Interestingly, it is the idea that prophecy ceases before Jesus’ return, which is nowhere clearly taught in Scripture, that is a postbiblical teaching.

By very definition, the canon by which we evaluate all other claims is closed; no one is writing Scripture now. We do not live in the generation or two right after Jesus, so none of us witnessed Jesus’ ministry or directly heard such witnesses, a criterion ancient Christians used for canonicity. We do not have to believe that apostles and prophets have ceased to believe that first-century apostles and prophets, or the immediate circle who knew Jesus in the flesh, have ceased.

Yet virtually all believers must agree that the Spirit continues to speak to us in some ways; in Romans 8:16, for example, God’s Spirit still bears witness with our spirits that we are God’s children. Theological continuationists are more consistent than cessationists, allowing for God’s more vocal ways of speaking to continue. And continuationists who embrace spiritual gifts and experiences with the Spirit in practice are more consistent than those who are merely continuationist in theory.

Patterns in Scripture

In 1 Corinthians 10:11, already noted, Paul cites the examples of the Old Testament; all Scripture is profitable for teaching (2 Tim 3:16). Paul uses Abram’s faith (Gen 15:6) as a model for believers (Rom 4:1–25). James uses the experiences of the prophets and Job as models for endurance (Jas 5:10–11). Ancient historians and biographers often plainly and explicitly tell us that they expected their readers to learn moral and ideological lessons from their true accounts.

Human examples in biblical narratives are often negative, but we can learn about God from all of Scripture. How we see God acting
in the world of the Bible can shape our understanding of how God
works. We should learn not only from what we consider key verses of
Scripture but also from patterns of how God works with his people in
Scripture. Being people of the Bible means that we embrace the biblical
worldview, a worldview in which God remains active in this world.
Expecting God to continue to act today in ways consistent with how
he acted in the Bible is closely related to what the Bible calls “faith.”
This does not mean that we can always predict what he will do, but we
can always be confident that he is working. We can even expect him to
surprise us, as God often surprised his people in the Bible.

As people of the end-time and people of the Bible, we should live
by faith in the recognition that what God did in the Bible he can do,
and in various times and places still does, today.

Reading with the Humble

Awakenings often start among the humble, the spiritual dimension
of Spirit hermeneutics thus cannot be the prerogative of the highly
educated. Scripture often indicates that God is near the broken but far
from the proud (Ps 138:6; Prov 3:34; Matt 23:12; Luke 14:11; 18:14;
Jas 4:6; 1 Pet 5:5). If God normally reveals himself especially to the
broken, why should he reveal himself differently (only to elites) among
those who read (or hear) the Bible?

Unfortunately, we scholars are sometimes proud of our knowledge;
knowledge does, as Paul warns in 1 Corinthians 8:1, tend to lead us to
overestimate our status. With few and usually private exceptions, it was
not the intellectual elite of Jesus’ day, but the lowly, who followed him.
“I praise you, Father,” Jesus prayed, “for you hid these matters from the
wise and intellectual and revealed them to little children” (Matt 11:25//
Luke 10:21). Only those who welcome the kingdom like a child will
enter it (Mark 10:15).

The humble read Scripture not simply to reinforce their knowledge,
but with faith—and often in a situation of desperation—to hear God
there. They read with dependence on God, trusting the Holy Spirit to
lead them. We who are scholars and leaders have much to offer them;
but we should also consider what their faith has to teach us.
God’s People as a Community of Interpretation?

In line with the frequent scholarly emphasis today on communities of interpretation, some emphasize the consensus of the Spirit-filled community. This is certainly part of the biblical safety net; in 1 Corinthians 14:29, after some prophesy, the other prophets are to evaluate the prophecies. Awareness of interpretive communities also helps us guard against prejudices that reflect a single interpretive location’s biases.

When I was moved by the Spirit to prophesy out loud to the entire cafeteria at my undergraduate Christian institution, I was very happy that afterwards someone came up to me and told me that God had told them to do the same thing, but they hesitated and then I did it. I would hate for that to have been just my imagination!

At the same time, I should also highlight some difficulties with the community criterion if used in isolation. If the community adopts an interpretation that diverges significantly from the message that God originally inspired, it lacks divine authority. Jeremiah had to stand virtually alone among the prophets of his day; most of the other prophets were prophesying peace when there was no peace (Jer 5:13, 31; 6:13; 14:13–15). Jeremiah had to call the community of his day back to God’s message (Jer 6:19; 9:13; 16:11; 26:4; 32:23; 44:10, 23); the community was wrong about the word of the Lord.

Happily, God ensured that, over the course of generations, the long-range communion of saints got it right: Jeremiah’s word came to pass, so it was his tested message, rather than the failed prophecies of his majority detractors, that made it into the Bible (2 Chr 36:12, 21–22; Ezra 1:1; Dan 9:2). Yet this observation suggests that the wisdom of the people of God is not always the best criterion for discernment in a given generation that might need it most. I mistrust the political proclivities of most born-again Christians in the United States right now, partly based on some dreams I have had; the hindsight of the next generation will likely be able to arbitrate the wisdom of competing political strategies more confidently than is possible at the moment.

While I certainly deem Spirit-led consensus valuable, as in Acts 15:28, consensus is often more elusive than we would prefer. Those
who claim charismatic experience range from the Way International, which denies Jesus’s deity, to Oneness Pentecostals, for whom Jesus is the Father, Son, and Spirit.

Among Trinitarians, they range from conservative U.S. evangelicals such as J. P. Moreland and Wayne Grudem, to British Anglicans such as Michael Green and N. T. Wright, to Lutherans such as Mark Allan Powell, Methodists such as Richard Hays and Ben Witherington, and Catholics such as Teresa Berger and Luke Timothy Johnson.

While we share a common respect for Scripture, we represent a range of interpretive methods and theological details. On most of the most important points, we Trinitarians all agree, but appeal to consensus, whether of Christians in general or those generally designated as renewalists, cannot resolve all questions. Simply designating one subgroup of Christians as the reliable community of interpretation without argument begs the question of how such a group should be identified, unless we tautologically pre-identify them as “the best interpreters.”

Dangers of Neglecting the Human Dimension of Scripture

I have tried to take seriously here both human and divine dimensions of Scripture and of reading it. Some scholars have recently criticized my emphasis on the importance of the ancient element in interpretation and my concerns about undue subjectivism in approaches that neglect it.

Here, then, I will elaborate and especially illustrate those concerns further. Obviously, one does not even need to be able to read to communicate the gospel (some argue that many or most of the first apostles, such as Peter, could not read, although they could dictate). For evangelism the basic gospel is sufficient, and apostolic servants of the gospel with signs and wonders are advancing it throughout the world today.

But as some of those very apostolic servants have expressed to me (and as the letters of the first apostles indicate they would have agreed), believers being conformed to Christ’s image eventually need more of the gospel’s implications that depend on the distinct gift of teaching Scripture. My annoyance is not with those who cannot read, but with those who have resources available yet neglect them (cf. Isa 29:11–12).
Most importantly, I believe that if we as scholars fail to challenge some popular errors that harm Christ’s body, we abdicate our responsibility as those called to be teachers.

Whatever else God might say, it will naturally not contradict what he has already spoken in Scripture; if believers are not equipped to evaluate other teachings from Scripture, what is the future of the churches? Theological liberalism as promulgated in secular universities where many of our young people study? Fundamentalist legalism for local traditions? Or the pop religion circulating in many Christian bookstores and on the internet? Or even the fusion of faith and partisan politics dominant in much Christian social media?

A popular approach in the West today is celebrating “whatever Scripture means to me,” if we appeal to Scripture at all. Such an approach usually cites a very selective repertoire of texts and usually without much regard for safeguards such as literary context, background, wider biblical theology, or even the wider Christian community.

Counterbiblical teachings are of course not limited to charismatic circles: witness, for example, prayed-a-prayer-always-saved teaching or widespread neglect of Jesus’ teachings about caring for the needy.35 (At least prosperity preachers have enough of a conscience to try to justify their materialism!) Similarly, John MacArthur’s followers embrace antipsychology, dispensational eschatology, and cessationism. Less vocal but also spiritually lethal, some pastors of whatever stripe, perhaps reacting against some more traditional legalism, will not preach against sexual immorality for fear of offending someone, no matter how often it comes up in Paul’s letters.

But in circles primed to blame biases more directly on the Holy Spirit, fresh errors seem to surface more quickly and ad hoc, since they require less historic precedent. Because I am charismatic and am addressing “Spirit hermeneutics,” I note here especially cases where promoters of particular ideas claim the Spirit’s authority yet diverge significantly from Spirit-inspired Scripture. In many charismatic circles, many winds of teaching (Eph 4:14) have buffeted believers:

- Some Branhamists still await William Branham’s return;
- Some still accept Pigs in the Parlor demonology originally allegedly acquired from interviewing demons;36
• Hobart Freeman, a former professor, rejected medical treatment, reportedly leading to his own death and that of many of his parishioners. This rejection appears not only in Dowie but even in some early Pentecostal theology;

• One may note also the excesses of the shepherding movement;

• The more extreme forms of positive confession and prosperity teaching;

• Some extreme faith and Manifested Sons teaching that believers will become Christ or gods;

• Allowing only positive, comforting prophecies, which if taken to extremes may lead to crying, “Peace, peace,” when there is no peace (cf. Jer 6:14; 8:11).

Many of these errors reflect independent churches without larger spheres of accountability. But in 1989 Margaret Poloma showed that, although the Assemblies of God and nearly all its scholars and teachers officially rejected the teaching that sufficient faith always cures, more than a third of adherents in A/G churches accepted it.

I have recently conferred with some significant renewal leaders who are deeply concerned with unhealthy teachings circulating among their own followers, even including salvific universalism. Most of these erroneous teachings reflect readings of texts that are unfaithful to the original contexts. Some leaders in Pentecostal biblical training in Brazil and Nigeria have noted to me that many Pentecostals are now returning to mainline denominations because of inadequate or erroneous teaching in many Pentecostal circles. Although I believe that God often uses such an exodus to bring renewal to other denominations, it is not a state of affairs that any of us relishes.

Michael Brown’s new book Playing with Holy Fire addresses a number of in-house charismatic errors. Many errors that he critiques are widespread in Christian media, promoted by major figures who claim special revelation impervious to the insights of mere academicians who merely devote our much less important lives to studying Scripture.
Both they and we claim the direction of the Holy Spirit.

Second Timothy 3:16–4:3 shows that God gave us Scripture as an arbiter to decide claims to revelation and to correct error. Both they and we claim dependence on the Spirit, but whose teachings in given cases conform to Scripture as it was inspired in its original setting? First John 4:1–3 invites us not to believe every spirit, but to test the spirits according to the Jesus who came in the flesh, the Jesus consistent with the apostolic message John had taught.

From such observations I would conclude that, at least so far, the “community of interpretation” approach, while helpful in part, has not proved sufficient by itself in guarding sound teaching. One might of course appeal to Spirit-filled scholars as a more authoritative community of interpretation with better knowledge of sound teaching. But Hobart Freeman and one of the leaders in the shepherding movement, Derek Prince, were scholars. The community still needs to be anchored in the original message of Scripture.

Conclusions: Spirit Hermeneutics

Responsible exegesis still requires us to explore the meaning of the biblical texts in their original contexts. But sometimes even non-Christian scholars do that. Where we go beyond non-Christian scholars is that we believe these texts as Scripture.

Careful study of Scripture is essential to counter the unbridled subjectivism of popular charismatic excesses, for example, teachings about God making us rich. At the same time, study that does not lead to living out biblical experience in the era of the Spirit misses the point of the biblical texts. All Christian experience in this era must be shaped by the experience of the day of Pentecost. The last days are here, and the Lord has poured out his Spirit on his church.

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Notes


2 Treated in *Spirit Hermeneutics*, 153–204.


5 On a popular level, I treat some of this material in *The Bible in Its Context*, available free in several languages at http://www.craigkeener.com/free-resources/.

6 What has traditionally been called sensus plenior.


9 Cf. e.g., Christopher Spinks, *The Bible and the Crisis of Meaning: Debates on the Theological Interpretation of Scripture* (Bloomsbury, 2007), 44, 82, 92, 122; John Farrell, *The Varieties of Authorial Intention: Literary Theory Beyond the Intentional Fallacy* (Springer, 2017), 43.


15 Note that I am speaking here of historical context, not historical criticism, which I explicitly distinguish in *Spirit Hermeneutics*, 84, 124, 125, 132, 146, 347n55. I use the latter for academic historical discussion, but it is historical context for which I advocate for textual understanding.


27 Discussion in Mind of the Spirit, 55–112; briefly, my Romans (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2009), 85–97.


31 Cf. e.g., Mark Shaw, Global Awakening: How 20th-Century Revivals Triggered a Christian Revolution (Downers Grove, Ill.: IVP Academic, 2010).

32 I did my Ph.D. at Duke in the heyday of Stanley Fish’s influence, so interpretive communities (see e.g., Stanley E. Fish, Is There a Text in This Class? The Authority of Interpretive Communities [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1980]) were regular subjects of discussion with friends in the English department, religion.
department, and divinity school.


41 For perhaps the most thorough critique of universalism, see Michael J. McClymond (a renewalist scholar), *The Devil’s Redemption: A New History and Interpretation of Christian Universalism* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018).

Before responding to Dr. Keener, let me first thank him for writing *Spirit Hermeneutics*.¹ If you have not read it, I recommend it highly. Second, I thank him for honoring us by visiting ORU again and giving this splendid presentation.

To respond to his book and presentation, I want to describe how I perceive the discussion about hermeneutics (i.e., biblical interpretation) among Pentecostal and Charismatic scholars.² (Full disclosure: I am a life-long Pentecostal, an ORU alumnus and faculty member, and I belong to a local United Methodist Church.)

All of us as Spirit-filled scholars would say (I trust) that we stand under the authority of Scripture as God’s inspired Word. All of us, I think, would say we pursue our scholarly tasks to serve Christ and his church. As persons committed to the authority of Scripture and the mission of the church to make disciples, we obviously share core beliefs with non-charismatic Evangelicals and our Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox brothers and sisters (despite differences in describing authority).

But in this area of hermeneutics, there is some disagreement among Spirit-filled scholars about which community we should seek to serve: should our focus on hermeneutical theory serve to explain and validate the experiences and practices of the Spirit-empowered community (otherwise known as Pentecostal/Charismatic churches)? That is, should we provide something like an apologetics, a defense, for reading and teaching the Bible as Charismatics? Should we seek to provide a hermeneutical framework for Pentecostal pastors? Or, on the other end
of the spectrum, should Pentecostal scholars pursue a hermeneutics that seeks to serve the whole church (including non-Pentecostal and even non-Protestant believers)?

My position is that our biblical hermeneutics should strive to keep the whole church focused on what Scripture indicates is God’s focus: by the death and resurrection of Jesus, and by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit, God has indicated that his purpose is growing an ever-larger family of people being conformed to the image of his Son, Jesus, our Lord.

There is some value in Spirit-filled scholars discussing among ourselves how we interpret the Bible. But if we limit our discussion to people with experiences like ours, we impoverish ourselves and our sisters and brothers in the larger church. Using Scripture’s analogy of the church as a “body,” Pentecostals should not identify ourselves with just one part of that body. Our hermeneutics should not be confined to the service of the Pentecostal part or party.

If the whole church contains all the blood-bought sons and daughters of God, and if God has given the Spirit of adoption to all of them, why should we want to speak to or hear from only some of them? Christ crucified, risen, exalted to the Father’s right hand, and coming again for a whole church without spot or wrinkle—that should be our unifying focus for doing hermeneutics, homiletics, and theology. That should be the unifying focus for my life and yours as disciples of a Lord who has that kind of focus.

Yes, we have our distinctive practices and emphases within our various communions and traditions. But which of those distinctive practices should overshadow the work of Christ or of the Holy Spirit who makes us one in Christ? And if we are one in Christ, why should my Christian hermeneutics be intended for only some in Christ?

I hope it is obvious that I am in strong agreement with Dr. Keener. The “charismatic community” is not the canon, the standard. The Bible is the canon, and the text of Scripture must be understood historically, grammatically, and in its cultural setting. Its “intended design” is our unifying theological baseline, our standard for teaching, preaching, prophesying, and healing in Jesus’ name.
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Notes

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Introduction

It is certainly an honor to respond to Craig Keener’s paper. I have been reading his books since I was a doctoral student back in the 1990s and have had numerous occasions to interact with his work in my own research and writing. His presentation, focusing on his book *Spirit Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture in Light of Pentecost*, touches upon a topic I have been involved with lately, namely, the role of the Spirit in interpreting Scripture. Moreover, as a recent convert to Eastern Orthodoxy from Wesleyan Protestantism, and as a biblical scholar by training and vocation, I have been forced to reassess how it is I approach the Bible both in my personal and professional lives. On top of this, many colleagues at other Pentecostal schools are on a quest to develop a distinctive Pentecostal hermeneutic, a pursuit that brings their work into direct interaction with Keener’s. In this response to Keener’s thoughtful and inspiring paper, I would like to focus on three topics, suggested by his paper and my own context as a reader of the Bible. First, I will highlight a crucial aspect of Keener’s presentation, his distinction between a grammatical-historical reading of the text, which he advances, and the historical-critical approaches of post-Enlightenment Western biblical scholarship. Second, I will argue that Keener’s approach has common ground with how the Bible is read in Eastern Orthodoxy, a point that he acknowledges in his paper (whether he meant to do that or not!). Third, I will briefly discuss how Keener’s Spirit hermeneutic in conjunction with
the Orthodox approach to the Bible may inform the current quest for a distinctive Pentecostal hermeneutic.

Keener’s Appeal to Historical Context

In this paper, Craig Keener accepts the daunting challenge of navigating a Spirit hermeneutic between the Scylla of the highly rationalistic approach of the historical-critical schools of biblical studies and the Charybdis of unbridled subjective appeals to the Spirit in interpretation characteristic of many within Pentecostal circles. Keener argues that careful attention to the contexts of Scripture—literary, historical, socio-cultural, etc.—is necessary to determine the “plain meaning of the text,” work that must be done before, or at least in conjunction with, the process of hearing the Spirit’s voice in the text. This work, as any theological student engaged in academic biblical studies will attest, requires a great deal of knowledge to perform. Biblical languages, a wide array of background material (and here I must say that no one has done more than Craig Keener to make this material accessible to a wide audience), familiarity with the leading critical methodologies of the day, and so forth, are required to assure that one is paying due attention to the original setting of the text. Only when one has done so can one be confident that a firm foundation has been laid upon which to seek a spiritual sense in the text. An interpreter must pay due diligence to perform this task to the best of his or her ability to frame the sense of the text in its original context in order to have a benchmark against which to test potential moments of spiritual inspiration regarding a text’s meaning. In this regard, Keener is quite in keeping with the hermeneutical approach of another prolific Pentecostal scholar, Gordon Fee, whose co-authored text on hermeneutics has found popular reception among a wide, varied audience.

This is not to say that Keener advances uncritically the post-Enlightenment historical-critical approaches that hold sway in much Western biblical scholarship. While not denying the value that studies in this vein may produce, Keener here proposes an approach that pays careful attention to the historical setting of the text and indeed the very words that authors employed in their writing. Citing such exemplars as
John Chrysostom, Martin Luther, and John Calvin—chosen precisely because these interpreters predate the modernist historical-critical project—Keener argues that the fact that divine revelation has been given and preserved in textual form requires that readers pay “common courtesy” to the biblical authors by first reading their writings as just that, writings. This is not to suggest that the “other author” of the Bible, the Holy Spirit, is neglected. Rather, a direct appeal to an experiential spiritual encounter must not supersede the work of reading a written text. History matters, words matter, genre matters, for these are all appropriated by the Spirit in the inspiration of the biblical writers. A Spirit hermeneutic must work with all that the Spirit used in communicating God’s revelation to human beings.

Keener and Eastern Orthodoxy

Keener’s appeal to John Chrysostom opens the way for inquiry into the similarity of Keener’s approach to the larger Eastern Orthodox approach to the Bible. While no one doubts at all that Craig Keener is familiar with the Bible, such an opinion is not often held regarding the Eastern Orthodox, at least among Protestants. This caricature holds because the place of the Bible in Orthodox life is substantially different from that of Protestants. In Orthodoxy, there is no equivalent for the Protestant doctrine of sola Scriptura. Scripture for the Orthodox is an integral and enervating aspect of the “tradition,” which is the unbroken chain of teaching and practice from Jesus through his disciples and apostles and transmitted through the Fathers of the Church, or “the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3, NRSV). That is, Scripture does not stand above tradition as with the Reformers, nor does it function as the primary source of authority in conversation with tradition as found in my once-beloved Wesleyan Quadrilateral. Rather, Orthodoxy’s approach to Scripture is inextricably connected with the role of liturgy in Orthodox life. Revelatory to me upon becoming Orthodox was the thoroughly biblical language and imagery employed in the wide range of liturgical services in Orthodox worship, especially in the Divine Liturgy. This
“delivery system,” if you will, is actually derived from Scripture itself. The Orthodox have long observed that the Bible itself contains liturgy within it, from prescriptions for Tabernacle and Temple worship, the Psalter, the orders for Eucharistic observance, and the creedal fragments found within Scripture. Liturgy and Scripture are inseparable at their roots. While Keener is correct that Fathers such as John Chrysostom were concerned with the grammatical-historical reading of Scripture, they were also capable of typological, allegorical, Christological, and creedal readings of Scripture, approaches that took into account the words and settings of Scripture, but go beyond those readings. From Gregory Palamas’ fourteenth-century controversy with the anti-Hesychast Barlaam, the Orthodox preference of mysticism over against rigid scholasticism worked its way into the Orthodox mindset. All of this is now broadly the way of the Tradition, and current Orthodox hermeneutical methodologies tend now to read Scripture in the way of the Fathers, but also through the Fathers, experienced directly in the liturgical life of the Church.

So how does this intersect with Keener’s approach? As he has noted, there is a broad area of common focus, as his appeal to Chrysostom illustrates. But I think there is more here than just an incidental common methodological concern. Given its own methodological preferences, Orthodox reading of the Bible may be termed a Spirit hermeneutic in its own right. The words and settings of Scripture matter to the Orthodox, if in no other way than the words and images are appropriated for its very liturgical life and the tradition provides something akin to a historical setting with which Orthodox readers are very concerned. Moreover, Orthodoxy would heartily endorse Keener’s distinction between a contextual reading and the modern manifestation of scholasticism: historical-critical approaches. And given the deeply ingrained presence of Scripture in the prayers, worship, and hymnography of Orthodox liturgy, this would surely constitute an engagement with the Spirit in the encounter with Scripture toward appropriating Scripture for faithful living in the world.
Keener, Orthodoxy, and the Quest for a Pentecostal Hermeneutic

Given the title of his book, it is no surprise that Keener has drawn the attention of many Pentecostal scholars engaged in the quest to develop a distinctive Pentecostal hermeneutic. Keener seems to have this group in mind when he argues for an approach that would make available a Spirit hermeneutic for the larger ecclesial world and not just one segment of the church. However, many Pentecostals are dissatisfied with the more scholastic approaches to Scripture that they have by and large inherited from evangelicals. The result has been a growing number of studies that offer a distinctively Pentecostal approach to Scripture that ostensibly derives from and contributes to life in Pentecostal communities. Another result has been conversations, sometimes quite passionate, between Keener and these Pentecostals. While many Pentecostal responses to Keener’s book have been quite positive, some have been less so, bringing to my mind reminiscences of a few responses to Gordon Fee’s hermeneutic some time ago that assessed his approach as not “Pentecostal” enough. So how does Keener’s book contribute to this quest?

Perhaps returning to our earlier discussion of the Eastern Orthodox approach to Scripture may be of some help here. Orthodoxy appears to share Keener’s regard for Scripture as a textual revelation as well as the concern of many Pentecostals for the function of Scripture in its own ecclesial context. Perhaps Keener’s concern for context may be enlarged to include ecclesial context, as we saw with Orthodoxy’s organic understanding of tradition as a context for reading Scripture. And perhaps Pentecostal interpreters (as many already do) may take seriously Keener’s distinction between serious grammatical-historical reading of Scripture and the scholastic approaches many regard with suspicion, a view also found in Eastern Orthodoxy. The historical connection between evangelicals and Pentecostals is something that some may not particularly celebrate at all points, but it is a reality that cannot be ignored. Keener seems content to salvage the evangelical interest in Scripture as a written text, an interest shared among many Pentecostals, and to employ it in its best sense with the reality of Pentecost.
Perhaps Eastern Orthodoxy may serve as a broker in the conversation between Craig Keener and those in pursuit of a distinctive Pentecostal hermeneutic.

**Conclusion**

So whither Pentecostal hermeneutics? The current interest among some Pentecostal scholars in developing a distinctive Pentecostal hermeneutic arises, in part, from a disaffection with modern critical approaches and their perceived inability to speak fruitfully to Pentecostal experience. They now wish to explore possibilities for reading Scripture that align with how they see Scripture functioning in their Spirit-empowered communities. The result is a variety of experimentations into how distinctive Pentecostal theology and experience might shape their readings of Scripture. Craig Keener’s approach will not fully satisfy Pentecostals such as these. Nevertheless, his work in *Spirit Hermeneutics* will appeal to many other Pentecostals, and non-Pentecostals alike, standing as an exemplar of a hermeneutic that balances rigorous scholarship and fervent spiritual devotion. Though I am sympathetic with the impulse to define a distinctive Pentecostal hermeneutic, I doubt there will ever be one widely adopted hermeneutic to satisfy all—there may end up being as many Pentecostal hermeneutics as there are Pentecostalisms. Given this prospect, Keener’s contribution deserves an honored seat at the table in discussions of Pentecostal hermeneutics.

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**Notes**

2 I will use the term “Pentecostal” to refer broadly to classical Pentecostal, neo-Pentecostal, and Charismatic traditions.

3 Douglas Stuart and Gordon D. Fee, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, 4th ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2014). The first edition of this text was released in 1981.


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A Student Response to Craig Keener’s Talk on Spirit Hermeneutics

Pamela L. Idriss

Introduction and Summary

I must thank Jeffrey Lamp for inviting me to write a student response. I am deeply honored. Lamp was my professor for New Testament Greek Hermeneutics and Exegesis, and I also had the privilege to serve as his teaching assistant for Greek Synthesis II. The months that I spent with him as a student and as a servant were academically rewarding and personally enjoyable. I graduated from Oral Roberts University (ORU) in August 2017 with a Master of Arts Degree in Biblical Literature—Judaic Christian Studies Concentration (hereafter, JCS).


Keener used multiple sources for his talk: his comprehensive book Spirit Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture in Light of Pentecost (hereafter, SpiritH), several articles, a book article entitled “Pentecostal Biblical Interpretation/Spirit Hermeneutics,” and “subsequent discussions” on SpiritH. By necessity, Keener narrowed his presentation to two “common sides” of Spirit hermeneutics: “to hear the message . . . between the ancient author and audience” and to “hear what the Spirit says to the churches . . . today.” Despite his abridgment, the
talk contained five sections and mentioned some fifty topics and theological terms, such as “canonical authority,” “recontextualization,” “methodological naturalism,” “patterns in Scripture,” “interpretive communities,” “unbridled subjectivism,” and “dire errors from charismatic scholars.” Keener opened his talk in prayer and spoke for an hour and twenty minutes. Occasionally, he veered from the transcript to add amusing details.

In this response, I will address five concerns. First, I will discuss the absence of a precise definition for Spirit hermeneutics. Second, I will consider Keener’s omission of P/pentecostal history. Third, I will comment on his inclusion of multiple subjects. Fourth, I will advocate for an inclusion of Jewish hermeneutics in a Spirit hermeneutic. Finally, I will examine how well Keener investigates the Jewish context of Pentecost. My observations are presented humbly, respectfully, and thanks to Brad H. Young, with a little bit of chutzpah.

Five Specific Reactions to Keener’s Lecture

Originally, I anticipated a straightforward lecture contrasting a pneumatological hermeneutic with traditional historical criticisms—especially those that minimize or negate supernatural activities of the Holy Spirit (such as Rudolph Bultmann’s demythologizing). I also expected my previous knowledge of P/pentecostal hermeneutics to equip me intellectually. To start, I was familiar with Amos Yong and Steven M. Studebaker and was intrigued by their separate pursuits for distinct academic pneumatologies concerning the Trinity. Additionally, I had a basic understanding of P/pentecostal hermeneutics from lengthy conversations with two ORU alumnae. Both are now pursuing Ph.D.s and have academic relationships with professors and scholars who advocate variations of P/pentecostal hermeneutics—whom Keener cites in SpiritH (Chris E. W. Green, Kevin L. Spawn, Archie T. Wright). Lastly, I had attended a session on P/pentecostal hermeneutics at the 2014 SPS meeting that Lamp chaired.

By the end of Keener’s lecture, I realized that my past familiarity was marginal. Keener was instructive and humorous, but as a neophyte in these P/pentecostal conversations, I did not grasp the magnitude of
Spirit hermeneutics until I thoroughly studied his transcript, read his book, and researched the reviews of several national and international P/pentecostal scholars. Hence, this response is the result of months of prayerful investigation. I will begin by addressing Keener’s approach to definitions and P/pentecostal history.

Lacking: One Clear Definition and a History of Pentecostal Hermeneutics

Keener’s lecture was filled with meaningful content, but to my surprise, he did not supply one plain definition of Spirit hermeneutics. Instead he defined the term through a series of attributes (characteristics). Keener describes an initial attribute within the first twelve minutes, but it is only implicit: “a full-orbed hermeneutic [emphasis added] invites us to [consider] . . . ancient [and] modern contexts.” Unfortunately, the first explicit characteristic arises much later, almost thirty minutes into the talk: “A Spirit hermeneutic is a . . . relational hermeneutic . . . we . . . read the Bible” by trusting in God. The next explicit characteristic (about twenty minutes later) is: “A Spirit hermeneutic means that we embrace the message of the text and live it out . . . .” Within the last quarter of the lecture, Keener offers a fourth characteristic: “the spiritual dimension of Spirit hermeneutics . . . [is not] . . . the prerogative of the highly educated.” Each attribute appears in different subsections of the lecture, “Hearing the Other Author,” “Spirit and Letter in Romans 7:5–6,” and “Reading with the Humble.” Since they surface unannounced, a listener is constrained to devise his or her own definition of a Spirit hermeneutic. Thus, Keener’s approach is inductive. He supposes an informed audience—one prepared to assimilate the sundry characteristics.

Today’s approach mirrors SpiritH. Keener inserts attributes unpredictably throughout the book and usually inserts them in a chapter’s conclusions. While he never intended a manual, I still expected a tidy compilation somewhere in the book. Therefore, a practical and necessary solution for the lecture and the book is to take copious notes.

My second reaction concerns history. Keener omits a history of P/pentecostal hermeneutics or Spirit hermeneutics, whether long
or short. Who originated Spirit or P/pentecostal hermeneutics and when? Does the discipline incorporate stable or variable traits? Does it interconnect with charismatic hermeneutics or the Spirit-empowered approach at ORU? As an external observer lacking a historical basis, the talk proved to be interesting, but it was not entirely useful. Let me clarify. Keener offers many practical techniques to enhance biblical exegesis (consider ancient contexts, “hear[ing] the other Author,” study devotionally and with faith, and exegete with humility), but I am unsure if his suggestions are fresh contributions to Spirit hermeneutics or if they only affirm and fortify what already exists. John Christopher Thomas also notices “the absence of intentional engagement with the origins and development of contemporary Pentecostal hermeneutics . . . .” In Keener’s defense, according to SpiritH, his aim is “to stimulate . . . further discussion and contribute to this intriguing area at the interface of various disciplines and the Christian life.” Consequently, he approaches the subject “as a biblical scholar,” not as “a theologian . . . or historian of interpretation.” So, my immediate response after the talk was awe and appreciation for Keener’s scholarship. However—excluding seven months of concentrated study, which I completed after the talk—I was immediately uncertain about the purpose or mechanisms of a Spirit hermeneutic. How or when would I apply it? In fact, I did not realize that any controversies existed until I heard Arden Autry’s response. An overview or synopsis of charismatic and P/pentecostal histories would benefit the listeners. A discussion of one aspect of Keener’s methodology follows.

**The Inclusion of Multiple Topics**

Keener builds his lecture on two pillars—the ancient contexts and hearing the text’s message for personal application. The two function well as his thesis statement. Right away, Keener emphasizes the ancient context through various paradigms: ancient genres, languages, events, original authors’ minds, and ancient meanings. He gives extra attention to hearing the ancient message and hearing the message “afresh.” However, after the first third of the talk, Keener divagates to multiple subjects. For me, his inclusions are confusing or at least distracting.
Some of them are: canonical meanings; God provided a textual book in “Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek”; proper recontextualization; engaging the texts intellectually; and a stray but auspicious comment about “women in ministry.” Comparable to his use of attributes for a single definition (in the previous section), these subjects arise unannounced and are prominent between paragraphs. For example, at the eighteen-minute spot, Keener begins with “original meaning,” moves to “canonical authority,” and ends with “interpretive communities . . . Jehovah’s Witnesses or Mormons.” The next paragraph jumps to exegetical “specialists” and mentions “women in ministry,” and the following two paragraphs discuss biblical languages (“Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek”) and the “textual form” of Scripture.\(^8\)

The practice of juxtaposing seemingly unrelated subjects mimics Keener’s style in *SpiritH*. He explains, “my approach to the biblical witnesses here is *deliberately integrative* [emphasis added], moving back and forth [emphasis added] among different biblical writers in an effort to show that the emphases in question are rarely limited to a single biblical writer.”\(^9\) For the talk, Keener extracted the subjects from different chapters in *SpiritH*, which broadens the disconnect. As subjects move back and forth in the lecture, it becomes more difficult to follow his schema for a Spirit hermeneutic.

Thomas observed a similar weakness in *SpiritH*, noting “the book’s rhetorically charged tone, and a certain imprecision that occurs throughout.”\(^10\) From my humble position, the somewhat ambiguous flow is an evident drawback in Keener’s lecture. My fourth and fifth reactions follow, and they are closest to my heart and academic training.

**The Jewish Hermeneutics and the Jewish Context of Pentecost**

As a JCS graduate, I am particularly aware of the Jewish (Hebraic) practices, thoughts, and interpretative methods embedded in the New Testament. Undeniably, Keener is aware, and I missed hearing more of that in his presentation. In Section V of *SpiritH*, “Intrabiblical Models for Reading Scriptures,” Keener asserts that intrabiblical methods of interpretation are another element of a Spirit hermeneutic.\(^11\) The New
Testament is Keener’s “expertise,” and in Section V he asks, “How did Jesus handle Scripture? How did Paul interpret the law . . . ?” I realize that it is impossible to address every topic in one lecture, but it seems reasonable to prioritize Jewish perspectives as a foundation when one discusses anything related to the Holy Spirit (Ruach HaKodesh).

In Section V of SpiritH, Keener elaborates on the interpretative methods used by primary Jewish Bible figures, such as Jesus, Matthew, and Isaiah. He even consults several Talmudic sources and mentions gezerah shevah in the endnotes. The gezerah shevah is one of several Jewish hermeneutics used by tannaitic rabbis who are contemporaries of Jesus. This is extremely significant. In Section V of SpiritH, Keener reveals the heart of the way we understand and practice hermeneutics today, and too often, we sweepingly apply current methods to Jesus’ day. Keener rightly says, “Jesus and his first followers modeled a way of reading Scripture that [exceeds] our modern exegetical methods. The original sense of the text . . . as we may recover it, remains foundational . . . but the Spirit working in God’s people helps us” with fresh applications today. He continues, “Jesus read the Scriptures in a disciplined and sophisticated way that contrasts the common abuse of popular Scripture verses today.” (I am not completely innocent either.)

I definitely appreciate Section V, and again, I missed more from that section in the lecture. To be specific, regarding the pivotal events of the Spirit described in Acts 1 and 2, Keener does not attempt to investigate Peter’s hermeneutical methods at all, whereas in Section V he examines Jesus’ methods with vigor and scrutiny. Keener overlooks the epic discourses from Peter—one of Jesus’ leading apostles. In Acts 1:15–26 and 2:14–36, Peter authoritatively and masterfully explains two crucial events (Judas’s replacement and the Spirit’s outpouring), utilizing texts from Psalms and Joel. Keener offers a tepid reference to Peter saying, “Peter’s announcement is consistent with the rest of the NT” and “some argue that many or most of the first apostles, such as Peter, could not read, although they could dictate.” To declare a possible illiteracy for Peter without affirming his obvious ability to interpret publicly from the Hebrew Scriptures (as Jesus did) is not only disappointing, but a considerable oversight.

Thomas comments likewise on SpiritH, “[In] several areas . . . the
work missed opportunities for significant engagement within this area of hermeneutics, including the . . . absence of specific examination of several NT texts that reveal much about concrete ways in which the Spirit functions in interpretation.”¹⁸ By neglecting Peter’s interpretation in the lecture (and in the book),¹⁹ Keener foregoes a prime occasion to study and appreciate Peter’s Jewish hermeneutics. Peter’s Jewish interpretive methods in Acts 1 and 2 must also be considered a Spirit hermeneutic.

Keener’s oversight spawns another concern: it deflates the ancient Jewish context of Pentecost documented in Acts 1 and 2. The Hebrew word for Pentecost is שׁתֹעֻבָ, or Feast of Weeks (Lev 23:15–16). Deuteronomy 16:16 records it as the second of three required Jewish festivals. The Jewish Messiah Jesus (Yeshua) told His eleven Jewish disciples (now apostles) to wait for the promise of the Father—the full outpouring of the Ruach (Acts 1:4). Acts 2:5 says that “devout” Jewish men from “every nation under heaven” heard the diverse tongues. The Ruach’s inimitable appearance during the festival of Shavuot (תֹעֻבָּ) is entirely Jewish. Keener’s discourse would have benefited from a more thorough recognition of this crucial fact. I will finish with a summary of the response and include some important insights on Jewish midrash.

Conclusions

Keener’s lecture politely and competently expanded a prevailing topic throughout national and global P/pentecostalism—Spirit hermeneutics. Jacqueline N. Grey, an Australian scholar, encapsulates the current situation of P/pentecostal hermeneutics:

At the center stage of pentecostal theology and scholarly discourse for several decades has been the theme of hermeneutics . . . from the global community, including biblical scholars, theologians, historians, philosophers . . . .¹ At the heart of the drama are issues of pentecostal identity, culture, and theology . . . driven by conflict between advocates of evangelical reading approaches (. . . historical-critical methodologies) and those that promote more postmodern readings (. . . reader-response and postcolonial approaches).²⁰
Keener does not participate in “the drama.” Instead, he mediates and contributes from a unique position of qualification and personal experience. By using the term Spirit hermeneutics, Keener gracefully deemphasizes the word P/pentecostalism and stresses Christian hermeneutics in general.

In my response, I addressed five concerns. The fourth and fifth points require additional focus: Peter’s Jewish hermeneutics and Keener’s limited attention towards the inherent and visible Jewish context in Acts 1–2. In today’s lecture, Keener did not discuss or elevate the Jewish environment of Pentecost, despite his requirements for fastidiousness. He says: “. . . our reconstructions of background vary in degrees of probability and still leave lacunae in our knowledge . . . not that our background knowledge will be perfect but that we should do the best we can, which is . . . considerably better than . . . if we do not try.” This statement is more emphatic in SpiritH. Quite early Keener asserts, “As will become clear later in the book, I have little patience for approaches that claim to be ‘of the Spirit’ yet ignore the concreteness of the settings in which the Spirit inspired the biblical writings, settings that help explain the particularities in the shape of such writings.” As a polite criticism I would like to see a better execution of what Keener consistently expects from his readers and listeners. Secondly, I will remark on Peter’s hermeneutics.

At the 2014 SPS Convention in Missouri, Alicia Panganiban presented a paper entitled, “Towards a Pneumatic Biblical Hermeneutics That Takes into Account Jewish Hermeneutical Practices.” She argues “for a pneumatic hermeneutic that takes into account Jewish hermeneutical practices to develop and deepen Pentecostal understanding of pneumatic hermeneutics.” She concludes, “Jewish hermeneutics must be included because of its scriptural origin and similarities within the Christian tradition, and specifically to the renewal tradition and more specifically with Pentecostalism.” Panganiban’s entire paper is closely related to my response and is worth reading.

I am also reminded of James D. McCaw’s M.A. thesis completed at ORU: “Spirit Inspired Utterance: A Comparative Study of Acts 2:14–21 and Second Temple Period Jewish Literature.” His work is imperative because it investigates Peter’s discourse as a Jewish midrash and not solely
as an oratory recorded by Luke.\textsuperscript{25} His abstract states: “Peter’s sermon on Pentecost marks the seminal event . . . . In the fertile atmosphere of Messianic expectation during the Second Temple Period, the outpouring of the Holy Spirit assumes eschatological significance . . . . Peter’s midrash of Joel 2:28–32 must be interpreted in this context (Acts 2:14–21).”\textsuperscript{26} In the lecture, Keener only identifies the “eschatological” features of a Spirit hermeneutic without mentioning midrash.

Walter C. Kaiser, Jr.’s, definition of midrash typifies one reason many scholars dismiss this ancient Jewish interpretive method. He writes, “A [midrash is a] type of early rabbinic interpretation characterized by fanciful and whimsical explanations of the biblical text that generally ignored the grammatical-historical context of the Scriptures being interpreted.”\textsuperscript{27} Rabbinic scholar Reuven Hammer affirms the indifference, “Non-Jewish scholars belittled all rabbinic literature and took little interest in these works of midrash, which, they felt could hardly be taken seriously as Bible exegesis.”\textsuperscript{28} Young defines Jewish midrash as: “[A] Hebrew term meaning ‘Bible commentary, sermon on Scripture’ (plural, midrashim). A collection of rabbinic expositions that interpret the Bible in order to bring out legal or moral truths.”\textsuperscript{29} Jewish midrashim are not merely whimsical explanations.

Hebrew scholar Judah Goldin says midrash “save[s] the Scriptures from becoming archaic, from being treated as though their specific lessons, down to the minutest particularities, were only of sentimental historical interest . . . and narratives no longer compelling.”\textsuperscript{30} Jewish midrash is a sound ancient interpretive process that is dissimilar to and independent of modern grammatical-historical techniques. For my M.A. thesis, I utilized a Jewish midrash as a comparative source to help clarify the meaning of πέτρα (bedrock) in Matthew 16:18.\textsuperscript{31} Who or what is the bedrock? The thesis is entitled, “A Comparative Linguistic Analysis of Matthew 16:18, the Midrash Yelamdenu of Numbers 23:9 in the Yalkut Shim ‘Oni, and the Hodayot 1QHa 14:25b–27a.” Several scholars acknowledge the Midrash Yelamdenu as a comparative source, but more discount its utility without investigating the Midrash’s surprising linguistics.

Just as Keener seeks to hear the ancient context in his exegetical research, my desire was to hear the original message in Matthew 16. What did the twelve Apostles hear from Jesus that day?\textsuperscript{32} The project
fully revised and extended my understanding of Matthew 16:18, because I did not rely on the known, well-meaning interpretations (Jesus, God, faith, Peter, or Peter’s confession are the bedrock)\textsuperscript{33} or modern grammatical-historical hermeneutics to illuminate Jesus’ enigmatic saying.

The foundation for Keener’s Spirit hermeneutics begins at Pentecost. I am extremely grateful that he includes the Jewish hermeneutics of Jesus, Matthew, and Isaiah as a component of a Spirit hermeneutic. How much richer would Spirit hermeneutics be if Keener built it on a foundation that wholly explored and utilized the vibrant contextual Jewish elements and interpretive insights (Peter’s \textit{midrash}) entrenched in Acts 1–2?

My final comments are personal. While writing this response, I experienced what Keener addresses in \textit{SpiritH}. The author urges scholars to invite the Spirit to assist them during and after their exegetical studies.\textsuperscript{34} Consequently and thankfully, the Holy Spirit solved the wrestles I experienced researching and writing for the past seven months. Praise the LORD for \textit{Ruach HaKodesh}.

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Notes

1 I adopt the nomenclature Keener used in \textit{Spirit Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture in the Light of Pentecost} (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 216), 3, 7. The “\textit{P}” represents Classical Pentecostalism or specific Pentecostal denominations, and “\textit{p}” applies to global pentecostals.


4 Steven M. Studebaker, *From Pentecost to the Triune God: A Pentecostal Trinitarian Theology* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans, 2012), 214–15. See also, Amos Yong, *Who Is the Holy Spirit?* (Brewster, MA: Parakeet Press, 2011), xiii. Worth noting, Yong and James K. A. Smith originally asked Keener to contribute a volume to their series on pentecostal theology. The result was too long, so the work was published separately as *Spirit Hermeneutics*.


8 In Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics*, find women in ministry in the “Introduction,” “Reading Experientially,” “Do Ancient Meanings Matter,” 18, 27, 124, respectively; canonical authority in “The Measuring Stick,” 103–4, 124; deconstructionists in “Needing Other Cultures’ Input,” 86; and Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek in “Room Left for Authors,” 134.


17 Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics*, 208. The chapter’s title is “How Jesus Invited Us to Hear the Bible.”


Studies Annual Meeting in 2014.”
21 Keener, Spirit Hermeneutics, 3.
22 Keener, Spirit Hermeneutics, 2.
23 Alicia Panganiban, “Towards a Pneumatic Biblical Hermeneutics That Takes into 
Account Jewish Hermeneutical Practices,” paper from the 43rd Central Regional 
Meeting, Society of Pentecostal Studies, 7 March 2014, 1.
24 Panganiban, “Towards a Pneumatic Biblical Hermeneutics That Takes into Account 
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and Second Temple Period Jewish Literature,” (M.A. thesis, Oral Roberts University, 
27 Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., The Promise-Plan of God: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New 
Testaments (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2008), 401.
28 Reuben Hammer, Classic Midrash: Tânaistí Commentaries on the Bible (New York: 
29 Brad. H. Young, Meet the Rabbis: Rabbinic Thought and the Teachings of Jesus (Grand 
31 In Pamela L. Idriss, “A Comparative Linguistic Analysis of Matthew 16:18, the 
Midrash Yelamdenu of Numbers 23:9 in the Yalkut Shim’Oni, and the Hodayot 1QHa 
14:25b–27a,” (M.A. thesis, Oral Roberts University, 2017), chapter 3, I show that the 
Midrash Yelamdenu is defensibly contemporaneous with the time of Jesus.
32 I uphold the authenticity of Matthew 16:18. In Idriss, “Comparative Linguistic 
Analysis of Matthew 16:18,” chapters 1 and 2, I discuss authenticity issues. The debate 
primarily concerns the Greek word ἐκκλησία (assembly, congregation), which is 
usually translated “church.” Chrys C. Caragounis states that Friedrich Andreas Stroth 
(circa 1781) formulated the initial suspicions on the authenticity of Matthew 16:18. 
See Chrys C. Caragounis, Peter and the Rock (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 2010), 2n10, 
(E-book accessed 2 September 2015, from ProQuest ebrary database.)
33 See Idriss, “Comparative Linguistic Analysis of Matthew 16:18,” chapter 1 for 
numerous interpretations of πέτρα.
34 Keener, Spirit Hermeneutics, 129, contains Keener’s personal testimony.
Water Baptism in Pentecostal Perspective: A Bibliographic Evaluation

Andrew Ray Williams

Key Words water baptism, Pentecostal theology, sacramentality

Abstract

Situated within the larger conversation surrounding Pentecostal sacramentality, this study seeks to trace the development of water baptism throughout Pentecostal scholarship by reviewing the major voices within the field. This review also seeks to expose prevailing themes, key influences, and new developments. The outcome is a recommendation that interests and concerns have changed over time, offering Pentecostal theology new opportunities.

Introduction

The subject of sacramentality continues to be an emerging topic that has received noteworthy attention in contemporary Pentecostal scholarship. Although there have been significant articles, chapters, and edited volumes emerging from Pentecostal scholars on the relationship between Pentecostalism and the sacraments, Chris E. W. Green’s published doctoral thesis, Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Lord’s Supper, contains the only prominent review of the existing literature. However, Green’s treatment of the scholarship pays particular attention to scholars’ engagements with the Lord’s Supper, making his treatment of water baptism peripheral. And while his review of literature engages
some Charismatic voices, it ignores Oneness Pentecostal ones, making the need for a comprehensive and definitive view of Pentecostal scholarship on water baptism even more apparent.\(^2\)

In response, this study builds upon Green’s initial review of the scholarship surrounding Pentecostal sacramentality by tracing the development of water baptism throughout Pentecostal scholarship.\(^3\) To that aim, I will engage the descriptive and prescriptive accounts in current Pentecostal scholarship and conclude by noting overriding themes and their interconnections. Perhaps most importantly, this study will expose how concerns and developments have changed over time, offering Pentecostal scholarship new possibilities.

Following Green, these scholarly Pentecostal’s works are engaged in chronological order.\(^4\) Yet, unlike Green, I have divided the works between descriptive accounts and prescriptive accounts to show better what kind of work is being done in each type of engagement. Following my survey of the relevant literature, I will conclude with summary and analysis, suggesting that new developments present fresh, future research opportunities for Pentecostal scholars.

### Scholarly Descriptive Accounts

**David A. Reed**

David Reed, Professor Emeritus of Pastoral Theology at Wycliffe College, has noted that Oneness Pentecostals, using Acts 2:38 as their model, argue for water baptism in Jesus’ name paired with Spirit baptism and tongues as the necessary components for biblical Christian initiation.\(^5\) As Reed notes, Oneness Pentecostals’ use of Acts 2:38 places them between James Dunn and Howard Ervin in the debate over the meaning of Spirit baptism. Reed notes that Dunn argues that Acts 2:38 “is the text par excellence of conversion-initiation” while Ervin on the other hand interprets Spirit baptism as subsequent to conversion. However, the dominant position of the United Pentecostal Church lines up with Dunn’s view of conversion including all three elements in Acts 2:38, with the exception that Spirit baptism is accompanied with glossolalia. Therefore, the Christian birth is composed of baptism in
Jesus’ name and a Pentecostal Spirit baptism. Lastly, he notes that while Oneness Pentecostals interpret Acts 2:38 to teach the forgiveness of sins, they insist that the “efficacy is in the name, not the water.” Reed compares this to the thought of both Luther and Calvin. And most significantly, Reed states that the Oneness view of Christian initiation is “rooted in the believer’s identity with the Name of Jesus” making “The Name . . . efficacious for salvation.” For this reason, Reed describes the Oneness Pentecostal theology of water baptism as “sacramental.”

Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., and Jerry L. Sandidge

Absent from Chris Green’s review of the sacraments is Cecil Robeck’s and Jerry Sandidge’s paper given at the 1988 meeting of the international Roman Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue later published as an article. The authors, both Assemblies of God historians and ministers, point out that there is much diversity among Pentecostals on the issue of water baptism. While all Pentecostals concur that baptism is something that was commanded by Jesus, there is still debate on the meaning and significance of water baptism. The relationship to faith is also something that is nuanced depending on denomination or Pentecostal person, although the majority holds that faith must precede baptism. Full immersion and believers’ baptism is preferred over sprinkling and infant baptism. However, they speak favorably of Pentecostal groups that practice both pedobaptism and believers’ baptism since in the future, this way of dealing with baptism “may prove to be particularly useful in interchurch discussions.”

Harold D. Hunter

Harold D. Hunter, Pentecostal ecumenist and theologian, published a formal, Pentecostal response to Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry, published by the World Council of Churches in 1982. In his response, Hunter states that Pentecostals have a unique contribution in reflecting on such matters that differs from both “high church traditions” and the evangelical tradition. When discussing baptism specifically, he states that North American trinitarian Pentecostalism has “tended to tie the indwelling of the Holy Spirit to union with Christ and thereby to
consider the believer united to the entire body of Christ.”

Therefore, according to Hunter, Pentecostals do not consider water baptism as an act that incorporates the person into the body of Christ. Pentecostals hold to both God’s gift and our human response. Rebaptism is practiced often, either when someone has “backslidden” or when he or she was baptized as an infant. While all Pentecostals do not practice the trinitarian formula, most do. Immersion is the “unquestioned practice of choice for the majority of Pentecostals,” since it is considered to be the “New Testament precedent” and it enriches “the imagery of dying and rising with Christ Jesus.” Lastly, triple immersion is a rare happening within Pentecostal churches. In sum, Hunter’s description of Pentecostals’ understanding of water baptism can be best classified as “symbolic” since he understands Pentecostals to view sacraments as “external rites directed by Scripture and observed by the people of God” that have no “self-contained efficacy.”

Richard Bicknell

Along with Hunter, Elim Pentecostal theologian Richard Bicknell asserts that in opposition to claims that baptism and the Lord’s Supper are channels of grace, Pentecostals view the ordinances as something purely symbolic. He cites the favored term “ordinance” over “sacrament” as evidence that Pentecostals attempt to reject any form of sacramentalism. Thus, Pentecostals do not see baptism as effecting salvation, but merely as part of the ongoing personal response to the commands of Jesus following their conversion. Following Donald Gee, Bicknell holds that baptism without faith becomes “sheer mockery.” It serves also as an outward confession of salvation, thus is reserved for believers only. Baptism is also important because it is a matter of submission to Christ. Therefore, while baptism is not essential to salvation, “it is necessary to full Christian obedience.” While Bicknell asserts many times and many ways that baptism is “purely symbolic,” at the end of his section on baptism, he asserts that water baptism may also be regarded as a means of grace “given certain presuppositions,” including that it is not a “mechanical transfer of saving grace.”
Assemblies of God theologian Daniel Albrecht has attempted to detect and describe the shape of Pentecostal worship in his work on ritual studies of Pentecostals. In his monograph, *Rites in the Spirit*, Albrecht observes and evaluates both the ceremonies and spirituality of three Pentecostal/Charismatic churches. In his findings, Albrecht states that Pentecostal and Charismatic worship provides a context for a human-divine encounter. While Pentecostals seldom use sacramental language, “they certainly believe and experience their God’s gracious acts.” But instead of the communion table being the “divine-human axis,” it is the “altar space itself.” When it comes to water baptism, Albrecht also mentions that while all three churches practice believers’ baptism, two of the three churches observed do not have baptisteries. This points to a “relative de-emphasis on baptism as a Christian community boundary.” While baptism is one of the criteria within the standard of membership among the three churches, baptism does not “rise to the same level of importance as the event of conversion” or to the same level as “Spirit baptism,” which “reigns as the second most significant rite of passage.” Spirit baptism and water baptism, then, have virtually no relation. In sum, Albrecht sees Pentecostal spirituality expressing a strong sacramental worldview, even though ironically this sacramental worldview is not often applied to the Eucharist and water baptism.

Kimberly Alexander

In response to the call for a formal dialogue to take place between Oneness Pentecostal and Trinitarian Pentecostal scholars in 2001, Kimberly Alexander, Associate Professor of Church History at Regent University, was asked to prepare a presentation that would survey early Pentecostal beliefs and discussions regarding the Trinity and water baptism. Most notably, Alexander states that water baptism was best understood across the board as an ordinance emphasizing the obedience aspect of the rite. In her work on Pentecostal models of healing, she states that “early Pentecostal spirituality was undergirded by a rich sacramentality.” These Pentecostals believed healing would
occur “through human touch,” which speaks to this sacramentality. For Wesleyan Pentecostals the practice of baptism “represent[s] a kind of impartation or transmission of grace,” while for Finished Work Pentecostals baptism is an act “of obedience” and a sign “of what has already been accomplished, in effect, remembrances in the Zwinglian sense.” While Alexander describes what each stream would say they believe about the sacraments in the above statements, the rest of her monograph on healing points to the fact that their expectations and lived theology are much more sacramental. Thus, along with Albrecht, Alexander’s work shows Pentecostal spirituality expresses a strong sacramental worldview, even though it is not often applied to water baptism.

Mark J. Cartledge

Mark Cartledge, Professor of Practical Theology at Regent University, has also contributed to the discussion by attempting to work out an empirical Pentecostal theology of Pentecostal beliefs. As Green notes, Cartledge “listens” to the “ordinary theology” of everyday believers on theological themes including the sacraments. Cartledge’s findings indicated that water baptism was not talked about as much as the sacrament of the Lord’s Supper and other major theological themes such as Spirit baptism. Across the board, baptism was sidelined in ordinary theological testimonies and other themes were given more prominence. Nonetheless, most significantly, Pentecostals expect “all aspects of . . . ministry” to be “empowered by the presence of the Spirit in the life of the believer through conversion (including baptism) and subsequent occasions or moments of encounter (including the baptism in the Spirit), be they sacramental or charismatic.” Experiences such as water baptism are “experiences of the Holy Spirit” that are “sacramental initiations and locate important ritual milestones.” Lastly, Cartledge suggests that, if Pentecostals would allow a “greater recognition of very different baptismal practices,” then “openness to others within the Christian tradition might be facilitated.” Thus, Cartledge’s findings on baptism indicate that while water baptism seems to be sidelined compared to other themes, there is a Pentecostal spirituality that expects
the Spirit to be found through initiatory practices and events such as baptism, thus mirroring the findings of Albrecht and Alexander.

Prescriptive/Constructive Accounts

Myer Pearlman

Myer Pearlman, once a faculty member of Central Bible Institute, first wrote on the sacraments in *The Pentecostal Evangel*. For Pearlman, there are two sacraments—the Lord’s Supper and water baptism. Water baptism is the “rite of entrance into the Christian church, and symbolizes spiritual life begun.” It is a visible picture of salvation, identification with Christ, regeneration, and putting on Christ. Thus, water baptism is a visible drama “portraying the fundamentals of the faith.” Further, the scriptural mode is by immersion, baptized in the name of the triune God. The right recipients of water baptism are those who “sincerely repent of their sins and exercise a living faith in the Lord Jesus.” Since infants have no sins to repent of and cannot exercise faith, they cannot be baptized, but they may be dedicated to Christ. Regarding the efficacy of baptism, water baptism has no saving power.

Ernest Swing Williams

Green commits space to the Assemblies of God theologian in his literature review, noting that in his three-volume systematics Williams devotes a chapter to the “ordinances.” Regarding water baptism, Williams states that water baptism “signifies our identification with Christ.” This identification is in salvation, in death to sin, and in resurrection unto holiness; thus, this rite is not a saving rite because individual faith precedes baptism. According to Williams, Augustine is mistaken by asserting that infants without baptism are lost, considering it an unscriptural position. Children are saved if they die before the age of accountability, therefore “baptism makes no change in their position.” For Williams, baptism always follows or accompanies repentance and salvation. Although Green does not mention Williams’ convictions surrounding baptismal formula, it is important to note that
Williams holds that believers should be baptized in the name of the triune God, but also insists that triune immersion is mistaken. In sum, Williams’ view is clearly symbolic since water baptism is “an outward sign of an inward work.”

M. A. Tomlinson

M. A. Tomlinson, an early General Overseer of the Church of God of Prophecy, first spoke of water baptism in his published Basic Bible Beliefs. On baptism, Tomlinson states that it is “evident that water baptism has an important place in the plan of salvation.” And while Jesus was sinless, it was important for him to be baptized not because he needed to repent, but because it was necessary for him to fulfill all righteousness. For believers, water baptism is the outward display of an inward reality. It testifies to what has already taken place through repentance, and it should be done by immersion because “a few drops of water sprinkled from a hand” is not in line with the New Testament witness and “God’s plans do not change.” Following this logic, the baptismal formula must be in name of the triune God, since Jesus himself commanded it. Lastly, Tomlinson supports rebaptism if a person “should fail God and go back into sin,” and then “come back” to the faith.

James L. Slay

Church of God (Cleveland, TN) missionary James Slay also wrote on the church’s ordinances in the early 1960s. For Slay, baptism is “the symbol of death, burial and resurrection.” The reason one is baptized is out of obedience. Only those who are “regenerated” are to be baptized, which requires repentance and faith in the Lord. Baptism is the profession of a “spiritual change already wrought.” Further, since baptism is for believers, infant baptism should be rejected. For Slay, it should not only be “oppose[d],” “but condemn[ed].” Regarding the mode of water baptism, although there has been much controversy surrounding this topic, immersion is the only way, for the “ancient rite of pouring water” is a part of “paganism.” Additionally, all should be baptized in the formula given to us by Jesus, which is in the name of the...
triune God. For Slay, Jesus’ command trumps any mention of baptism in “Jesus’ name” found in Acts. In sum, Slay believes baptism to be purely symbolic.

Raymond M. Pruitt

In his review, Green notes that Raymond Pruitt—an ordained minister in the Church of God of Prophecy—published his Fundamentals of the Faith in 1981, dedicating a section in it to discuss “the ordinances”—the Lord’s Supper, water baptism, and footwashing. For Pruitt, water baptism signifies “death, burial, and resurrection.” We are baptized fully in Christ—into his full life—which is now ours anew. Baptism “touches” our resurrection symbolically, for it indicates we share in his defeat over death. Baptism, then, is a “symbol of the believer’s identification with Christ in burial and resurrection.” Pruitt clearly affirms believers’ baptism by immersion, for “complete immersion is the New Testament mode for baptism . . . sprinkling does not symbolize the believer’s total participation in Christ which baptism is intended to signify.” Further, Christ himself gave the suitable baptismal formula—in the name of the triune God. Therefore, all in all, baptism is ultimately representational of participation in Christ’s life, death, and resurrection.

Guy Duffield and N. M. Van Cleave

In 1983 Foursquare faculty members of L.I.F.E. Bible College, Guy Duffield and N. M. Van Cleave, co-authored Foundations of Pentecostal Theology. According to Duffield and Van Cleave, ordinances are “outward rites or symbolic observances commanded by Jesus, which set forth essential Christian truths.” Since baptism is an ordinance, it is “an outward sign of an inward work” or “the visible sign of an invisible work of grace.” We are to participate in water baptism because Jesus set an example for us by submitting to baptism himself. The manner of water baptism is by immersion because Christ was completely immersed in his baptism in the Jordan. Further, the formula for water baptism is clearly stated by Christ: in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit. Referring to the Foursquare Declaration of Faith, water
baptism “is a blessed outward sign of an inward work, a beautiful and solemn emblem” that reminds us that just as Christ died on the cross, so we are dead to sin, buried with him, and raised up from the dead so we may walk in newness of life in our baptism. Thus, for Duffield and Van Cleave, baptism is purely an act of obedience with symbolic meaning.

John Bond

Echoing Duffield and Van Cleave, John Bond, a South African Assemblies of God pastor, contributed a chapter in a co-edited monograph in what he considered the distinctives of Pentecostal doctrine. Within the chapter, he devotes a paragraph to “the sacraments”—water baptism and the Lord’s Supper. According to Bond, Pentecostals baptize their converts, and the accepted mode is immersion. This means that adults are baptized, “or at least as a believer able to make an intelligent decision.” Baptism is a “step of obedience” and serves as initiation into the Christian life; however, it is not necessary for salvation nor is it a means of regeneration.

Stanley Horton, William Menzies, and Michael Dusing

As Green notes, Assemblies of God theologians Stanley Horton and William Menzies extended an earlier publication outlining Assemblies of God beliefs by publishing an expanded version under the title *Bible Doctrines*. In it, the authors state that baptism is a ceremonial, symbolic event as a public statement of our affinity with Jesus in both his death and resurrection. Additionally, water baptism is for believers only, and there are no biblical grounds for baptizing infants. Thus, infant dedication should be undertaken instead. Since baptism is for believers, immersion should be the correct mode, keeping in line with the New Testament. As for the formula, the authors affirm Jesus’ command to baptize in the name of the triune God: “Church history confirms that baptism continued to be done in the Triune Name.”

In 1994, the official Assemblies of God *Systematic Theology* edited by Horton reiterates the positions of Menzies and Horton outlined in their *Bible Doctrines*. In that volume, Michael Dusing wrote the
chapter on the ordinances. According to Dusing, Christ instituted the ordinance of baptism, which is an act all Christians should do out of obedience. Repeating Menzies and Horton, Dusing affirms that baptism is about signifying identification with Christ. Overall Dusing states that baptism “symbolizes a great spiritual reality (salvation) which has revolutionized the life of a believer; nevertheless, the symbol itself should never be elevated to the level of that higher reality.”

**John Christopher Thomas**

In his monograph on footwashing, John Christopher Thomas, Clarence J. Abbott Professor of Biblical Studies at Pentecostal Theological Seminary, suggests that for the Johnannine community, footwashing was a rite that “signified for the forgiveness of post conversion sin.” In referring to baptism explicitly, Thomas notes that in the minds of many scholars, footwashing is closely associated with water baptism. This is due to several points found in John 13:1–20, especially. Thus, footwashing and water baptism share commonality as two “washing” sacraments. For Thomas, at least two dimensions of water baptism’s meaning may be realized from the Gospel of John. First, due to its apparent connection with John’s baptism, likely the rite indicated forgiveness of sin. Further, if the traditions about John are alike to those current in the Synoptic Gospels, “forgiveness of sin is at the heart of this baptism.” Second, baptism signifies entrance into the Kingdom of God due to a potential baptismal motif located in John 3:5. Both dimensions of baptism present in the Gospel of John—forgiveness of sin and entrance into the Kingdom of God—are also features noticeable in other early Christian groups.

**French L. Arrington**

For French Arrington, a Church of God (Cleveland, TN) minister and theologian, “the ordinances are not mere ceremony in worship by a means of real communion with God and of strengthening grace.” While the ordinances are not essential to salvation, they are important because Christ commanded them while also strengthening faith. When discussing water baptism, Arrington notes that immersion is the correct
mode for it “aptly symbolizes death and resurrection with Christ” as found in Romans 6.\textsuperscript{64} Arrington notes that Christ instituted baptism, and thus we should follow his example. It is also to be administered in the name of the triune God. And lastly, the conditions for baptism are “the hearing of the Word of God, repentance from sin, and faith in Jesus Christ.”\textsuperscript{65} Further, water cannot cleanse us of sin for only the Holy Spirit can do such a thing.

**Steven J. Land**

In his groundbreaking monograph, *Pentecostal Spirituality*, Steven Land—Professor of Pentecostal Theology and Spirituality at Pentecostal Theological Seminary—reinforces that the “ordinances” for early Pentecostals were “means of grace.”\textsuperscript{66} However, not only were the ordinances means of grace, so were “songs, testimonies, preaching, (and) prayer.”\textsuperscript{67} Due to early Pentecostals associating the word “sacrament” with Roman Catholicism, they used the word “ordinance” more often, even though as Land comments, the word “ordinance” is also not a biblical term. For Land, participating in the ordinances was to “do it unto the Lord . . . and he (Jesus) was present in, with, under, and through these acts.”\textsuperscript{68} When discussing baptism specifically, Land notes that it is not a saving sacrament of initiation, but a means of grace. Babies are not usually baptized but dedicated, because they are not lost if they die before water baptism. He also notes that rebaptism has historically been practiced in Pentecostal churches, following the convictions of the early Anabaptists. Further, water baptism does not save, for only the power of God unto salvation to everyone who believes saves. Lastly, baptism is a corporate act that was “the acceptance of the call to become a holy witness in the power of the Holy Spirit.”\textsuperscript{69}

**Frank D. Macchia**

Like Green notes in his review, few Pentecostals have made more imaginative contributions to sacramental theology than Frank Macchia, Professor of Theology at Vanguard University.\textsuperscript{70} Macchia has argued that, in spite of that fact that most Pentecostals at the popular level are uncomfortable with the term “sacrament,” Pentecostal spirituality is
thoroughly “sacramental” . . . “if the term is carefully defined.” This is expressed in the sacramental worldview of Pentecostals where visible and audible signs such as tongues speech and healing are normative. Therefore, he believes that it is time for Pentecostal theology to catch up to actual experience of ordinary Pentecostal believers.

Surprisingly Green’s review of Macchia’s sacramental theology fails to include arguably Macchia’s most popular monograph, *Baptized in the Spirit*. In it, addressing the issue of water baptism specifically, Macchia asserts that there exists a unique relationship between water and Spirit baptism. The difference between the baptisms of John and what endured in Christian communities is that John’s looked toward Spirit baptism, and Christian baptism “lives from it and points to its fulfillment.” Spirit baptism may not be consciously felt during conversion or water baptism, but if Spirit baptism is felt during those events, then the events cannot be defined outside of that experience. Therefore, water baptism and Spirit baptism are two different events that have different meanings, although the two events may happen simultaneously.

Water baptism is also a drama—an event that acts out the performance of salvation. Being buried with Christ in baptism means that our death is defined in solidarity with his death. To complete the drama, the baptized rises up from the water displaying newness of life stemming from Christ’s resurrection that fulfills the “reign of God on earth.” For Macchia, the regenerated life through the Spirit is not reliant upon the rite of water baptism, but he understands regeneration as somehow “fulfilled” in the dramatization of the act of baptism in the same way a wedding ceremony endorses and realizes a pledge between two people already committed in love. He notes that within this view, it is difficult to affirm infant baptism. Looking to Scripture, he comments, “the case for it from the New Testament is weak at best.”

Lastly, in relation to the baptismal context, he asserts that Trinitarians ought to recognize the Oneness baptisms in Jesus’ name since it at least implies “the role of Jesus as Savior in devotion to the Father in the power of the Spirit.” Moreover, due to the liberty of the Spirit in Spirit baptism, perfect form is not required, for what matters most is the sincerity of devotion to Christ. In other words, the church
does not administer Spirit baptism, but Spirit baptism administers the church, “even in its weakness, including its inadequate forms.” Lastly, in ecumenical hope, Macchia asserts that baptism can potentially unify communion between the churches.

Simon Tan

In a significant journal article, Assemblies of God minister and theologian Simon Tan calls for a reassessment of the practice of believers’ baptism in the Pentecostal tradition. In his article, he reviews and evaluates the historical arguments for pedobaptism and then seeks to show how the practice is consistent with biblical teachings and theological rationale. Most notably, Tan argues that believers’ baptism emphasizes the West’s obsession with individuality, which does not fit with Asian culture. While believers’ baptism emphasizes the faith response of the one being baptized, Tan contends that infant baptism (more rightly) emphasizes God’s grace acting on the individual’s life. In the end, for Tan, “the question is not whether or not we can prove theologically that infants should be included, but whether there are unimpeachable theological grounds for excluding them.” Tan then moves to discuss the practice of infant dedication, which originated in the eighteenth century. He states that this practice was formed before any robust theological justification. Considering this he asks, “does it really matter whether we practice infant dedication or infant baptism, and whether we use water or not?” Tan then argues for a sacramental understanding for baptism concluding that baptizing infants is an act of grace.

Amos Yong

Amos Yong, an ordained Assemblies of God minister and Director of the Center for Missiological Research and Professor of Theology and Mission at Fuller Seminary, has written about the sacrament of baptism in several of his monographs. First in his The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh, he seeks to propose a pneumatological theology of water baptism within his chapter “Pneumatological Ecclesiology.” Before dealing with
baptism specifically, he suggests that Pentecostal sacramentalism is founded on the reality of the Spirit’s manifestation within “material and embodied experiences” such as shouting, dancing, testimony, healings, and speaking in tongues.\(^8\) And while the sacraments have historically been understood as mediating the grace of God, for Yong this must be qualified, for they mediate grace “insofar as they provide ecclesial venues for the Spirit of God to accomplish the purposes of God among the people of God.”\(^9\) Thus, “Pentecostals can cease to be suspicious of sacramental language regarding water baptism.”\(^10\) First, this is because both biblical and patristic sources understand there to be a connection between water and Spirit baptism. Further, reception of the Spirit is a crucial part of water baptism, affirming the Syriac fathers in their assertion that baptism is a charismatic event. Thus, Yong asserts that the celebration of the rite should include the invocation of the Holy Spirit and there should be an expectation that the participant receives the gift of the Spirit.\(^11\)

After the publication of Green’s monograph (2014), Yong published his *Renewing Christian Theology*. In it, Yong again discusses the “ordinances and sacraments,” yet interestingly seems to arrive at different conclusions. In it he explains to the reader that Baptists and others in the Free Church tradition use the language of “ordinance” to reject intentionally the theology held about the “sacraments” in the Roman Catholic and Orthodox traditions. Yong understands, “Renewalists situated within the baptistic tradition” and thus all renewalists “oppose . . . sacramental interpretations and instead see both rites (water baptism and the Eucharist) as symbolic or memorial activities performed in obedience to Christ’s command.”\(^12\) While the basic thrust of ordinance language needs to be reaffirmed, the debates between ordinance and sacrament need fresh consideration. This is what he desires to do in his section on Christian initiation and water baptism.

Next, Yong gives a brief history of the church’s understanding of water baptism over the centuries. For “renewalists,” though, despite varying views globally, there are some things that all can affirm. For Yong, one of these is that baptism is the practice marking initiation into faith in Christ and into the church. And although renewalists need to be “fluid” in their expectations of the order of how the sacraments unfold,
“baptism in water” is usually “followed formally by the rite of baptism in the Holy Spirit.” In sum, in Yong’s *Renewing Christian Theology*, the ordinances or sacraments are “signs of the presence of the Spirit and of the coming reign of God,” thus symbolic in nature. As stated earlier, Yong’s latest work shows a departure from his earlier and fuller treatment of water baptism in his *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*.

Kenneth J. Archer

Following John Christopher Thomas’ call for a re-appropriation of the sacraments within the context of the fivefold gospel, Kenneth Archer, Professor of Theology at Southeastern University, has responded by constructing a “narrative-oriented elaboration and expansion” of his proposal by correlating sign with “fold.” What he terms “sacramental ordinances” are “community acts of commitment ordained by Christ as means of grace with particular symbolic significance for our Pentecostal identity (story) and faith journey (via salutis).”

In discussing water baptism, Archer discusses how through the rite we experience Jesus as savior. First, we are baptized out of obedience to Christ, which further proclaims one’s new identity with Christ and his community. He argues for believers’ baptism by immersion because it best reenacts the salvific experience of identifying with the death and resurrection of Christ. The act “recapitulates” the protection of Noah and his family from divine judgment and the miraculous exodus deliverance through the waters of the Red Sea. Thus, baptism is the sacrament that initiates “one into the corporate via salutis.” Lastly, water baptism also points to the ultimate redemption of creation and our glorification, for the community of faith is the eschatological community of God. As a result, we now “function as a redemptive sacrament for the world—the body of Christ broken for the healing of the nations.”

Simon Chan

Pentecostal theologian Simon Chan is chiefly concerned with Pentecostals experiencing “genuine traditioning” and an ecclesiology that supports such an effort. Thus, Pentecostals need to reexamine their ecclesiological framework by considering dialogue with
sacramental traditions, especially Eastern Orthodoxy. In his review, Green recognizes Chan’s sacramental understanding of Spirit baptism, “informed by sources of the classical Christian tradition.” Chan suggests that Pentecostals ought to understand Spirit baptism as the “actualization” of water baptism as a separate “part of the complex of conversion initiation,” but in Green’s words, not just merely a “superadditum.” Further, in Spirit baptism being the “actualization” of water baptism, “there is an awakening of the reality of God in such a manner that the religious affections are radically configured and transformed.” These affections are also “quickened, deepened, and intensified” to help give a Pentecostal “perspective of life.” This link between water baptism and Spirit baptism shows that baptism is not a “mere sign” within itself, but is an experience that is used by the Spirit to effect the reality in and by the sign. According to Chan, in the early church water baptism was “no dead ritual but a vibrant reality energized by the Spirit.” Thus, he calls the church back to embrace this perspective.

In a recent work, Chan addressed the wider evangelical community, “engaging with Pentecostalism indirectly.” In Chan’s words, “I sought to address this evangelical ecclesiological deficit and suggested how they might deal with it by revisioning their worship on a dogmatic foundation and learning from ancient liturgy.” Drawing from New Testament sources, Chan understands the flood (1 Pet 2:20–21) and the crossing of the Red Sea (1 Cor 10:2) to portray baptism as an event from death to life. However, baptism is not just merely concerned with the sin of the individual, either as cleansing from original sin or as a symbol of one’s sins already forgiven, but referencing Eastern Orthodox theologian Alexander Schmemann, Chan insists that it is a cosmic event (Col 1:13). This cosmic dimension of baptism means that the baptized is immersed into death and rises into new life in the new creation. Also, this cosmic emphasis also emphasizes “renunciations and exorcisms,” for by participating in these activities the church is “making a cosmic claim that God’s power has vanquished the enemy,” not on souls alone, but on all of creation. Thus, Chan argues for more of a sacramental understanding of water baptism in dialogue with the greater Christian tradition.
David K. Bernard

David Bernard, arguably the most significant voice in Oneness Pentecostal theology, currently is serving as the general superintendent of the United Pentecostal Church International, having published widely on a range of Oneness doctrinal issues. In several works, Bernard discusses how the distinctive “New Birth Doctrine” in Oneness theology has water baptism at the center. Thus, for Bernard “water baptism is part of the new birth” and significantly, baptism remits sin. Additionally, since Paul refers to only one baptism (Eph 4:5), the two baptisms by Spirit and water “are two parts of one whole.” And while some have collapsed the two into one event, Bernard advocates that the two cannot be equated although they “combine” to form one baptism.

Bernard defines water baptism as “a ceremony in which one who has repented of his sins is immersed in water in the name of Jesus for the remission of those sins. It is an act of faith in Jesus Christ.” Therefore, immersion is the only valid mode because that is the only mode the Bible explicitly records. According to Bernard, other modes and “nonbiblical practices” such as infant baptism, triple immersion by Trinitarians, and “postponement” baptism at the deathbed came about because of convenience later in Christian history. Those who advocate infant baptism “on the grounds that infants were circumcised in the Old Testament” are mistaken because “baptism is a spiritual and not physical circumcision.” Interestingly enough, despite Bernard’s rejection of infant baptism, he does articulate a covenantal understanding of baptism in continuity with Old Testament circumcision. In addition, though, there must be faith present because without faith, “baptism is meaningless.”

Water baptism and belief are both essential in salvation according to Mark 16:16, so we must not unlink baptism and belief in the promise of salvation. Bernard strives to show that this does not mean that scripture teaches “baptismal regeneration,” for the water and the ceremony do not hold the power to remit sins. It is by Christ’s work through our faith and done in the power of “The Name” that remits sin. This “theology of the Name” also requires “Christological baptismal
Baptism should be in the name of Jesus only. Baptism in the name of Jesus signifies that “we trust in Jesus alone as our Savior” while also demonstrating obedience to Scripture “over and above human tradition, convenience, or peer pressure.” In sum, Bernard articulates a sacramental understanding of water baptism within the greater Oneness doctrine of the “new birth.”

David Norris

Echoing Bernard’s earlier articulations, Oneness Pentecostal theologian David Norris understands water baptism to be a “real action of the holy God,” thus excluding both “superstitious and also purely symbolic meanings.” He argues that while the baptismal formula for Christian history has been in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, the earliest church “universally” baptized in Jesus’ name. Norris also asserts that repentance, faith, baptism, and the reception of the Spirit are elements of one experience of Christian initiation. According to Norris, this is because the first-century Christians did not think of faith in terms of a “punctiliar moment” but as something working in tandem with other elements of initiation. After surveying the book of Acts, he further demonstrates that profession of faith, baptism in Jesus’ name, and receiving the Spirit (which was accompanied with tongues), were all components of initiation into covenant. Therefore, Norris articulates a Oneness sacramental understanding of water baptism in Jesus’ name.

Wolfgang Vondey

As Green comments in his literature review, Wolfgang Vondey, Professor of Christian Theology and Pentecostal Studies at the University of Birmingham (UK), works from a “robustly sacramental view.” As Green observes, “all in all, Vondey’s is an expansive sacramental vision that extends beyond the rites of baptism and the Eucharist to include the church and indeed all creation.” For Vondey, the Eucharist and baptism are “conjoined.” Those who are drawn towards the Body of Christ and respond to the gospel in faith in the fellowship of the church should be baptized. In a real sense, the fellowship of the Eucharistic meal is “a reflection of and condition for the baptized life.”

Water Baptism in Pentecostal Perspective | Williams
remarks, “[Augustine] shows the eucharistic companionship as consisting of the experience of the whole life of faith, from conversion and exorcism to baptism with water, to the anticipation of what Pentecostals have termed the baptism of the Holy Spirit.” Therefore, baptism is related to the Eucharist in a unique way. Further, baptism as a sacrament captures a dynamic picture of the confrontation of human and divine realities in its coming together of both physical and spiritual dimensions. Lastly, since in baptism the sacramental “character is the seal imprinted on the soul,” this mark makes baptism unrepeatable.116

Daniel Tomberlin

Daniel Tomberlin, Instructor of Pastoral Ministries at Pentecostal Theological Seminary, advances a sacramental view of water baptism. As Green notes, he argues that Pentecostals should understand the sacraments as “real and really effective means of grace.” While he uses “means of grace” language, it is arguable that he advances a more sacramental worldview in his work. In responding to *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry (BEM)*, he notes that while it is impossible to speak of the Pentecostal perspective on water baptism, Pentecostals have surely theologized on the subject. In moving forward, Tomberlin suggests that the paradigm for a Pentecostal sacramental theology should be the Pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit. Pentecostalism is a physical spirituality—one that expects to encounter the living God. Thus, the presence of the Spirit is “manifested *materially*” since there is a causal relationship between the Spirit and matter in creation. Therefore, the Spirit of God rests “paraphysically” upon the material elements (in this case, water) and as a result Christ and the Spirit touch believers through the sacrament. Further, baptism is the rite of initiation into the body of Christ. In baptism water is not merely a metaphor for the Spirit, “but a material agent upon which the Spirit moves, touches, and anoints.” It conveys a “salvific grace” because of a real “Christo-Pneumatic presence” that cleanses and sanctifies. In the spiritual bath, there is symbolism of the drama of one’s new life in Christ as well as an anticipation of the new creation.

Since Tomberlin understands water baptism as an act of faith, he
asserts that Pentecostals must consider the legitimacy of infant baptism, since it reflects the faith of the believing community. For Tomberlin, the issue needing attention in infant baptism is “salvific efficacy.” He suggests—alongside his Wesleyan roots—that prevenient grace “may be a way forward.” While some may object to the fact that infants cannot “know” God, Tomberlin states that since God knows all infants while in utero, God’s act of knowing is efficacious. This emphasizes, then, water baptism to be “proleptic, even prophetic.” Water baptism is more than just a spiritual washing, but an opportunity to experience the ecstasy of the Spirit, where manifestations of the diverse charismata are expected. It is important to note that along with BEM, he affirms that baptism is a one-time event, but embracing “subsequent salvific movements of the Spirit of grace” can constantly reaffirm it, footwashing serving as an example of one.

Chris E. W. Green

Chris Green, Professor of Theology at Southeastern University, works from a sacramental framework in his theology. While his published doctoral thesis explores the Lord’s Supper, he explicitly devotes attention to water baptism in his monograph, Sanctifying Interpretation. For Green, just as God’s people feast in the presence of their enemies and are called to “love toward reconciliation with God in Christ” at the Eucharistic table, so are they joined in solidarity in the waters of baptism, considering Israel’s passage through the Red Sea. In other words, “God’s chosen people join the damned.” Further, articulating a covenantal baptism also ought to be understood as circumcision. In baptism, “we once and for all put off the body of the flesh (Col. 2.10–12)” and are then as a result freed to live life in Christ.

Primarily in baptism, we are “restored to our calling, re-fashioned in Christ’s priestly image” for displaying Christ to the world and offering the world to God. Too often Pentecostals associate baptism merely with repentance, regeneration, conversion, and forgiveness of sins rather than understanding that the “mystery of baptism” graces the people of God to share in the “reality of Christ’s own life and lived experiences.” Water baptism marks the beginning of our journey
with God because it is the means he uses to anoint us as co-participants into Jesus’ kingdom work. Baptism is an acceptance to become a holy witness to Christ in the power of the Spirit. Thus, salvation and mission are inexplicably joined. Given this “inseparability” . . . “we have to re-imagine our theology and practice of water baptism accordingly.”

Therefore, while Green does not give a treatise on water baptism specifically, his comments on the rite are keeping in line with his sacramental articulations of the Lord’s Supper.

**Conclusions**

In sum, a thorough review of the scholarly descriptive accounts surrounding water baptism exposes that traditionally trinitarian Pentecostals have understood water baptism to be “symbolic.”

Interestingly though, some scholarly trinitarian descriptive accounts note a rich sacramentalism embedded in Pentecostal spirituality (Albrecht, Alexander, Cartledge) that is (incoherently) assigned to certain spaces (altar) and not others (table, baptismal).

The survey of prescriptive accounts has also shown this to be generally true for Pentecostal scholars constructing theology (Myers, Duffield/VanCleave, Horton/Menzies/Dusing). And while most of the prescriptive accounts articulate a “symbolic” view of the bath, other prescriptive accounts have tended to articulate a “means of grace” position that reflects the Wesleyan/Holiness roots of the Pentecostal movement (Arrington, Land, Archer). However, neither of these positions have considered the support that Pentecostal spirituality has shown to rich sacramental practice and theology. Still, some trinitarian Pentecostal theologians are beginning to (re)discover a sacramental quality of Pentecostal spirituality and apply this to their reflections on the Lord’s Supper and baptism (Chan, Tomberlin, Green). Nonetheless, the review of literature exposes that this is a relatively new development, which is not unusual for the fledgling discipline of Pentecostal theology.

Lastly, Oneness baptismal sources, both descriptive and prescriptive, uniformly express a sacramental view towards baptism.

In response to this recent development within trinitarian
Pentecostal baptismal theology, one might consider that there are fresh dialogue opportunities for trinitarian and Oneness Pentecostals to engage in, even on such a historically divisive issue. This also presents opportunities for trinitarian Pentecostal scholars to construct theologies of water baptism that take into account the support that Pentecostal spirituality has shown to rich sacramental practice. Therefore, in response to these findings, perhaps it would be prudent to take heed of Sandidge’s and Robeck’s suggestion not to “overlook the real presence of the Sovereign whose death, burial, and resurrection are remembered (anamnesis) in the act of obedience” when constructing Pentecostal theological accounts on water baptism. In sum, it is my hope that this examination assists Pentecostal scholars in those future endeavors.

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Notes

1 See Chris E. W. Green, Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Lord’s Supper: Foretasting the Kingdom (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2012), 5–73.
2 Although Green excludes Oneness Pentecostal authors from his review, at times he engages Charismatic ones. In this review, I will do the opposite due to the historical importance of the issue of water baptism in early Pentecostalism and word count limitations. However, I will engage Charismatic voices when they speak descriptively of classical Pentecostals. Thus, my review will be limited to classical North American Pentecostal work, excluding the wider Charismatic movements.
3 At times I will be engaging Green’s work on sources, giving due credit for his prior engagement.
4 Green, Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Lord’s Supper, 6.
14 Hunter, “Reflections by a Pentecostalist on Aspects of BEM,” 335.
16 Harold D. Hunter, “Ordinances, Pentecostal,” in *New International Dictionary of the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements*, eds. Stanley M. Burgess and Eduard M. van der Maas (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2002), 947, 949. While Hunter personally appears to be open to a more sacramental understanding, his descriptive account falls more in line with a more symbolic understanding.
19 Bicknell, “The Ordinances,” 207.
22 Albrecht, *Rites in the Spirit*, 132.
23 Albrecht, *Rites in the Spirit*, 125.
25 Green, *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Lord’s Supper*, 60.
28 Green, *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Lord’s Supper*, 69.
34 Pearlman, *Knowing the Doctrines of the Bible*, 356.
38 Williams, *Systematic Theology III*, 151.
40 Tomlinson, *Basic Bible Beliefs*, 19. Tomlinson fails to provide a commentary on what is meant for Christ to fulfill all righteousness.
44 Slay, *This We Believe*, 103.
45 Slay, *This We Believe*, 104.
46 Slay, *This We Believe*, 99.
47 Slay, *This We Believe*, 100.
55 Bond, “‘What Is Distinctive about Pentecostal Theology,’” 139.
57 Menzie and Horton, Bible Doctrines, 111–12.

58 Menzie and Horton, Bible Doctrines, 115.


60 Green, Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Lord’s Supper, 24; John Christopher Thomas, Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community (London; New York: T&T Clark, 2004), 172.

61 Thomas, Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community, 176.

62 Thomas, Footwashing in John 13 and the Johannine Community, 176. Thomas also cites the following scriptural references for examples of other Christian circles affirming these two dimensions of baptism: 1 Cor 12:13; Gal 3:27; Acts 2:38; 13:24; 19:4; 22:16; 1 Pet 3:21; Titus 3:5.


64 Arrington, Christian Doctrine, 3:209.


66 Steven J. Land, Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2010), 109.

67 Land, Pentecostal Spirituality, 137.

68 Land, Pentecostal Spirituality, 112.

69 Land, Pentecostal Spirituality, 110. While Land speaks descriptively at times, it is important to note that he is speaking descriptively in order to resource his prescriptive work.

70 Green, Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Lord’s Supper, 35.


72 Frank Macchia, Baptized in the Spirit (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2006), 249.

73 Macchia, Baptized in the Spirit, 249.

74 Macchia, Baptized in the Spirit, 249. Further, Macchia believes infant baptism ceases to make baptism a true embodiment of the gospel and undermines the relationship between divine initiative and human response in salvation. In Macchia’s words, baptism becomes a “divine embrace without the proper correlative response and performance by the one participating in the Spirit of a new life through baptism.” Faith is also vital for the participant in baptism, for no faith of the church or parents can make up for the lack of conscious faith by the one being baptized. While he acknowledges that the fact that infant baptism is reality not without value, baptism upon profession of faith gives the best possibility of embodying the truth of salvation in Christ. See Macchia, Baptized in the Spirit, 250.

75 Macchia, Baptized in the Spirit, 251.
78 Tan, “Reassessing Believer’s Baptism,” 229.
80 Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2005), 156.
81 Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 156.
82 Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, 160.
86 Throughout *Renewing Christian Theology*, Yong weaves between speaking descriptively and prescriptively. His methodological use of “The World Assemblies of God Fellowship Statement of Faith” provides the rationale behind this. While Yong speaks descriptively much more in *Renewing Christian Theology* than he does in *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh*, I do not believe that this point of difference can account for the latter departure from his earlier work.
88 Archer, “Nourishment for our Journey,” 79.
89 Archer, “Nourishment for our Journey,” 91.
90 Archer, “Nourishment for our Journey,” 91.
93 Green, *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Lord’s Supper*, 55.
94 Chan, *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition*, 71; Green, *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Lord’s Supper*, 55.
95 Chan, *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition*, 71.
96 Chan, *Pentecostal Theology and the Christian Spiritual Tradition*, 71.
98 Green, *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Lord’s Supper*, 55.
100 Chan, *Liturgical Theology*, 118.
113 Vondey, *People of Bread*, 287.
114 Vondey, *People of Bread*, 287.
117 Green, *Toward a Pentecostal Theology of the Lord’s Supper*, 70.
118 For instance, he states that in the “waters of the baptismal pool” the baptized person personally encounters the Spirit in a real way. See Daniel Tomberlin, *Pentecostal Sacraments: Encountering God at the Altar* (Cleveland, TN: Center for Pentecostal Leadership and Care, 2010), 82.
126 Green, Sanctifying Interpretation, 24.
127 Green, Sanctifying Interpretation, 65.
128 Green, Sanctifying Interpretation, 12.
129 Green, Sanctifying Interpretation, 13.
130 Green, Sanctifying Interpretation, 15.
131 One might also suggest that traditionally trinitarian Pentecostals have explicitly claimed water baptism to be symbolic while there is an implicit understanding of it as sacramental.
132 One might also consider that these voices are putting to words what has been practiced and implied in their theologies. Particularly, the presence and activity of the Spirit in all things suggests an implicitly sacramental view.
133 This would be in keeping with the previous dialogues that have taken place in years past. See “Oneness-Trinitarian Pentecostal Final Report,” Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies 30 (2008), 203–24.
Boletín Hechos is a theological journal in Spanish. It is edited by Miguel Álvarez and Geir Lie. This journal is poised to serve the academic needs of Latin America and its diaspora throughout the world. This theological bulletin gives voice to the Pentecostal Movement. As such, Hechos appeals to academicians, students, pastors and lay people with a keen interest in Latin America and theological issues of interest among Latinos and Latinas.

To acquire a copy of Hechos, one may search on Amazon for HECHOS: Una Perspectiva Pneumatológica: Vol. 1 No. 1 Enero 2019 (Spanish Edition).

There is also a digital version available online http://www.akademiaforlag.no/hechos/
This article accepts that twentieth-century classical Pentecostalism originally shared a similar ethos to that exemplified among the South German Anabaptists, and investigates some resonances in ecclesiology between the two. Scrutiny of a selection of early sixteenth-century documents relating to Anabaptism identifies the following: a radically consistent application of sola scriptura, a rejection of the state-church synthesis, a revisioning of sacramental belief and practice that subverts the clergy-laity divide, commitment to the teachings of Jesus as the primary and central guide to discipleship, a sacrificial pilgrim mentality of “just passing through this world,” individual choice and responsibility to follow Jesus, confident personal witness to the goodness and salvation of the Lord, and some level of demonstration of the charismatic gifts. Early Pentecostalism resonated with all these themes, although it developed a more detailed and sophisticated biblical and theological understanding of the charismatic aspects. However, present-day popular Pentecostalism, especially but not exclusively in the West, appears to demonstrate in its implied ecclesiology a number of dissonances from all of these elements, which may indicate a significant divergence from the original ethos of the movement and present major future challenges to its authentic and consistent continuation and self-propagation.
Introduction

The Anabaptists were for centuries the forgotten people of the Reformation. Like the Celtic *peregrini* before them, they were a dangerous irritant in the cogs of those “official” religious processes of a Europe that sought a new religious settlement—a settlement based on a post-Constantinian model of the Christian church as the religious arm of the state. Established Christianity was emerging in Europe as Roman, English, Lutheran, or Calvinist, with no room for a transnational grassroots pilgrim people who were socially, politically, and theologically lightweight compared to the caste, influence, and erudition of this mainstream.

Yet in the present-day post-Christian and post-Christendom social order, these disparate nonconformists are now enjoying a more objective and favorable revisioning. John Howard Yoder’s 1965 endorsement of Pentecostalism as the ideological and theological heirs of Anabaptism was soon buttressed by Reformed theologian Jürgen Moltmann’s preference for an Anabaptist ethos in his own ecclesiology.¹ Pentecostal scholarship itself, initially uncritical of the adverse picture of Anabaptism gained from their own university mentors, is revisiting its Anabaptist heritage, recognizing its influence in developing the ethos of the movement’s later precursors.²

Phenomenological studies in social and historical research depict a group with arguably the earliest radically modernizing influence in post-Reformation Europe. Implicit in the Anabaptist ethos was an economic and political subversion of late feudalism in both state and church, a modern democratic vision of human governance as the realm of consenting equals³ and not of privileged patrons and subservient clients. They viewed the church as a family, as a circle of friends, as an egalitarian partnership of everyone, involved implicitly and explicitly in aggressive evangelism and mission. While many were not consciously political in their own aspiration or self-understanding, they implied in wider society a corresponding view of human relationships. This religious and social vision influenced the political development of the United States of America. Summarily rejected and stifled in sixteenth-century Europe, it bore its trans-Atlantic fruit in the development of a
consistent democracy that predated that of the Mother of Parliaments by some 150 years.

This paper focuses on one aspect of this new approach: the coherence between the Anabaptist view of Christian community and the present-day Pentecostal, a study in historical and contemporary ecclesiology. The Anabaptists in this overview are primarily the more quietist South German variety, rather than the more militant revolutionary or prophetic groups who adopted such strident roles in politics and civic structures.

Yoder’s comment led me to Anabaptist studies from which emerged a depiction of a movement so close in form and ideology to my own South African classical Pentecostal background that not only do I personally uphold his assertion, but also assign primacy to the Anabaptists and Moravians in my own understanding of the theological and social roots of Pentecostalism. Today it seems especially true of the first two generations of Pentecostalism that emerged after the second World War in the Global South among Latin Americans, Africans, and Asians. Anabaptist ecclesiology resonates with my own received and lived ecclesiology.

I limit my representation of Anabaptism to the first generation in the Reformation, and primarily the South German/Swiss groups, known collectively as the Swiss Brethren. I have based my analysis of their ecclesiological ethos on two summarizing documents of the period: the well-known Schleitheim Confession and a lesser known tract The Answer of Some Who Are Called (Ana) Baptists as to Why They Do not Attend the Churches,\(^4\) dated between the Zopfingen (1532) and Berne (1538) disputations. That summary is largely confirmed by their opponents, as expressed in a third document issued by the Luneburg consensus of 1536 that articulates the church-state’s rationale for prosecuting and executing Anabaptists.\(^5\)

The Basis of Anabaptist Ecclesiology

The Anabaptists did not produce statesmen and scholars of the recognition and stature of Luther, Calvin, Melanchthon, or Cranmer. They were motivated principally by principles and aspirations derived
from their reading of the Bible and from shared personal religious experience. From this emerged two major pragmatic thrusts: a striving for authentic discipleship of Jesus Christ and a commitment to effective personal witness in the world. To follow Jesus, their key text was the Sermon on the Mount; to witness effectively they invoked commissioning texts such as Matthew 28:19 and Acts 1:8. They were essentially primitivist, viewing the pre-Constantinian period as the time of the most authentic Christianity, with some particularly impressed by Tertullian’s robust response to the charismatic and ethical decline of the late second-century church.

On such a basic philosophical and pragmatic framework they developed and maintained a coherent set of theological principles. Some were explicitly expressed, others implicitly demonstrated—in either case they were discernible and authoritative within their own self-understanding and mission.

**Consistent Application of the Principle of *Sola Scriptura***

The Anabaptists’ most commonly-expressed accusation of the “official” Reformers was that leaders such as Luther and Zwingli had balked at recognizing and implementing the full radical implications of *sola scriptura*. To posit, as Luther courageously did, that the argument from Scripture trumped the arguments of Roman churchmen was all very well. But to refuse to implement this to its radical conclusion was unforgiveable. They were unable to condone what they saw as the triumph of pragmatic political considerations over clear biblical principle. Erudite theologians such as Zwingli may even have secretly agreed with Anabaptist conclusions on baptism, sacraments, and church-state relations, but seemed convinced that any group implementing them would receive short shrift from the princes, bishops, nobility, and gentry. To the Anabaptists this was nothing less than craven capitulation to the threat and monopoly (or temptations!) of secular and religious power, contempt for the price that Jesus himself had paid when spurned by the powerful of his own day. There was no greater distinction than to suffer the same rejection as he; the alternative was human hubris—and cowardice—at its worst.
The Anabaptists were *radical*. They had no desire to implement a cosmetic modification to Christian faith and community. Their consistent application of Scripture led them to conclude that the authentic church consisted solely of those who allied themselves with Jesus Christ by personal choice, those who accepted the challenges this presented not only to their identity but also to their personal survival. One entered the pathway of discipleship through a door and by means of a way that could only be discovered by means of a personal response to the demands of Christ upon them. In such a “believers church” community there could be no other door, least of all a sacramental door, and still less a sacrament considered efficacious for infants who could not yet exercise their own choice to follow Jesus.

This commitment to applying an exegesis of Scripture “all the way,” with no consideration for implications or personal cost, implied an ecclesiology unlike any encountered in Europe since the eclipse of the Celtic groups. Perhaps implicit in the views of Wycliffe and in the message of Hus in Prague, it was the Anabaptists who brought it to full public expression in those tumultuous early decades of the Reformation, with awful consequences for themselves. As far as Europe was concerned, this was an ecclesiology to be excluded and marginalized, even exiled or eradicated. For much of North America it became a social ideal as well as a mainstream ecclesiology.

**Rejection of the State-Church Synthesis**

The secular state might be God-ordained, according to Scripture, for the sake of peace and stability, but it remained precisely that: secular. The church of Jesus Christ was part of a Kingdom “not of this world,” as attested by Jesus before Pilate. A state that trespassed upon the life of the church was meddling where it ought not, and a church in partnership with the state was a church that was seduced by “the things of the world.” In terms of community, the divide between the sacred and the profane—at least the politically profane—was absolute. This dualism of church and world was to them firmly established in the text: the church could exist for God or it could exist for Caesar, but not for both.
The Anabaptists developed their social hermeneutic at a time when the worst excesses of the church-state synthesis were evident. They shared the disgust and hostility of the initial Reformers for the toxic effects of the combination of spiritual, political, and economic authority so flagrantly demonstrated at the time. They yearned to put to the test “a more excellent way,” to demonstrate the benefits of an open, free, unconstrained Christian community, beneficial not only to the disciples of Jesus but also for wider society. As forcefully as they rejected the legitimacy of cozy cooperation between church and secular power did they reject the role of hierarchies and a powerful elite in the church itself. Their egalitarian impulse may have been developed primarily from their biblical theology, but its implications for the organization of wider society were also clear. It made perfect sense for the established church and state to turn on this new revolutionary upstart and jointly rend it, as its most basic beliefs denied their synthesis any legitimacy before either God or humanity. Indeed, even the radicals’ option for non-violent dissent subverted the state’s sense of self-importance.

At the heart of this aspect of Anabaptist ecclesiology was that the church was not so much an organization or institution in society, but an organism: individuals and groups of people organically linked in their common attempt to live within society reflecting an alternative set of values to normal secular “business as usual,” as an alternative society, not just one more complacent element of “normal” social order. Indeed, their appeal may have included the powerful human attraction to “disruptors” of any aggressively dominant and complacent social consensus.

Radical Reconsideration of the Nature and Role of Sacraments and of Sacramental Views of Grace and Salvation

Anabaptists could find but two ordinances of Christ in the Scriptures: the immersion of new converts in water (some Anabaptists practiced “pouring” rather than immersion, but Zwingli’s practice of execution of Anabaptists by drowning may indicate that immersion was most common), and a believers’ meal commemorating Christ’s crucifixion. For them sola scriptura dispensed with more than a thousand years of development in sacramental theology, and with it the necessity for a
separate class of clergy. Moreover, the notion that water, wine, or bread could under any circumstances produce a real effect, be it spiritual, metaphysical, or physical, was to them ludicrous. (If some believed in baptismal regeneration, perhaps this over-evaluation was the result of the high price they paid in dissenting from the mainstream view?) In this they demonstrated an astounding (and costly) commitment to a radically modern view of reality. In their age they were perhaps the most resolute in identifying and purging any trace of superstition not only from religion but also from daily profane processes.

This rejection of sacramental thinking implied a radical deconstruction of the most powerful arm of contemporary religion—the clergy. Their stance eradicated any requirement for a priestly or episcopalian class and by definition therefore for a Pontifex Maximus. Since this class formed the religious equivalent of feudal secular nobility and gentry, their simple theological decision radically subverted the cogency of the entire established social order of the day. Even Protestant rulers such as Zwingli realized the implications of this and reacted forcefully against it. Anabaptists were clearly treasonous, subverting the right of the state and church to manage in concert the civil affairs of society. The unbaptized could not be citizens; therefore parents refusing this rite for their children were clearly subverting the state and implicitly forming an alternative society.

The ecclesiological implications of this subversion of sacramentalism affected both liturgy and church governance. The gathering of the faithful was now viewed as “play” rather than “performance,” mutual participation rather than a single performer conducting a ritual into which the larger gathering might be sporadically co-opted. Their church governance was similarly egalitarian, its rejection of formal clergy permitting a pragmatic approach to who would take leadership, when, for what, and for how long.

**Literal and Consistent Application of the Teaching of Jesus, Especially as Recorded in the Sermon on the Mount**

The Anabaptists maintained a clear distinction between what Jesus taught, and what the other New Testament writers had taught or
derived from his teaching. While the words of the Apostles and their generation were revered, the values and behaviors that ideally marked the Christian disciple were pre-eminently those enunciated by the Master himself. How to follow Jesus Christ in the world today was explained in the words of Jesus himself.\(^{10}\)

This commitment produced a community of individuals who were by and large pacifist, while subject to and indeed appreciative of secular authorities as agents of peace and stability.\(^{11}\) They rejected not only hierarchies among themselves, but also the aspiration to hold or exercise power over one another. Their commitment to Jesus as their only Lord, to call none other Lord or Master or Father, implied a subversion of the prerogatives, rights, and powers of the secular and ecclesial lords. They did not need overtly to agitate against the powers of the day; their private and communal confession demonstrated their “disrespect” for the demands of the powers. Their pacifist submission to the authorities as agents of God for the good order of society did not mitigate this offense, since their belief system implied rejection of secular rulers who claimed allegiance to their persons and not just their role.\(^{12}\)

While they did not reject the basic elements of the economy such as money and the marketplace, they did refuse to take an oath, oaths of obedience and fealty as well as oaths taken in commercial transactions. This was a radical economic choice, since a largely illiterate common market required verbal oaths to seal contracts. While Anabaptists placed themselves outside of common economic process, they actually implied a radical subversion of that process, a stance that “responsible” social powers could not ignore. With their rejection of infant baptism, this commitment placed the entire group outside the pale of accepted social conduct and political compliance, and condemned vast numbers to persecution and execution by the powers of Christendom. Even popular culture labelled them troublemakers, subversives who demonstrated no respect for the established order, using even derision to deny them any right to a rational hearing or response.

This view of themselves in the world undergirded their self-identification with Jesus, a band of disciples, siblings, friends, and partners following in the footsteps of a single Master. From such a
context would emerge an understanding of “One Lord, one Faith, one Baptism” that was radically different to that of the established Christian churches around them.

A Pilgrim Mentality—This World Is not Our Home, We Are Just Passing Through

The Anabaptists were marked by their eschatological hope, demonstrating an existential and cosmological apocalypticism. The radical transformation that took place when they encountered Jesus foreshadowed an apocalyptic end to the “heavens and the earth,” and a final judgement where each would be rewarded or punished by God.

While the Jesus they followed had called them in a very real world, they remained committed to storing “treasure in heaven” rather than on earth. Persecution was seen as entirely normal for this portion of the journey. So they remained true to Jesus as disciples even in the face of discrimination, imprisonment, torture, and death. Some derived their hermeneutical key to text and history from Tertullian, who heaped scorn on those who attempted to flee persecution by migrating from town to town, or to avoid it with compromise. The certainty of hearing their Lord say “Well done!” overcame attachment to secular and temporal trappings.

Yet within the world they were not unrealistically otherworldly. They displayed a definitive Protestant work ethic, perhaps the earliest of the Reformation. Where they were faced by the realities, challenges, and demands of physical, economic, and social reality, they did not adopt the Thessalonian approach of doing nothing “until the Lord returns,” but the more incarnational approach of “occupy until I come,” of “work now for the night comes when no one can work.” The material world was created by God, was pronounced “good.” So they demonstrated a responsible approach to agriculture and husbandry, to financial and social resources, and to compassionate care for one another and even friends and neighbors. Money and possessions were not intrinsically evil, but could become a distracting focus from their commitment to Jesus himself. What they put their hand to,
they did with all their energy simply to please the Master and earn his commendation. They approached the material plane as *stewards* rather than as *owners*.

Following Jesus was both an individual commitment and a communal one. They could follow even if they walked alone on the pathway, but they would also follow as a community of co-pilgrims marching together with one purpose. They would follow as families when they could, but alone if they had to. They did not walk in mystical otherworldly isolation, but witnessed fervently and convincingly to those they encountered along the way. And they exhorted and assisted one another as they went.¹⁵ Those who shared their pilgrimage were to them their friends, their siblings, their partners. It was this sense of mutual eternal destination and evangelical commitment that provided much of the glue that welded them together as a united church.¹⁶

Such a pilgrim mentality relativized the assumptions and demands of human powers and rulers. As demonstrated later in America, and as noted even earlier in some Anabaptists in the train of Cromwell in England,¹⁷ this became a powerfully democratizing principle where allegiance could be given to an *abstract* (such as democracy, the people, the Constitution, parliament, the monarchy, etc.) rather than to a specific person or personality. Rulers themselves came to be viewed as subject to this abstraction rather than autonomous as ruling lords who could demand unconditional allegiance and fealty. For them the role of rulers was to serve rather than to rule. This pilgrim mentality was one of the most significant underpinnings of the modernizing democratic principle.

**Individual Responsibility to Choose to Follow Jesus, and to Maintain Authentic Witness and Lifestyle in the Face of Threats, Distractions, and Temptations**

Anabaptists rejected any collectivistic basis for salvation or pilgrimage. Individuals were responsible for their own choice to follow Jesus, and for working out their own pathway with him. They had the responsibility to maintain and guard their own personal commitment and loyalty to the master. This was not lonely individualism, although history demonstrates that when driven into isolation from friends, family, and
other pilgrims they were still able to stand in prophetic solitude. On the basis of the biblical text, of which even the simplest of them seemed to demonstrate remarkable knowledge and insight,¹⁸ they were able to adopt Jesus, John the Baptist, the apostles, and the Old Testament prophets as their role models and examples. By preference they would live and walk the pilgrim pathway with like-minded others, as a community of believers, but in the absence of such a fellowship they acknowledged their individual responsibility to stand tall for the Master.

This was a rejection of the notion that personal salvation was the gift and provenance of the church as institution, granted to those who submitted themselves to the gracious ministry of the church that dispensed to them the grace and wisdom of God. They had no truck with *extra ecclesiam nulla salus*. They rejected the need for a mediatory ecclesiastical priesthood, preferring what came to be known as “the priesthood of all believers.” They were demonstrably Protestant in this respect, and more radically so than many of their more cautious “official” Protestant fellows.

It also associated them with that stream of Renaissance thought that was humanist, the notion that each human being not only had intrinsic individual significance but that all claims of the powerful (individual or collective) over the body, mind, or efforts of another person were illegitimate. Unlike those secular humanists who considered each individual to be ontologically and morally autonomous, the Anabaptists affirmed the right and suzerainty of the one true God and Jesus his Son and their Lord over every human being. The Lord had the right to demand of all people that they repent and turn to him, and to reward or punish according to the individual’s response. It is this philosophical distinction that has become a central perspective in the present-day contrast between post-Enlightenment secular humanism and Judaeo-Christian evangelical theological anthropology. In what was still effectively a largely feudal social environment, this assertion of individual choice, right, and responsibility was political and social hubris of the worst order and inevitably evoked stern opposition from the powerful.
Confident and Intense Witness to Others of the Goodness and Salvation of the Lord

The Anabaptists were not only evangelical but also fervently evangelistic. Within their own culture they were essentially the earliest Protestant missionaries; they understood that they bore a powerful and challenging message that at an existential level confronted every one of their families, friends, neighbors, and fellow citizens—their fellow human beings. This ethos later found wider international and transcultural implementation in the first major coherent group of their ideological heirs—the Moravians. Their message was more than “turn or burn.” It was also saturated with the promise and hope of the goodness of God demonstrated in Jesus. It was not the fear of hell that inspired them to endure torture and the cruellest of executions; it was a conviction similar to that of Polycarp: We have served him and he has done us no harm, only good, so why should we deny him now?

As the maturing Reformation progressed into a struggle of competing confessions and church structures, the Anabaptists offered an existential alternative: a personal encounter with God that would transform and bless each life and the personal, domestic, and social context in which they lived. Their allegiance was not to content of confession or shape of church and ritual, but to Jesus himself, the Lord who had transformed them. They did not die as champions of the Reformation but as personal servants of the Lord. It was this intense personal conviction and expression that disturbed the other Reformers and came to be labelled sectarian. Ecclesiologically it was yet again revolutionary; by implication the true church now came to be seen as a product not an agent, an effect not a cause. The church could no longer be viewed as the custodian of God’s goodness, to be dispensed to the complacent faithful by word and by sacrament. For them the church was a repository, the collection of those who had had a personal transforming encounter with God and had now been immersed by his Spirit into the resulting community. The church was neither agent nor mediator. Indeed, they appear to have been evangelistic Christians who belonged to a community rather than an evangelistic community
comprised of individual members; it was the receiving community for each new believer who brought with them their own personal giftings, to the benefit of the others.

**Appropriation and Expression of Charismatic Gifts and Power to Witness**

The attractively simple division of the Anabaptists into quietist and pietistic communities (e.g., the southern groups) versus the activist and charismatic revolutionaries (mainly of the north) may also be a simplistic division. History clearly remembers the most visible and prominent charismatics as those who undertook or promoted either violent revolution (such as Moltmann’s favorite, Thomas Munzer) or claimed ecclesial and civil authority on the basis of their prophetic commissioning (Zwickau and Munster.) The question to what extent wider Anabaptism was also intrinsically charismatic (Pentecostal?) is far more complex and nuanced. The enthusiasts who demonstrated extremist and catastrophic impulses were perhaps exceptions rather than the rule, since many others also testified to discernible charismatic gifting and effect. Prophecy according to the 1 Corinthians 14 pattern seemed to be fairly common in their gatherings. While dramatic healing, exorcism, and glossolalia are less widely reported, immediate divine guidance and miraculous protection were common testimony.\(^{19}\)

Anabaptist affinity for the views of Tertullian also embraced his later Montanist convictions, when he was concerned with the diminishing of charismatic expression and experience, implying they had a similar concern for the restoration of personal charismatic experience and witness. Their recorded response to the irresponsible enthusiasm of the militants parallels that of the twentieth-century Pentecostal community, which has had to deal with similar enthusiastic tendencies in the first decades, such as the Latter Rain prophetic movement of the 1920s that declared “Bible or no Bible, this is what the *Spirit* says!” The question was not the authenticity of regular experience of charismatic gifts; it was inauthentic expression of such gifting within the community and in wider society. Their response was not a retreat (such as Calvin’s) into cessationism, but a measured reflection on the nature of authentic expressions of charismatic
gifts and fervor. They urged caution with regard to the charismatic gifts but without disparaging, discouraging, or rejecting them.

The ecclesiological assumption of Anabaptists that every member of the church was a valid “player” indicates a community where overtly charismatic experiences and phenomena would not be exceptional or counterintuitive. Whether this indicates that in the early sixteenth century they saw themselves as a charismatic community may be more than the evidence demands. Certainly the Quakers later demonstrated a conscious effort to exist as such and to display a distinctive phenomenology of the Spirit’s presence among them.

Kraus summed up this Anabaptist ethos as a radical, Jesus-centered, martyr (witnessing) movement. As I argued in my research on Pentecostal hermeneutics, this description resonates with the values and phenomena encountered in the Western classical Pentecostal movement in its first six or seven decades, and the movement in the Global South in its first two generations at least. In the next section I aim to reflect on whether or how the elements I have elucidated above, in the light of Kraus’s summary, are encountered in the history and present-day presentation of Pentecostalism.

**Pentecostal Reflection on This Basis and Resonance in Its Own History and Ethos**

I approached this research with two questions: first, was Yoder correct in his assumption that Pentecostalism was a more accurate reflection of the Anabaptist ethos than even his own Mennonite church? And second, is Kraus’s depiction of sixteenth-century Anabaptism as a radical, Jesus-centered, martyr movement a credible reflection of the historical witness?

In earlier research I extrapolated the following elements of Pentecostal self-understanding: In the light of these insights it is possible to distinguish some basic elements of an ethos that is typified in Pentecostalism. It could be adequately summarized as a radical (apocalyptic, obedient, discipleship), Jesus-centered (the Foursquare formula), martyr (sacrificial, urgent witnessing, missionary) movement (not sectarian, but also not nationally,
culturally, politically, nor liturgically coherent as a single denomination.)\textsuperscript{22}

It therefore seems safe to assert that Pentecostalism did (at least in its first decades) demonstrate an ethos, self-understanding, and view of church and society that resonated with similar aspects of Anabaptism.\textsuperscript{23} However, in terms of church organization, Pentecostalism has not demonstrated consistent ecclesiological assumptions across the movement. The earliest Pentecostals had not intended to develop separately from their host groups, and it was primarily as a response to intense and consistent hostility from these mainly evangelical and Holiness groups that distinct Pentecostal denominations emerged.\textsuperscript{24} They therefore organized themselves according to one of two major rationales: they simply retained the structure of the group they emerged from, or they attempted to develop a radically different organizing ethos often based on personalities and/or theories of prophetic or apostolic leadership. It was primarily in their liturgy, mission, ethos, and evangelizing models, rather than their formal organization, that the Pentecostal ethos emerged so distinctively. Comparisons between Pentecostalism and Anabaptism regarding church organization will also always be bedevilled by the massive difference in sociocultural contexts: late feudalism versus early modernity.

Significant Pentecostal departures or modifications of the wider free-church ethos of the early twentieth century, compared to similar Anabaptist characteristics noted by Kraus, can be identified in three main areas.

**A More Detailed Exposition of Their Jesus-centered Emphasis**

The classification of Pentecostal studies has changed in university libraries since the 1960s. Initially housed alongside the cults and sects, Pentecostalism shared shelves with Jehovah’s Witnesses and Mormons. With the wider visibility of the Charismatic Movement they migrated into revival history on the one hand and pneumatology on the other. From the 1980s they enjoyed recognition as discreet Pentecostal denominations, and have also featured quite distinctively on shelves devoted to mission and global
Christian studies. At the present time Pentecostal-focused studies can usually be found across the spectrum of humanities and theology. Some of the earliest studies into Pentecostalism from outside the movement dubbed it a “Spirit movement.” Non-Pentecostals who welcomed the Pentecostal experience at the time of the neo-Pentecostal and Charismatic movements found space for their new experience in their own rather underpopulated discipline of pneumatology, reinforcing the “Spirit movement” notion. Even some Pentecostal researchers have rather uncritically adopted this view. However, Donald Dayton’s exposition demonstrating the theological roots of Pentecostalism to be located firmly within the Foursquare formula has gained wider acceptance among Pentecostals, albeit with explicit dissent from some. This formula states “Jesus saves, Jesus heals, Jesus baptizes in the Spirit, and Jesus is coming again as King” or “Jesus: Saviour, Healer, Baptizer in the Spirit, and Coming King.” The clearly publicized and demonstrated message of the movement was not centered in baptism with the Spirit and speaking in tongues. It was expressed as “Jesus saves, Jesus heals.” Spirit baptism and demonstration of spiritual gifts was never the primary content of the kerygma of the movement; it was rather the underlying spiritual dynamic that enabled more effective witness to a saving and healing Jesus.

A More Consciously Charismatic/Pneumatic Form of Primitivism

The utilization of literature studies and literary sources to determine the nature and ethos of Reformation Anabaptism may fall afoul of the fact that much more was written about the Anabaptists during the sixteenth century than by the Anabaptists themselves. This recorded history depicts the more overtly charismatic groups and individuals as enthusiasts and fanatics, and denounces them soundly for their sectarianism and lack of cogent or responsible theology and ethic. A parallel stream assesses some other groups as being just as sectarian but recognizes their political and social quietism as largely pacifist. Estep shows how hostile criticism at first lumped all Anabaptist-type leaders and groups into a single category of irresponsible and spiritualist
sectarians, but a gradual recognition emerges of complexity in the makeup of the movement. In reality, the extent to which charismatic experience, practice, and understanding permeated Anabaptism remains largely unknown as it simply does not feature strongly in their own writings, limited as these are.

This apparent reticence was clearly not evident in early Pentecostalism. The movement understood itself as “apostolic,” not primarily in the sense of having strong authoritarian leaders but as demonstrating the “signs and wonders” of the apostolic age. Along with a formalized understanding of the baptism with the Holy Spirit the movement also developed a detailed understanding of spiritual gifts based on Paul’s analytical references and a parallel typology of gifts derived from the entire canon, especially the New Testament narratives.

Influenced by their experiences they bore testimony to a phenomenology that remained remarkably robust during the first half century of the movement’s existence. From many “burnt fingers” episodes they managed to combine both enthusiasm and caution into their teachings and testimony—caution in particular with regard to selfish and aggrandizing appropriations of notions of apostleship, prophethood, and discernment; and enthusiasm for the baptism with the Spirit and “signs and wonders” of healing and deliverance in particular.

A survey therefore of extant historical sources for the two movements may cogently argue that while Anabaptism may have implicitly understood itself as charismatic, Pentecostalism has overtly, demonstrably, and aggressively asserted such a self-understanding. Its appropriation of a primitivist perspective on early church dynamics was based as strongly on its non-dispensational and non-cessationist hermeneutic as on any desire to challenge or reform the “cold formality and spiritual death” of the historical denominations. Their early literature and testimony is redolent with these themes, linking and interweaving their rediscovery of the dynamic charismatic aspects of Christianity with a rejection of “spiritual and ecclesiastical death.”

If Anabaptism is remembered primarily for its challenge to ecclesiology and the social status quo, Pentecostalism will always be recognized more for its challenge to “cold and dead” ecclesiastical and liturgical formalism and spiritual complacency. However, both
demonstrate a powerful egalitarian impulse, emphasising not only that in Christ is there “neither Jew nor Gentile, male nor female, bond nor free,” but also that he pours out his Spirit on “all flesh”—male, female, old, young, masters, and servants. Both are therefore socially and ecclesiologically radical in their own context.

A More Developed Phenomenology of *Pneumatika*, *Charismata*, and *Phaneroseis*

As argued above, Pentecostals identified with those accounts and records of the early church that emphasized spiritual manifestations and gifting more than ecclesiological or social principles. However, they also formalized their charismatic understanding in greater detail and extrapolated its implications for evangelization and missions more consistently. There were some very early Pentecostal groups who experienced the presence of the Holy Spirit primarily as a liturgical phenomenon (1 Cor 14) rather than a missional one (Acts 1:8.) In the United Kingdom this led to the later-arriving Elim movement (1915) demonstrating a more aggressive evangelistic thrust than had the significantly earlier Sunderland group (1906.)

Not only did Pentecostalism derive a Bible-based typology of spiritual charisms and demonstrate a clear phenomenology of these in life, worship, and witness, they also developed a sustained and consistent distinctive exposition of conversion-initiation that came to expression in a doctrine of “subsequence” and an understanding of initial evidence. Present-day Pentecostal self-understanding can be ambivalent on how central this theological development was in the early movement: did the movement gain its self-understanding and impetus from these motifs, or was their theological formulation *ex post facto*—a rationalization and explication of a new phenomenology? Western and particularly American Azusa-based theories of Pentecostal origins prefer the former, while the Pentecostalism of the Global South largely prefers the latter. This may explain why the issue of speaking in tongues is such a central debate in the West, while featuring hardly at all in the South. A detailed biblical or theological analysis and rationale concerning the work of the Spirit was not primary or central to their self-understanding and portrayal.
Drawing too detailed a comparison between the movements therefore requires caution, hence my own inclination to speak of a common ethos rather than a common phenomenology. It is with this understanding that I address recent developments in Pentecostalism that may be stretching the consistency of that identification in ethos and at the same time challenging the consistency and cogency of present-day Pentecostal self-understanding and presentation.

**Dissonances and Challenges in Mature Pentecostalism**

Had the Anabaptist movement, which enjoyed exceptional growth at grassroots level, survived in a more congenial religious climate for a century or more, there is no knowing what it may have become and what pragmatic accommodations may have occurred in its ethos. The Pentecostal movement today has survived its first century, and still demonstrates some remarkable consistencies with its initial ethos and emphases. But in many ways and places it exhibits an ethos totally other to what impelled the original pioneers. There are contexts where the movement presents almost identically in core beliefs, values, and dynamics to the original classical Pentecostal paradigm (as in parts of rural Africa), and others where the founders would scarcely recognize the present-day phenomenon (as in many African cities).

From my own research, lived experience, and observation I would identify the following emerging dissonances and challenges.

**“Jesus, Be the Center . . .”?**

In the West the Charismatic Movement of the 1960s and 70s influenced many Pentecostals to envision themselves primarily as people of the Spirit. The depth of theological erudition, and the wealth of publications at the hand of many non-Pentecostal participants and observers of this new revival, dominated its public expression. It molded the thinking and self-understanding of many Pentecostal teachers, colleges, and leaders who could offer or access no competing deposit of scholarly work.
Central to the new self-understanding was pneumatology rather than Christology and the Foursquare formula in particular.

This was not reflected to the same extent in the Global South, where classical Pentecostalism was at first not as challenged by the new charismatic phenomenon, and for whom Jesus remained the person proclaimed and experienced, the one able to confront and overcome the inimical spirituality of local cultures. At the coal-face of evangelism the preaching of Jesus as redeemer and deliverer, as unchanging Lord over every other spirit, remained central to the practice of the people.

For others, though, the challenge to the centrality of Jesus was reinforced by the emigration of the later Charismatic Movement from the historical churches whence it emerged, and its co-option primarily into the large independent ministries. E. W. Kenyon’s teaching that “Jesus Died Spiritually” (JDS) is mainstream in many of these. This has produced a soteriology and accompanying liturgy in which the centrality of the crucifixion is replaced by the celebration of the resurrection, where the role of Jesus is reduced to merely the first example of a new super-race of humans who by the exercise of their faith can live completely victorious lives, equivalent in power even to that of Jesus himself. The songs, preaching, and rituals of the great narrative of redemption history were replaced by songs and sermons of personal victory based on one’s own expression of faith and positive confession. This new super-humanity is headed by “God’s Generals,” “Great Men of Faith” who exercise authority over those who flock to them by virtue of their open lines of personal communication with God. This leadership model has developed into the ubiquitous “Great Man of God” phenomenon in Pentecostal-Charismatic ministry and leadership. The future of a Christology where Christ is τὸν υἱὸν τὸν μονογενῆ (“the unique Son”) is unclear under this paradigm.

**Non-sacramental?**

The Anabaptists represented the most radical rejection of sacramental theology. Like many revival groups, they preferred the personal and individual encounter with God to any mediated or ritually incarnate efficacy linked to persons or material objects. The Pentecostal Movement
was no different. Some did teach baptismal regeneration, usually where the locus of debate with non-Pentecostals was paedo-baptism versus believers’ immersion, but this was never mainstream. The practice of laying-on of hands was ubiquitous, but was also usually egalitarian and not limited to a priestly class.

Present-day Pentecostal groups have been permeated with a new sacramentalism, or at least superstition, where both material objects and formal rituals are deemed to have power and efficacy. The Word Faith movement introduced formulaic rituals of positive confession and sowing-and-reaping (giving to receive). The psalmody movement (the precursor of the contemporary worship school) introduced belief in the spiritual efficacy of song, music, and body movement as maintained by the Latter Rain groups of the 1920s. Music and praise-and-worship songs are considered effective in making God present in the gathering; indeed, certain instruments, musical chords, formations, and notes, even the position of musical instruments in relation to the audience, may have relevance for the potency of effect. The spiritual warfare school, developed initially from the teachings of Derek Prince, invokes any number of rituals considered effective or deleterious in dealing with demonic powers and territories. They also identify entire classes of physical objects as useful either for transmission of demonic influence (native religious art, animist *muti*, “new age” creatures such as frogs and dolphins, etc.) or its negation (salt, grape juice, olive oil, etc.). Rituals and objects for healing, deliverance, or success have proliferated, from little green cloths for healing ($5 each) to “anointed” pens that ensure you pass your exam!

Where the earliest interface between Pentecostal ministry and animist and pagan spiritualities entailed the desacralization of local rituals, objects, totems, taboos, and superstitions, today in many parts of the world the new “incarnational” approach has simply appropriated them for its own purposes. Where a person claiming to have been cursed by a witch or shaman would earlier have been informed that such rituals and curses are empty and foolish superstitions, the new ministries implicitly endorse the old worldview, with the rider that “but our leader can break the curse,” effectively establishing themselves as the new, more powerful shaman.35 The old worldview remains unchallenged, the efficacy of objects and rituals is affirmed, and the modernizing effect of Christian conversion negated.
Egalitarian? The Clergy-Laity Divide Eliminated?

In 1974 Peter Hocken could state, “A Pentecostal minister does not determine what happens in church— he discerns what the Holy Spirit is doing.” Four decades later such an ethos is a distant memory.

A number of trends have coalesced in Pentecostal consciousness to challenge the earliest egalitarian impulses. These include:

- the discipleship authority-and-submission influences from the Fort Lauderdale Five;
- the “new apostolic paradigm,” which implicitly divided the church into “anointed vision-bearers” and the common people (the Great Man of God syndrome), based on the so-called fivefold ministries of Ephesians 4:11;
- the church leadership paradigm of John Maxwell, Bill Hybells, and others that effectively divides the church into leaders and followers;
- a formulaic approach to music and song, the “building the throne” school, which elevates singers and musicians to a priestly role (more recently claiming also to be elders, teachers, and prophets) by which they assume responsibility for mediating the encounter between God and the people during the gathering;
- “Great Men of God” who operate as new shamans on the interface between Christianity and animism or paganism.

All of these represent, encourage, or establish what is effectively a new clergy-laity divide. Indeed some “anointed” leaders even refer disparagingly to the “common laos,” while the anointed few unapologetically recognize and affirm one another as the new elite. The church leadership school very clearly elevates leaders over followers, despite all assertions that such leadership actually aims to facilitate the development of ministry among the followers. The harsh on-the-ground reality is that leadership is too often
about authority, and penalties are exacted on the recalcitrant. Formulaic and “incarnational” approaches to encountering God and prosecuting spiritual warfare imply the need for an enabled class of ministers and heroes to manage the complex interface between normal life and the spiritual world—in effect, a new clergy. The priesthood of all believers exists purely in the rhetoric of a new self-serving class of leaders.

Pilgrims Just Passing through an Alien and Hostile World?

Early Pentecostals reflected a similar apocalypticism to the Anabaptists, a re-evaluation of the importance of the secular and temporal, a sense of pilgrimage through an inimical context, of being strangers in a strange land. They strongly maintained the dualism of secular and profane, of this world and the next, of being “in the world but not of the world.” However, this was not aimed at achieving comfort and success in the world, but of living lives of love, joy, peace, fulfillment, and powerful testimony despite the hostility of the world. It was a sacrificial paradigm for Christian discipleship and mission: “the world well-lost for Jesus,” let us evangelize intensively as the time is short! These values were reflected in their sermons, testimonies, missionary urgency, liturgies, songs, and writings. Following Jesus centered on identifying with his crucifixion, denying oneself, forsaking the world, taking up the cross, and following him. Discipleship reflected the great redemptive truths of Calvary.

It was probably inevitable that by the third generation this calling had lost its appeal for the grandchildren of the pioneers. Coinciding with the emergence of consumerism, upward social mobility, an economically-enabled youth culture, the explosion of visceral forms of music, pop-psychology, and the emergence of motivational and self-fulfilment thinking, Pentecostalism was increasingly tempted to abandon its message of “die in order to live” based on the cross. It accepted in exchange the promise of benefits situated higher up Maslow’s hierarchy: self-fulfilment, health, wealth, victory, being the head not the tail, living your dream, receiving all that God has promised you—based on celebration of the resurrection and bypassing the self-sacrifice of the cross. Indeed it is very rare in Pentecostal ministry and gatherings in the
West now to find the theme of cross and self-sacrifice in any sense other than coincidental or peripheral. It does not sell, it does not work, and it is no longer “what the Spirit is doing.” In their editors’ comments two UK scholars point out how the new Pentecostal churches that are the fastest growing in Europe are those that proclaim a more human-centered motivational message than the traditional redemption-history content of the earlier movement.\textsuperscript{37}

This change in culture implies a curtailment of Pentecostalism’s subversion of contemporary secular values and society, and its absorption into mainstream secular culture—prophetic dissent has been abandoned, the prophets have been seduced into conformity rather than subversion.\textsuperscript{38} The world’s consensus is now affirmed, not condemned, resisted, and undermined. Gone are the songs of the cross, the expectation of the Master’s return, the longing for the final destination in Heaven—dominant are songs and oratory of victory, of fulfilment, of human dreams, of a place in this world that is no longer a hostile environment for pilgrims, but an affirming context for selfish dreams. Postmodern narcissism prevails over sacrificial commitment; the dominant paradigm is now \textit{acquisitive}.

\textbf{Evangelical Choice of Jesus as Savior from Sin?}

The Anabaptist contention was that the church consisted of those who had made a personal and individual response to the invitation and redemption of Jesus. They envisioned a believers’ church. This church was seen as an object rather than a subject, an effect rather than a cause, a depository of the redeemed not an agent of spiritual effect.

Pentecostals embraced this notion from the beginning. They did not understand the day of Pentecost as the occasion when the Spirit was given to the \textit{church}, but proclaimed an individual Pentecostal experience for each person according to the template of Peter’s application of Joel’s prophecy: sons, daughters, old, young, males, and females—to you, and all those that are far off, as many as God calls to himself. This complemented their basic evangelical ethos, and effectively proclaimed the individual’s own Pentecost as one more personal experience of identification with Jesus (died with him, raised with him, commissioned
with him, empowered with him) and of reception of the benefits provided by Jesus (he saves, heals, baptizes in the Spirit, and is coming again to reward us.) Their proclamation and liturgies were replete with the cross-pollinating themes of Christ, cross, resurrection life, holiness, and the presence of the Spirit among his people with power.

These themes are no longer encountered in any significant sense in Western Pentecostalism and also in much of the urbanized world of the Global South. The themes of self-fulfilment and life enhancement provide the material for liturgies, sermons, and community action. Historically and socially this may parallel the development of the Methodist revival and the Salvation Army. At their inception these groups were intensively and sincerely engaged in betterment of human communities, but it was clear this was the product of their personal experience of divine redemptive action. This is no longer a realistic representation of their ideals or activities. Is the Pentecostal community fated to follow the same ballistic historical trajectory?

**Confident and Extrovert Witness?**

Pentecostals in the early years had a reputation for robust personal witness to Jesus. To encounter a Pentecostal, to work, play, or study with them, placed one in peril of salvation. While their churches and gatherings were not necessarily attractive in themselves, their lives and earnest witness won over many who initially were intensely hostile to both the Christian gospel and the Pentecostal ethos. Gospel services were unapologetically “in your face” and often attended with powerful demonstrations of charismatic giftings, including prophecy and gifts of healing. Passionate atmosphere and passionate expression in singing, worship, and preaching were the rule rather than the exception.

The evangelistic paradigm in Western Pentecostalism has changed dramatically. In some ministries it may still be passionate, confrontational, and even controversial, but there is a wider trend that wishes to disassociate with anything “cringe-worthy” and to present a more reasonable and less contentious gospel package. In this it has drawn largely from the strategies and apologetics of the evangelical movement,
adopting formal church growth strategies such as attractional (seeker-sensitive) methods. Their proclamation is often a combination of “These are the rules of our very reasonable and well-intentioned club” and “How can we help you help yourself?” The Foursquare formula is remarkable only for its absence in such methodologies. The demonstration of spiritual gifting is almost frowned upon, perhaps because it introduces an element of uncontrollability to what is otherwise a very professional and managed package.

Egalitarian Participation in Charismatic Phenomena?

The challenge to an egalitarian ethos can also be detected in the demise of that open congregational participation in liturgies that encouraged the individual expression of charismatic gifts. The earlier years were marked by intensive individual participation, to the extent that an entire service could become saturated in such expressions with sermons, singing, and even communion being displaced or included only as a brief afterthought. It is widely acknowledged today that in the West this is rarely the case.

The reasons for this are not difficult to determine. Attractional models of doing church find the gifts unpredictable, “Great Man of God” models assure the congregation that the leader’s power and anointing is the only crucial charismatic contribution required, electronically-amplified liturgies make spontaneous intervention and contribution from the pew impractical, and songs and music are formally rehearsed performances and not amenable to calls from the pews (or even a visiting preacher) for alternative songs that were not rehearsed on Thursday night. Effectively, in most Pentecostal gatherings the polyphony of the earlier period has been replaced by a duophony, with only two voices being heard: those of the leader and the “worship” leader.

What was one of the most significant and distinctive characteristics of the Pentecostal movement has now become embodied solely in the new clergy, the authoritative “anointed ones.” The role of the laity is merely to affirm and submit to these cutting-edge, infallible, and ever-victorious champions and heroes of the faith.
A similar trend is evident in local church (and sometimes denominational) governance, where democratic participation has been replaced by leader-centered practices. Whether the leader’s chosen paradigm is secular corporate practice, or “anointed vision-bearing authority,” prevalent governance models consist essentially of autonomous leaders establishing their own model for the community and advocating the compliance of the congregation or denomination to their vision and mission. The leaders will decide what the “DNA” of the church should be, choose their own preferred leadership team to implement it, and advise the people that they can either fit in or do the other thing. “My way or the highway” is the overt or implicit message conveyed by this paradigm. Members are not consulted, but commanded.

Church and State Separation?

As the Pentecostal churches have become more visible, sophisticated, and socially representative, they have drawn the attention not only of other Christian groups, but also of politicians and marketers. This is less so in the West than in the wider world where Pentecostals may reflect a significant proportion of the population. In some Latin American settings they might even be the majority group. Certainly in many African countries governments and rulers will ignore Pentecostals at their peril. The prevalence of “Great Man of God” models confers significant public influence on Pentecostal leaders, and the temptations and sins of celebrity—of money, sex, and power—are now clearly discerned in large parts of the movement. Pentecostals are no longer cautious about occupying the public space, nor reticent in making their views known.

Just how this trend will work out in the future remains unclear. However, as long as the movement continues to function uncritically among the trends and powers of the world (such as consumerism and political expediency) the more likely it is to become a partner of the secular state rather than a critic, to be co-opted into secular agendas rather than to subvert them. Watch this space. Had Anabaptism developed coherently for one hundred years, might it too have faced this challenge?
Conclusion

There are marked similarities in the notions of church expressed in Anabaptism and in Pentecostalism. Their historical contexts differ considerably and therefore a simplistic equation should be avoided. While Anabaptism coherently survived the almost universal hostility of its era only in small isolated groups, Pentecostalism has now flourished for more than a century. What it has become can be fairly confidently asserted, while what Anabaptism may have become had it not been so ruthlessly opposed and eradicated can only be speculated. However, the comparison between the distinctive ethos discernible among the Anabaptists and the original and now developed ethos of the Pentecostal Movement provides useful categories for Pentecostal self-understanding and self-critique, with some salutary warnings. However, what history teaches us is . . . ?

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Notes


7 As articulated by Luther at Worms: “I have composed . . . certain works against popery, wherein I have attacked such as by false doctrines, irregular lives, and scandalous examples, afflict the Christian world, and ruin the bodies and souls of men. And is not this confirmed by the grief of all who fear God? Is it not manifest that the laws and human doctrines of the popes entangle, vex, and distress the consciences of the faithful . . . ?”

8 Grebel identified with Zwingli’s memorialist and symbolist theology, as stated clearly in his first letter to Munzer in his enumerated points 14–17 against Munzer’s translated Mass that included “chanting,” in Leland Harder, ed., *The Sources of Swiss Anabaptism: The Grebel Letters and Related Documents*, vol. 4, Classics of the Radical Reformation (Scottdale, PA; Kitchener, Ontario: Herald Press, 1985), 284–92: bread is just bread as sausage is just sausage.

9 This is the very first reason offered in the Anabaptist tract *Why They Do not Attend the Churches*: That in the Protestant churches the contribution of the many (as per 1 Cor 14:26) was ignored or forbidden in preference for the single voice of the clergyman.


11 Article 6 of the Schleitheim Confession spells this out explicitly.

12 Tertullian, *Apology* 29–33, attacks the attitude of the Caesars who refused prayer for themselves, demanding prayer to themselves.

13 Tertullian, *About Fleeing Persecution* 14, and *De Corona* 1.

14 As evidenced in “Questions and Answers of Ambrosius Spitelmaier (1527),” in *Sources of South German/Austrian Anabaptism*, 63.

15 John Bunyan’s evangelical Puritanism redounds with Anabaptist themes, e.g., in *The Heavenly Footman* (Pensacola: Chapel Library, 2001), 20.
16 Jacob Hutter even established small separatist communes that later became a model for Moravians. However, this intensive form of community was not a usual model of Anabaptist community.

17 See note 3 above.


20 Kraus, “Anabaptism and Evangelicalism,” 173.


23 While many trace the identifiable historical roots of Pentecostalism to Wesley and no further, the organic roots can be traced further through the Moravians (who strongly influenced Wesley) to the Anabaptists (Clark, “An Investigation into the Nature of a Viable Pentecostal Hermeneutic,” 15–16.)


28 “Apostolic Faith Mission” was the name linked to the Azusa revival of 1906–1909, seen as a major “birthplace” of Western Pentecostalism.


34 To the almost complete exclusion in many “worship” lyrics of any mention of Jesus, his cross, or his blood.

35 A challenge to adequate contextualization addressed by, e.g., the leader of the Church of Pentecost in Ghana, Opoku Onyinah, in Onyinah, Opoku, “Akan Witchcraft and the Concept of Exorcism in the Church of Pentecost” (Ph.D. diss., University of Birmingham, 2002).


38 The absorption of the earlier prophetic movement of Israel into complacent allocated roles in the liturgy of the “King’s sanctuary” (Amos) is argued by both Walter Eichrodt (*Theology of the Old Testament Vol. 1* [London: SCM, 1961]) and Walter Brueggemann (*The Prophetic Imagination* [Minneapolis MN: Fortress Press, 2001]) in their theologies of the Old Testament, and its recall offers a challenging message to a less dynamic (if more socially acceptable) contemporary Pentecostal movement.

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Mission in the Diaspora: The Role of Migrants (Refugees) as Principal Bearers of the Christian Faith

Emmanuel K. Anim

Key Words mission, diaspora, refugees, migration, Pentecostals, Church of Pentecost

Abstract

This paper explores migration and displacement as both a crisis and opportunity. It maintains that throughout biblical history—and even in the history of modern mission—migrants and refugees have often become the principal bearers of the Christian faith. In our own generation, Africans who have migrated to other parts of the world for various reasons have traveled with their faith. Many African churches such as Kingsway International Christian Centre, The Church of Pentecost, Winners Chapel International, International Central Gospel Church, and Victory Bible Church International have all established branches of their churches in the diaspora through the efforts of their members who have migrated abroad. These Christians often come together in house fellowships, which metamorphose into churches and then pastors from their home countries are sent to lead them. This situation, I have argued, accounts for the significant expansion of the African churches in the diaspora.
Human migration is part of human history. It is the movement of people from one place to another with the view to settle either temporarily or permanently. A refugee is a person who moves from his or her home or original settlement to another as a result of either natural disaster or civil disturbance, while one affected by the same factors and moved within the same country may be described as a displaced person. Thus, all refugees are migrants but not all migrants are refugees.

In certain parts of the world, the migrants or displaced refugees do not feel welcomed by the host nation. As a result, the churches become their home and family away from home. These diaspora churches provide not only spiritual strength for their members but also emotional, financial, and social support, including resolving family and immigration issues. Thus, the churches enable migrants and refugees to survive in sometimes lonely and difficult situations. At the same time, the churches provide migrants and refugees with the platform from which they can launch their evangelistic activities in their respective communities.

Part of the substance of this paper appeared in my essay, “Mission, Migration and World Christianity: An Evaluation of the Mission Strategy of the Church of Pentecost in the Diaspora,” published in the *Pentecost Journal of Theology and Mission* in 2016. In that paper, I argued that African indigenous churches such as the Church of Pentecost play a significant role in the whole process of reverse mission. And this is made possible principally through the efforts of its members living abroad who start fellowships with their own fellow migrants, and these soon become churches. Here, I take the argument further to say that although many of these migrants, some of whom may be refugees or asylum seekers, do not see themselves as missionaries, they initiate the process of evangelism and church planting, and become key figures in reverse mission.

**The Next Christendom**

In 1970, researcher David Barrett boldly predicted that the number of Christians in Africa would reach 350 million by the year 2000. This was from a mere 10 million in 1910. In 2001, Barrett published the second
edition of his seminal *World Christian Encyclopaedia*, and he estimated the actual Christian population to be 360 million, which was more than he predicted. His classic reference book further illuminated the changing demography of modern Christianity and the massive shift of the faith’s center of gravity from the West to the southern continents of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.²

In that same time period, around the dawn of the new millennium, Andrew Walls and Kwame Bediako were drawing our attention to the fact that not only was Africa practicing the faith, it was changing it as well. Christianity was becoming a non-Western religion.³ This assertion was reaffirmed when Philip Jenkins, in his weighty book, *The Next Christendom*, argued that Africa, alongside Asia and Latin America, would define the coming of a new global Christianity by the year 2050. Jenkins observed that the stupendous growth of the church in Africa was principally in the Pentecostal/Charismatic strand of Christianity and that these churches were far more traditional, morally conservative, evangelical, and apocalyptic than their northern counterparts.⁴ David Barrett and Harvey Cox had previously drawn the same conclusions.⁵

What remains to be researched is the diffusion of such Christianity from Africa to the global religious space. It has been observed that Christianity in Africa and the African Diaspora offers new resources for the interpretation and analysis of African Christian movements.⁶ Jehu Hanciles has documented some developments in North America,⁷ and here I turn my attention to how this process begins from Africa. I look especially at the Church of Pentecost.

**Migrants and Christian Mission**

History has revealed that migration and Christian mission have often gone hand in hand. This can be seen in the early Church as persecuted Jewish Christians in Jerusalem fled to the neighboring communities of Samaria and later to Asia Minor in search of peace and security. In the process, these persecuted Christians moved not only with their families and possessions but also with their faith and culture. Thus Walls maintains:
It is easy enough to point to historical situations where migration forwarded the spread of the faith. It is clear that the earliest spread of the faith beyond Jewish Palestine owed much to prior Jewish migration across the Mediterranean world, as well as into Mesopotamia and beyond. The Jewish communities in the diaspora provided the networks by which the message about Jesus spread.\textsuperscript{8}

Refugees such as Philip and others evangelized in the region of Judea and Samaria, and many came to faith in Christ (Acts 8). Hundreds of years later, the Puritans of the early seventeenth century fled England to North America so that they could live and practice their faith in the peace and security of the new nation.

However, persecution and migration do not always signal a certain advance of the faith. In this regard, Andrew Walls rightly observes that migration stands for both disaster and promise, and it is not always clear whether it favors or hinders Christian mission.\textsuperscript{9} Walls comes to this conclusion by looking at the history of migration and the spread of Christianity in first-century Palestine and the movement of the faith across Europe from the fourth century. Walls points to cases where migration crushed, overwhelmed, or expelled well-established Christian communities—such as the raiders of Scandinavia who invaded Britain and the Muslim Arabs who entered Europe. But it is also clear that the spread of Christianity across the world owes as much to migration, either voluntarily or by persecution, as it does to direct missionary efforts. It is in these experiences that one may better understand African Christian mission in the diaspora.\textsuperscript{10}

**Migration and Refugee Crisis in Africa**

African independence from colonial rule brought much optimism, not only for sovereign power but also for economic emancipation. But this hope soon disappeared as many newly freed African nations plunged into civil wars and never-ending military coups. These calamities led to the displacement of people and families not only into neighboring African countries but also into Europe, North America, and other parts of the world. The singular goal of all these people on the move: a better life.
Like the early Christians in Jerusalem who fled with the Gospel, African migrants today also carry their faith, culture, and churches with them as they travel across the continents. Thus Hanciles observes that while in the past “unprecedented European migrations from Christianity’s old heartland provided the impetus for the European missionary movement, phenomenal migrations from Christianity’s new heartlands in Africa, Latin America, and Asia have galvanized a massive non-Western missionary movement.” It is in this experience that one may analyze “reverse mission” and the African contribution to global Christian mission.

The office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) report, “Global Trends: Forced Displacement in 2016,” indicated that nearly sixty-six million people have been displaced around the world as refugees. This is a record high. Nearly one-fourth of the refugees are in Africa. Conflicts in South Sudan, Sudan, Central African Republic, Somalia, and Nigeria have driven nearly fifteen million Africans from their homes.

African refugees move in all directions. Some venture to neighboring African countries where economic and political life are deemed to be better. According to the UNCHR report, the African countries with the highest number of refugees include: Uganda (940,835), Ethiopia (791,681), Kenya (451,099), Chad (391,251), Cameroon (375,415), and South Sudan (262,560).

Other refugees and migrants risk the treacherous routes to North Africa en route to Europe and Asia. In the process many lose their lives, while others are taken into forced labor by their captors. Many Ghanaian women who journeyed to Saudi Arabia in search of a better life have ended up as sex slaves and have suffered horribly. As refugees and illegal immigrants, such persons are vulnerable and barely have any access to judicial processes and human rights protection. In Ghana, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs recently issued a ban on the travel of Ghanaian women to Saudi Arabia in search of jobs.

The Liberian civil war, which broke out in late 1989, led to an immediate influx of refugees to Ghana. The prayer camp at Gomoa Buduburam in the Central Region was converted into a refugee camp that became the first stop for asylum seekers from Liberia. By the close
of 1990, the Buduburam camp was home to about 7,000 refugees, while about 2,000 refugees pushed forward into the city of Accra, a journey of another forty kilometers. The churches in Greater Accra, Central, and Western regions played host to some of the refugees and provided them with material support. In turn, many of the refugees became active in the churches by joining the worship teams and other ministries. Other refugees established branches of their home churches at the refugee camp.

According to the Ministry of Interior in Ghana, a total of 21,088 refugees from sub-Saharan Africa were living in Ghana as of 2015. These included 11,262 Ivoirians; 5,262 Liberians; 3,212 Togolese; and 1,352 people from other countries.\(^{16}\)

The refugee crisis in Africa cannot be overstated. Just recently, troops in northern Niger rescued nearly one hundred immigrants who, at the peril of their lives, were trying to cross the Sahara Desert, in the hope of reaching Europe through Libya. Many of these migrants were from Nigeria, Senegal, and Burkina Faso.\(^ {17}\) One of them died shortly after he was rescued.\(^ {18}\)

Recent newspaper reports have revealed that the plight of many African refugees or asylum seekers in the United States of America is a matter of great concern to that country. In April 2017, the US Ambassador to Ghana, Robert Jackson, announced that there were more than 7,000 illegal Ghanaian migrants in the United States and that they would soon be deported. Sixty-three of such persons were recently sent back to Ghana—and they arrived with only a few of their possessions. Most of the sixty-three were football fans who travelled to Brazil to support Ghana at the 2014 World Cup football competition, and they later made their way to the United States and overstayed their visas.\(^ {19}\)

African Churches and Migrants in the Diaspora

African churches have been a source of hope and support to migrants and refugees in Europe and America, just as they have been for refugees in Ghana. One notable example is the Church of Pentecost, which was founded in 1962 by an Irish Missionary to Ghana, Rev. James McKeown. McKeown’s history in Ghana stretches all the way back
to 1937, when he first arrived in the Gold Coast at the invitation of the Faith Tabernacle Church, led by Peter Anim. By the time James McKeown retired from active service as a missionary-pastor and returned home to Northern Ireland in 1984, the Church of Pentecost was well established in Ghana with additional branches in Cote d’Ivoire, Togo, Benin, Burkina Faso, Sierra Leone, Benin, Nigeria, and Liberia.

As of December 2015, the Church of Pentecost had more than two and a half million members (2,612,618) in Ghana and almost two hundred and fifty thousand members (243,534) in its ninety external branches across all the continents of the world.

The total membership of the Church of Pentecost in the United Kingdom as of December 2011 was 11,195. The figure increased to 14,203 in 2014, and 15,555 in 2015. Apart from the UK branches embarking on rigorous evangelism, the steady growth of the numbers is also attributed to the mass migration of Ghanaians from the Netherlands and Italy to Britain in the last seven or eight years after the European Union (EU) opened its borders. Many Ghanaian migrants in the Schengen states, who had received permanent residence in those countries, saw the move to the UK as an opportunity for their children to receive education in English, which would then ease their integration back to Ghana. However, this migration to the UK produced its own problems. For example, children who were born, raised, and enculturated in other European countries struggled to integrate into new communities in Britain. This brought a lot of tension between them and their parents, and a number of teenagers turned their backs on the church and their families, preferring to live their own independent lives.

Added to these challenges is the fact that many vulnerable migrants, no matter where they reside, are unable to return home to visit their spouses and children whom they left behind—and in some cases, have not seen for years. Returning home in the event of bereavement of a close family member is also often impossible. For most migrants, it is the church that provides the needed emotional support, as members continue to pray for each other and trust God for divine favor as they seek to regularize their immigration status and bring their families to join them.
The Church of Pentecost in the Netherlands played a significant role in the 1990s in helping settle a number of Ghanaians and other Africans who had come to the country to seek a better life. Many young African women who arrived before them were in dire straits. They had come with no academic qualifications, specialized skills, or knowledge of the Dutch language. As a result, many of these women, who were there illegally, resorted to prostitution in order to survive. (Some were even brought in by cartels for that very purpose.) The Church of Pentecost in the Netherlands tried to stop this cycle. African migrants in France, Italy, Germany, and Spain often face the same circumstances. In such desperate situations, churches are the ones who provide the vulnerable migrants with the needed spiritual, moral, and financial support.

**Conclusion**

It has been established that many situations account for migration or forced displacement of people across the continent of Africa and beyond. The optimism that greeted many African states soon turned sour when the corrupt African ruling elite took undue advantage of the citizens. Economic hardships following prolonged civil wars and military coups led to the displacement of many people from their home countries to neighboring African countries while many more traveled abroad to Europe, Asia, and the Americas. Over the years, some Africans have succeeded in travelling on visa permits, while many others have entered various countries as refugees and asylum seekers. Some used the legal process and regularized their stay, but many have been forced underground. They are vulnerable to all sorts of abuse. Some work at low-paying jobs while others resort to prostitution and drug peddling in order to survive. The situation becomes more desperate when the law catches up with them, and they face deportation or imprisonment.

African-initiated churches in these countries are an abiding source of rescue, hope, strength, and support. Many migrants, particularly Christians, look for churches in which to fellowship, and immigrant churches offer them a taste of home and a source of strength. In these
churches, fellow members help migrants find legal support to regularize their stay. Where the need arises, members also provide financial support, particularly in the case of bereavement. Migrants often constitute the majority of members of the African-initiated churches in the diaspora, and their movements also determine the growth or decline of such congregations. The African diaspora churches are therefore not only a platform for reverse mission to the West but also serve as a community that provides a home and spiritual support for vulnerable migrants.

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Notes


2 D. Barrett et al., World Christian Encyclopedia, 2nd ed. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001). Recent research has indicated that there are about 631 million Christians in Africa, ahead of Latin America, which records about 601 million. This makes Africa the continent with the highest population of Christians in the world. Cf. Todd Johnson and Gina Zurlo, eds., World Christian Database (Leiden/Boston: Brill, 2018).


8 Andrew Walls, “Mission and Migration: The Diaspora Factor in Christian History,”


11 Hanciles, Beyond Christendom, 8.


20 For a good study of the history of the Church of Pentecost, see Christine Leonard, A Giant in Ghana (Chichester, West Sussex: New Wine Ministry, 1989).

The Perfect and Complete Gospel of Both Comings of Jesus Christ: Reclaiming Eschatology in Pentecostal Proclamation of the Gospel

David K. Hebert

Key Words: second coming of Jesus Christ, Perfect/Complete Gospel of Both Comings of Jesus Christ, dispensationalism, eschatology

Abstract

This article is written to encourage a return to a position firmly entrenched in traditional Pentecostal and Charismatic eschatology that includes both comings of Jesus Christ in the proclamation of the Gospel. It develops the concept of the “Perfect/Complete Gospel of Both Comings of Jesus Christ,” identifying it as an emphasis in both historic Christianity in general and Pentecostal-Charismatic Christianity in particular. And in light of Oral Roberts’ vision received in August 2004, the article concludes with an exhortation to reconsider this proclamation in light of the imminent return of Jesus Christ.

Introduction

In mid-August of 2004, at eighty-six years of age, Oral Roberts received a vision from God at his home in Newport Beach, California. In this vision, he heard a loud “explosion” in the Spirit, and saw a vision of “fire, cloud, vapor, and smoke” (reminiscent of Peter’s rendition of
Joel 2:30 in Acts 2:19). Initially, it was “exploding over America,” and then became “diffused, spread throughout the whole earth.” Then, he was told that the understanding of the vision was a “wake-up call about the Second Coming”—that neither the church, nor the world, is ready for the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. Specifically:

Most people on the earth have no idea that my Son Jesus Christ is going to come a second time. He’s going to come first in that Second Coming in the air to catch away My people, My bride, the saints, to catch them up off the earth and into the heavens where I will meet them in the clouds, in the Rapture of the saints. And, I’ll take them back with me to heaven before the Antichrist rises and before Armageddon comes . . . Armageddon will follow. And signs will come in the sky and in the earth, and blood and fire and destruction, as Antichrist has risen.

Thus according to the vision, the church has not been fully doing its job by proclaiming the second coming of Jesus Christ in conjunction with preaching and teaching the gospel of Jesus Christ.

This vision brings up many concepts that are studied in a typical course on biblical eschatology (study of the end-times/last days’ events surrounding the second coming of Jesus Christ). Specifically, the following eschatological topics were addressed by the vision: the second coming of Jesus (and all events surrounding it, or the Parousia), the rapture of the Church, the Antichrist, the tribulation, and the battle of Armageddon. While these concepts may be addressed separately and more specifically in a course of study on biblical eschatology and/or in books by expert scholars on the subject, they will not be the central theme of, nor specifically addressed by, this article. The main purpose of this article is to focus on the concept of preaching and teaching both comings (advents) of Jesus Christ as part of the gospel. It is to this purpose that we now turn.

The Perfect/Complete Gospel of Both Comings of Jesus Christ

The concept of the “Perfect/Complete Gospel of Both Comings of Jesus” appears to be implied in the Great Commission, “Go therefore
and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I commanded you; and lo, I am with you always [Lit. all the days], even to the end of the age [emphasis added]” (Matt 28:20). However, this Perfect/Complete Gospel is explicitly stated in Philippians 1:6 (NLT): “And I am sure that God, who began the good work within you will continue his work until it is finally finished on that day when Christ Jesus comes back again [emphasis added].” In this verse, Paul explains the triune entirety of the Gospel of salvation:

1) “God, who began the good work”—justification: new creation of the Christian in Christ Jesus (Rom 3:20–30; 10:8–13; 2 Cor 5:14b–18a), based on the atonement at Jesus’ first coming (Isa 53);

2) “will continue his work”—sanctification: becoming perfect, holy, or Christ-like by the process of the Holy Spirit (Rom 8:1–17; 12:1–2; Gal 5:22–23; 1 Thess 5:23–24), which happens between Jesus’ first and second comings;

3) “until it is finally finished”—glorification, when Christians receive their new spiritual bodies, like Jesus did at his resurrection, and their salvation is completed (Rom 8:18–25; 1 Cor 13:12; 15:20–24, 50–55; 1 Thess 4:13–18), at Jesus’ second coming.

Therefore as in a marriage, where “two become one” (Gen 2:24; Matt 19:4–6), and in conjunction with humanity’s triune nature (1 Thess 5:23) in the image of the triune God of the Bible (Gen 1:26–27), this triune Perfect/Complete Gospel cohesively unifies Jesus’ first coming (for redemption, reconciliation, and restoration—the atonement) with his second coming (for the rapture/resurrection of the Body of Christ, 1 Cor 15:50–55; 1 Thess 4:14–18) into the complete salvation of the Body of Christ (both corporately and individually). Both comings are explicitly “married” in the liturgical church calendar, when the two become one in the season of Advent. Philip Schaff expounds, “After Gregory the Great the four Sundays before Christmas began to be devoted to the preparation for the coming of the Lord in the flesh and for his second coming to the final judgment. Hence they were called ADVENT Sundays [emphasis added].” This is confirmed by Pope Paul VI in his Apostolic Letter, dated 14 February 1969:
Advent has a *two-fold character*: for it is a time of preparation for the Solemnities of Christmas, in which *the First Coming of the Son of God to humanity is remembered*; and likewise when, by remembrance of this, minds and hearts are led to look forward to *Christ's Second Coming at the end of time* [emphasis added]. For these two reasons, Advent is a period for devout and expectant delight.\(^9\)

This concept is also addressed by the liturgical, tripartite “Prayer of Thanksgiving” (or the “Mystery of the Faith”): “Christ has died, Christ has risen, and Christ will come again.”\(^10\) The last part of this saying is specifically remembered by Paul (in 1 Cor 16:22), John and Jesus (in Rev 22:20), and the early church every time it celebrated Holy Communion, by exclaiming: *Maranatha*—Lord Jesus, come!\(^11\) And finally, the Perfect/Complete Gospel is connected with Christians being in relationship with the “Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End,” the “Author and Finisher,” Perfecter and Completer of all creation—the triune God of the Bible (Isa 41:4; Heb 12:2; Rev 1:8). With that as a general introduction, let us delve a bit more specifically (biblically and theologically) into this concept of the Perfect/Complete Gospel.

**Biblical and Theological Understanding**

This Perfect/Complete Gospel was intimated and patterned in the Old Testament by the “Creation Week” (Gen 1:1–2:3, including the Hebraic idea of seventh-day rest—sabbath), as well as the concepts of promise, deliverance, covenant, law, and kingship theology.\(^12\) These concepts were confirmed through the Old Testament offices of Prophet, Priest, and King; Israel’s biblical feasts or festivals (Lev 23); and theophanies or christophanies (e.g., Gen 18; Gen 32:22–32; Exod 3–4; Josh 5:13–15). And finally, the Perfect/Complete Gospel was foretold by Old Testament prophets through various kingdom of God and first and second coming of Messiah prophecies (e.g., Isa 9:6–7; 11:1–12, 61; Dan 2:31–45; 7:13–14; 9:20–27; and Mic 5:2–5).\(^13\) Note that these prophecies cohesively speak of both comings of the Messiah (Jesus).

In the New Testament, this Perfect/Complete Gospel was initiated by Jesus himself and taught to his disciples nearly two thousand years
ago via: direct teaching (i.e., Matt 24; Mark 13; Luke 17:20–37, 21; John 14:1–28); the parables about the Kingdom of God (e.g., Matt 13); the Lord’s Prayer (Matt 6:9–13; Luke 11:1–4); the “Words of Institution” at the Last Supper (Matt 26:26–29; 1 Cor 11:23–26); and the Great Commission (Matt 28:18–20). After Jesus’ death, burial, resurrection, and ascension, James, Paul, Peter, the writer of Hebrews, Jude, and John then taught Jesus’ Perfect/Complete Gospel to the early Christian church. A good way of describing the totality and importance of the role of Scripture in addressing the Perfect/Complete Gospel is put forth by Herschel H. Hobbs:

The preaching and writings of the Old Testament prophets focused always upon the promised incarnation of God in Jesus Christ as the event in history that would give purpose to their utterances. So also the proclamations of the New Testament preachers and writers point ever to the second coming of Jesus Christ at the culmination of history as that “one far-off divine event, to which the whole creation moves.” There is no book or message in the New Testament which does not expressly declare or imply the return of our Lord as that “blessed hope” of those whose trust is fixed in him.

Next, the Perfect/Complete Gospel will be broken down to its basic theological components.

In theological terms, the Perfect/Complete Gospel is based on the combination of two theological concepts: eschatology/teleiology and gospel. As mentioned above, the word “eschatology” derives from the Greek word eschatos, meaning “the extreme, most remote spoken of place and time, the last”—the study of last things, end times, or final events surrounding the second coming (Parousia) of the Lord Jesus Christ. This concept is further refined, and probably more appropriately communicated, by understanding the meaning of the Greek words telos or teleios as, “fulfillment, completion, perfection, goal, whole, full, entire, or perfect, complete.”

The word “gospel” is understood from two Greek words: euangelion, meaning “a good message, good news, the Gospel of Jesus Christ”; and martyreo/martyria, meaning “to witness/a witness.” Taken together, the
two words mean, the “good news” or witness about Jesus Christ coming to redeem and restore humanity back from sin into right relationship with God. From the understanding and combination of these two theological concepts of teleiogy and gospel comes the theological idea of the Perfect/Complete Gospel of Both Comings of Jesus. Next, this Perfect/Complete Gospel concept will be traced throughout church history.

Historical Understanding

The early church believers understood this concept of the Perfect/Complete Gospel at the moment they made the choice to follow Jesus of Nazareth as their Messiah, Savior, and Lord. At that time, this decision was a matter of life and death—there was a very real possibility that a new Christian could be martyred for his or her faith at any time in that first-century AD Roman world. According to Larry D. Hart, traditionally, a confession of faith accompanied the prayer of salvation, water baptism, and baptism in the Holy Spirit at each Christian's salvation experience in the early church. The most simple of these confessions was “Jesus is Lord” (see Rom 10:9–10; 1 Cor 12:3; and Paul's expanded version in Phil 2:6–11). There was also the gospel encapsulated in 1 Corinthians 15:3–8 and what would become the Apostles' Creed (later expanded by the Nicene [ca. fourth century AD] and Athanasian [c.a. AD 500] Creeds). These early Christians further understood the “blessed hope” that Paul mentions in Titus 2:13 to be consolidated into the final phrase of the paragraph talking about Jesus in the Nicene Creed: “He . . . will come again with glory to judge the living and dead. His Kingdom shall have no end [telos].” Thus in the early church, the Perfect/Complete Gospel can be clearly seen.

This Perfect/Complete Gospel continued to be taught by the early church fathers in conjunction with expectation of the imminent return or second coming of Jesus. Brian E. Daley explains further, “The history of eschatology in the Patristic age . . . cannot be separated from the whole development of early Christian reflection on the mystery of salvation in Jesus [emphasis added].” In addition to this were the baptismal creeds of the early church, coupled with the sacraments of baptism and the
Eucharist as promises and “types of symbols of the life of the world to come.”

Next, we turn to the Medieval Church Period.

With the start of the Medieval Church Period (approx. AD 500), there remained a steady stream of belief in the Perfect/Complete Gospel that ran throughout the Medieval Church Period, flowing primarily from the newly established creeds of the church, the sacraments of baptism and Holy Communion, and isolated Post-Nicene Fathers until the beginning of the eighth century AD. After that time, the stream began to dry up, become isolated, and there remained a huge void in teaching the Perfect/Complete Gospel during this period throughout Christendom.

This void in teaching began to be refilled just prior to, through, and after the Protestant Reformation through the writings of several mainline Catholic and Protestant theologians (e.g., Joachim of Fiore [1135–1202], John Wycliffe [1324–1384], Martin Luther [1483–1546], Francisco Ribera [1537–1591], and John Wesley [1703–1791]). This then gave rise to eschatological theologies and Christologies, which in turn gave birth to the Plymouth Brethren and Dispensationalism in England, the Dispensational Baptists and Presbyterians, Bible Prophecy Conferences, Bible schools, and newsletters/magazines in the mid-to-late nineteenth century both in England and the United States. And finally in the twentieth century, all this resurgence, coupled with the American Pentecostal Revival that occurred at the turn of the century, gave rise to the rebirth of the Perfect/Complete Gospel as a central doctrine in the founding of several American churches: A. B. Simpson’s (1843–1919) Christian and Missionary Alliance (1897) and his fourfold Gospel of Christ as savior, sanctifier, healer, and coming Lord; the Assemblies of God (1914); and Aimee Semple McPherson’s (1890–1944) International Church of the Foursquare Gospel (1923) and her Foursquare Gospel of Jesus as the Savior, Baptist in the Holy Ghost, Divine Healer, and the Coming King. Also during the early 1900s, the following Pentecostal churches taught the fivefold Gospel or full Gospel of Jesus as savior, sanctifier, Spirit baptizer, healer, and coming king: Church of God in Christ (1897, reorganized in 1907); Church of God (Cleveland, TN) (1910); and the Pentecostal Holiness Church (1911). Note that this fourfold
or fivefold Gospel concept aligns exactly with the trifold Perfect/Complete Gospel of Philippians 1:6, with the two (fourfold) or three (fivefold) middle “folds” (outlined above) being combined as one and acting as part of the sanctification process.

This resurgence in the teaching and preaching of the Perfect/Complete Gospel then became a central doctrine in many American churches, evangelical tent meetings, revivals, and crusades in the late 1940s and 50s, so much so that it became a central part of both Billy Graham’s and Oral Roberts’ ministries. Later in the 1950s, and then into the 60s and 70s, this resurgence flooded the Church through such well-known evangelists, theologians, and writers as George Eldon Ladd, Oral Roberts, Hal Lindsey, and Charles Ryrie. This trend has continued until the present time through such evangelists, theologians, and writers as John F. Walvoord, J. Dwight Pentecost, Billy Graham, Pat Robertson, and Norman Geisler. Also, Herschel H. Hobbs wrote the article, “The Gospel of the Blessed Hope” (mentioned above); C. Raymond Holmes completed his master’s thesis, “Preaching the Gospel of the Parousia,” from the Seventh-day Adventist perspective; and J. Christiaan Beker wrote a book entitled Paul’s Apocalyptic Gospel: The Coming Triumph of God. From this historical view of the Perfect/Complete Gospel, we now take a look at the current view of the concept.

**Current Status of Understanding**

According to many theologians, the church today, especially the western church, appears to be living in the Laodecian Period (Rev 3:14-20) of the Church Age (the time between Jesus’ first and second comings). They believe that this Laodecian Period is the last period of the Church Age just prior to the second coming of Jesus. Although there are pockets of revival around the world, this end-time church appears to fulfill the Laodecian description contained in the book of Revelation as follows: looking inward versus outward; being rich, self-sufficient, and complacent; and becoming lethargic and lukewarm by allowing secular humanism, moral compromise, and the social gospel to infiltrate its own body (the very body of Christ), while actually being wretched and
miserable, and poor, blind, and naked (Rev 3:17). The answer to this plight is found in the following verses of Revelation 3:18–20, in the form of an invitation by Jesus:

I advise you to buy from Me gold refined by the fire, that you may become rich, and white garments, that you may clothe yourself, and that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and eyesalve to anoint your eyes, that you may see. Those whom I love, I reprove and discipline; be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door and knock; if anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in to him, and will dine with him, and he with Me [emphasis added].

This solution is also highlighted in Revelation 1:1–3 and 19:10 in relation to Jesus’ second coming: “The Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave Him to show His bond-servants, the things which must shortly take place . . . . Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near . . . worship God. For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” [emphasis added].

All of this has led to the melding of the Perfect/Complete Gospel with “aggressive dispensationalism,” as initiated by Hal Lindsey in The Late Great Planet Earth (1970). This also coincided with the Charismatic Movement (or renewal) of the late 1960s into the early 1980s, which has continued in different forms and in different locations into the twenty-first century. However, gradually, the emphasis has shifted from the Perfect/Complete Gospel to just eschatology or “eschatomania” (eschatomania refers to an intensive preoccupation with the prophetic passages or details of the Bible, eschatological charts, prophecy studies, end-times predictions and preaching, etc.).

Over the last thirty years or so (the Postmodern Era), there has been a steady decline in teaching the Perfect/Complete Gospel in the churches specifically where it was a central, foundational doctrine (or critical core belief), and generally in teaching the doctrine throughout Christendom worldwide.

Additionally, let us look at the antithesis—what many call Satan’s false gospel. In these days of New World Order, New Age,
post-modernism, relativism, and the meteoric rise of radical Islam as a world religion, truth seems to be individually relative, deceptive heresy is taught as truth, the love of many has grown cold, and most people are lovers of self and pleasure rather than lovers of God (see Matt 24:12; 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 3:1–7; Jude 17–19). This culture has not taken place in a vacuum, but in an exponentially increasing explosion of knowledge, communication, and transportation, as foretold by the prophet Daniel some 2,500 years ago (Dan 12:4) since the rebirth of the nation of Israel on May 14, 1948. This, in and of itself, is a fulfillment of eschatological biblical prophecy (Isa 66:7–9; Ezek 37:15–28; Amos 9:15). Yet, this new global experience still gives evidence of humanity’s innate interest in its spiritual nature, which was born, and then died (with the original sin/fall of humanity), in the Garden of Eden (Gen 2–3). Humanity is still longing to be in right relationship with its Creator as originally designed (Gen 1:26–2:25). And by God’s grace, there remains “faith, hope, and love, and the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor 13:13), to allow each person to reconcile that relationship with God (2 Cor 5:19)!

Therefore today there is a critical and very-present need for discerning truth from error and the Perfect/Complete Gospel of the kingdom of God from the false gospel of the kingdom of Satan. This may be contextualized by the parable of the wheat and weeds (Matt 13:24–30, 36–43). In this parable, Jesus talks about both the kingdom of God and the kingdom of darkness coexisting and growing unhindered, side-by-side, until the “end of the age” (vv. 39–40). This typifies that in every generation since the fall of Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden (Gen 3), God has placed the opportunity to choose to be in relationship with him (kingdom of God), or to choose to believe Satan’s lie (“to be like God”—Gen 3:5), and go one’s own way (kingdom of darkness). Keeping in mind that the preaching and teaching of the Perfect/Complete Gospel of Both Comings of the Lord Jesus Christ and making disciples of all nations (or fulfillment of the Great Commission issued nearly two thousand years ago by Jesus himself) is the last sign to be fulfilled before the return of Jesus (Matt 24:14; Mark 13:10), this journey of the Perfect/Complete Gospel down through history, compared to Satan’s plan of deceit, heresy, and false
As stated and outlined above, the church’s focus has shifted in the past thirty years or so from teaching and preaching Jesus’ second coming as an integral part of the Perfect/Complete Gospel, to focusing only on the apocalyptic eschatological aspect of the end of the world. In relation to this phenomenon, there has been a major decline, up to the point of a near void, in teaching the Perfect/Complete Gospel in most of its foundational churches (or in any church for that matter), much less sharing that Perfect/Complete Gospel with and making disciples of a lost and dying world. This void is prevalent in most of the western church pulpits (even in the denominations/churches where the Perfect/Complete Gospel was a central doctrine in their genesis) and, consequently, also in the layperson’s presentation of the gospel to the people he or she meets in everyday life. This seems to be confirmed by the vision Oral Roberts received from the Lord in August 2004 (cited at the beginning of the article).

As the signs and birth pangs signaling the Lord Jesus Christ’s second coming increase in frequency and intensity (Matt 24:4–8; Mark 13:5–8), and as the world approaches the completion of the final sign to be completed before Jesus’ second coming (the gospel being preached throughout the whole earth—Matt 24:14; Mark 13:10), there should be a commensurate, increased sense of imminency and urgency to teach and preach the Perfect/Complete Gospel. However, this noticeable decline in teaching and preaching of it appears to have an inverse relationship to the exponential increase of Satan’s promulgation of deceptive and heretical lies, doctrines, and cults in this Postmodern Age. In light of the pervasiveness and this exponential increase of Satan’s last days’ deceptive heresies and false doctrines (which are being propagated as truth), and as the church moves toward the completion of the Church Age and the second coming of the Lord
Jesus Christ, the author sees this void as a chink in the armor of the church in fulfilling the Great Commission (Matt 28:19–20; Mark 16:15). If there ever was “such a time as this”—to reinstitute the teaching and preaching of the Perfect/Complete Gospel, to make disciples of all nations—it is now, in order to fulfill Matthew 24:14, Mark 13:10, Luke 24:47, and Romans 16:26. And thus, the Church may say with all honesty and sincerity, Maranatha, come Lord Jesus! Amen.

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Notes

2 Roberts, “Interview,” 2.
6 The term The Perfect/Complete Gospel of Both Comings of Jesus Christ comes from the refined title of the author’s doctoral work: David K. Hebert, “The Need for Teaching the Eschatological Gospel of Both Comings of Jesus Christ [emphasis mine] in the Twenty-First Century, Especially as We See the Day of His Parousia Approaching,” (D.Th. thesis, University of South Africa [UNISA], 2009).
7 Unless otherwise indicated all Bible references are to the New American Standard Bible (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1973).


20 Zodhiates, “euangelion,” 669.


35 Hal Lindsey, *The Late Great Planet Earth* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1970).


(Jude 11–13, 18–19; 1 Tim 4:1; 2 Tim 3:1; 2 Thess 2:3–4; Rev 3:20), last period before the end of the Church Age and Jesus, who is standing at the door, returns for His Body—1960 to the Rapture of the Church.

46 Hebert, “Gospel of Both Comings,” 2.


49 Hebert, “Gospel of Both Comings,” 1.

50 Hebert, “Gospel of Both Comings,” 1.

51 Hebert, “Gospel of Both Comings,” 3.

Frank D. Macchia embodies the best of the vanguard of Pentecostal theologians exerting profound influence in contemporary theology across the ecclesial spectrum. He exemplifies systematic theology at its best, providing a synthesis of substantive engagement with Scripture, significant utilization of the riches of historical theology, and trenchant analysis and interaction with important voices on the contemporary scene, including global contextual theologies. In this volume on Christology, Macchia offers a theological feast of groundbreaking insights, replete with numerous “quotable quotes” emerging from his often-epigrammatic style.

Macchia offers us a christological symphony. Part 1 serves as the overture. In two chapters he clears a methodological path (ch. 1) and wrestles with contemporary challenges to the task (ch. 2). The leitmotif of Spirit baptism and Jesus as the Baptizer is established in this section. Parts 2 and 3 provide the four-part symphony itself, dealing with Christ’s incarnation (ch. 3), anointing (ch. 4), death and resurrection (ch. 5), and self-impartation at Pentecost (ch. 6). The uniqueness of Macchia’s presentation lies in his tilting of the gem of Christology at just the right angle to enable the reader to capture, perhaps for the first time, the often-neglected programmatic theological rubric of Jesus as the bearer and dispenser of the Spirit.

At first blush, one might be put off by Macchia’s devotion of fully one-third of his monograph to christological prolegomena (Part 1). In other words, the overture was a little overblown, and the author might have devoted more space to various aspects of his christological program itself. However, while analyzing the overall task of Christology, Macchia also proceeds to display and argue his pneumatological thesis, which he further unwraps in Parts 2 and 3. The uniqueness of his approach
perhaps demanded this tack. In simplest terms, Macchia argues for a combining of incarnational Christology and Spirit Christology, an approach which incorporates many of the strengths of Pentecostal, Evangelical, and ecumenical christological emphases. Perhaps the greatest strength of Macchia’s presentation lies in its thoroughly trinitarian tone. He has provided a holistic biblical/theological synthesis of Christology based on the total metanarrative of Scripture.

The Preface and Introduction of the book state succinctly the author’s intentions: “The purpose of this book is to view all of the events of Christ’s life and mission through the lens of their fulfillment at Pentecost” (6). Pentecost is seen, therefore, as the ultimate confirmation and fulfillment of Christ’s person and work (27). Reflecting on this assertion in terms of the tradition Macchia represents, one is reminded of the emphasis of the worldwide Spirit-empowered movement on the present work of Christ, imparting the Spirit and building his church. It is a much-needed addition to most contemporary Christologies, which tend to stop at the resurrection and ascension. Macchia rightly views Pentecost as both an objective reality, a key event of redemptive history, and a very personal impartation of transformation and empowerment (although empowerment is not emphasized as much as one might expect in this work). Three key dialogue partners throughout are Karl Barth, Wolfhart Pannenberg, and Jürgen Moltmann, from whom the author gleans Barth’s strong trinitarian tone, Pannenberg’s accent on the centrality of the resurrection, and Moltmann’s emphasis on the role of the Spirit. These three symphonic accents serve well Macchia’s thesis of seeing Christ’s Spirit Baptizer role as the culmination of New Testament Christology. It would have been advantageous perhaps to bring Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen more fully into the discussion, with his seminal first volume, Christ and Reconciliation, of his five-volume constructive theology, which serves to complement, supplement, and perhaps correct Macchia’s presentation at points. It is virtually impossible to do justice to Macchia’s rich and rewarding monograph in a brief review. I will simply offer a handful of his insights and few personal responses.

Macchia maintains that a Christology from below is the best approach, since the Scriptures portray Christ as both the recipient
and dispenser of the Spirit. The author demonstrates effectively that Christ’s role as Spirit Baptizer is a key theme in Lukan, Johannine, and even Pauline perspectives, but it is Luke’s two-volume work that sets the agenda in terms of the event of Pentecost itself. This may be the most important contribution of Pentecostal theologies to present-day theological dialogue. But this strength of Macchia’s presentation could also be his weakness in terms of overemphasis or imbalance. What he should have perhaps argued for was a Christology “from the middle.” Just as contemporary communal models of the Trinity combine a dual emphasis on both God’s threeness and oneness (in contrast to more traditional eastern and western views), so should one simultaneously affirm both a Christology from above (incarnational Christology) and from below (Spirit Christology). After all, the Pentecostal effusion of the Spirit that the author emphasizes throughout is from above! At the same time, the author rightly desires to root his Christology solidly in the New Testament portrayal of the historical mission of Jesus as well as the historical event of Pentecost. In addition, Macchia rightly maintains the eschatological flavor of New Testament Christology throughout. As I have stated elsewhere, Jesus Christ is truly the ultimate eschatological event!

The author begins, brilliantly, with the announcement of John the Baptist. John, the forerunner of the Messiah, characterizes Jesus’ total ministry as a Spirit-and-fire baptism, and John does so in thoroughly eschatological terms. Thus, just as the resurrection is a prolepsy of the end time, so is Jesus’ anointing in the Jordan and his Pentecostal outpouring. Amazingly, this obvious scriptural teaching has too often dropped out of christological discussion (and pneumatological discussion, for that matter). Macchia’s previous publications have also served well this purpose. No monograph that I am aware of has explicated this insight better than Macchia does in this volume. Further, this approach serves well in tying together the doctrines of Christology and atonement. After all, much of Christ’s identity is rooted in what he has done and is now doing.

Macchia’s treatment of the deity and humanity of Christ (ch. 3) is comprehensive and compelling. He presents eight lines of argument and a masterful explication of the Nicene Creed in corroboration
of Christ’s being truly God (134–53). He could have perhaps also incorporated here more of the “implicit Christology” of the New Testament in terms of Jesus’s use of amen, Abba, and the like. Also, one wonders why the author accepts the concept of divine impassibility so uncritically. Moltmann’s The Crucified God argues powerfully for God’s sovereign freedom to embrace suffering love, and this perspective would have strengthened Macchia’s evaluation of the patristic debates. Instead, Macchia argues for the anhypostatic Christology of Cyril of Alexandria, which ironically has Apollinarian overtones! (Not to mention that many patristic scholars doubt that Nestorius himself was truly “Nestorian” in terms of the stark separation of the two natures.) Too often philosophy (Aristotle) trumps Scripture in terms of the suffering love of God. But putting aside this internecine squabble among patristic scholars, the advantage of the author’s emphasis on Pentecost is that of shedding fresh light on traditional christological rubrics—from the incarnation to the Jordan, on through Christ’s life and ministry, to his death and resurrection, culminating with Pentecost. And he does this in a truly trinitarian fashion.

Another strength of Macchia’s presentation is the way he integrates his Christology with his soteriology and ecclesiology. The salvation Christ brings is holistic. His Spirit provides regeneration, sanctification, and empowerment for mission. His church announces the Good News while humbly serving and working for peace. This more biblically complete approach incorporates the strengths of Pentecostal, Evangelical, and ecumenical perspectives, emphasizing personal holiness, a Spirit-empowered witness, and social engagement. And, Macchia would argue, a new appreciation of Pentecost would serve us well as we follow our Lord into a world that so desperately needs him. To my knowledge there is no monograph on Christology that better serves these ends.

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Miracles: God’s Presence and Power in Creation.

In this engaging and important book, Johnson begins by framing the discussion at length, noting that Christians have too readily allowed secularism to frame the discussion on (and meaning of) miracles. He then surveys God’s presence and power throughout Scripture and finally turns to the question’s pastoral implications. As one would expect from a celebrated senior New Testament scholar, his treatment of biblical theology of miracles offers numerous insights. I learned, for example, from his highlighting of elements that are distinctive in Luke’s treatment of what many call “nature miracles” (235–37).

Nevertheless, because most readers of this review are familiar with the pervasive activity of God articulated in Scripture and will be more interested in Johnson’s own distinctive approach, I focus this review more on the theoretical and pastoral sections of Johnson’s book.

Imagining the Biblical World

Johnson’s focus is not narrowly healings or even always what philosophic theologians term “special divine action,” but more broadly divine action within creation. This theme, of course, pervades Scripture, as he amply illustrates.

Thus he rightly emphasizes seeing nature as creation, a beautiful gift rather than merely natural processes for us to explain and manipulate (e.g., 281). We must approach everything around us with a sense of wonder; all of God’s handiwork and activity is infused with his glory, for those with eyes to see it. Indeed, as he points out (63), God’s design in the universe and in the history of life turns out to be more complex and magnificent, not less, than expressed in Genesis’s succinct creation narratives.

But as some people have perfect pitch whereas others are tone-deaf, not all individuals are equally initially fitted to recognize divine activity (65). Indeed, the modern world is increasingly alienated
from creation; many live in a sort of virtual reality surrounded and sustained by human constructs that leave little direct engagement with nonhuman creation (25). As Johnson emphasizes (66), we all interpret experience through our own symbolic worlds; one person’s “miracle” may be another’s “luck” or yet another’s “anomaly.” To see the God of Scripture, we must, he insists, imagine the world that Scripture does (46–64).

As I emphasized in *Spirit Hermeneutics* (Eerdmans, 2016), we should read with faith—trusting the Bible’s theological worldview. In reading Scripture we should enter the biblical theological world, reading the world around us through its lens: a world where God, miracles, and spiritual beings all are real, a world in which God is present and active. Envisioning this world is a right use of imagination, which does not mean creating a false fiction, but instead perceiving a truth largely obscured by the worldview of our culture.

Thus Johnson explains that by “imaginative” he does not mean “imaginary” (49). We need to live in the (theological) world of the Bible, embracing its reality and working for its realization (51), a concept intelligible to those of us who understand the kingdom as already/not yet. “Imagining the world that Scripture imagines . . . means focusing less on the world that created the Bible (through historical analysis) and more on the world that the Bible creates” (279).

Adopting a biblical worldview does not mean adopting a literal three-story cosmology; it means understanding the transcendent realities that the culturally-assumed language of the text is meant to communicate (52). And a creation alive to God’s presence is certainly one that is hospitable also to more explicit “signs and wonders” (63).

Secularism in the church. Although Johnson identifies the new atheism as epitomizing faith’s nemesis, his own primary target audience seems to be liberal churches that continue to recite the creeds and yet undermine them repeatedly by their dismissal of divine action in a manner naturalistically compatible with atheism. Deism, once deemed an external enemy of the Western church, now reigns in much of it.

Whereas “a numerical majority of believers may continue to celebrate the miraculous past and present . . . their witness is effectively marginalized by the dominant cultural order and by forms
of Christianity that claim to speak for the tradition as a whole” (19). Many seminaries continue to promulgate the secularist, reductionist critics’ dismissal of Jesus’s miracles, and many “enlightened” ministers evade embarrassing accounts of miracles with an “interpretive sleight of hand” (20). Their worldview, in which God does not act perceptibly, reduces the Gospel readings “to implausible fables from ancient and unenlightened people” (31). These clergy can offer little real solace about God’s activity in times of crisis (30–31), rendering prayer a mere exercise in self-help.

Such “enlightened” churches entertain novel theories of “historical Jesus” scholarship originally designed to supplant the church’s creeds while ignoring any cognitive dissonance this might create with their Bible readings, rituals, and other liturgical traditions (27). Yet denial of the supernatural leads to abandoning the most basic elements of the Christian faith, articulated in creeds that virtually all Christians share, and many Christians recite (22–23).

Cessationists who dismiss modern miracles while accepting biblical ones are inconsistent and particularly vulnerable to a Humean critique (21). (A reader interested in further discussion of that subject might consult Robert Bruce Mullin, Miracles and the Modern Religious Imagination [Yale University Press, 1996].) But against both Hume and cessationism, Johnson points out that “at the level of human testimony, there is no real difference between one person’s claim to have experienced healing, another’s claim to have experienced sexual abuse,” and so forth (33). Lack of such experience does not automatically qualify a critic to disqualify someone else’s claimed experience.

**Challenging Secularism**

Jesus’s followers must, he urges, “challenge secularism’s pretense that its discourse is sufficient to engage” all of reality (286). We need a vision of reality that supplants the secular one, not by responding to it piecemeal, but again by seeing nature as God’s creation, alive with his presence and activity (43).

One might not be able to quantify empirically the love of one’s spouse, but denying his wife’s love “means distorting every aspect of
our life together” (60). A secularist epistemology can remain useful for studying nonhuman creation through the natural sciences, but it becomes increasingly subjective and inadequate when applied to human experience: “Understanding of human emotions has not advanced markedly beyond Aristotle and Plutarch, and insight into human virtue and vice falls short of that offered by those ancient moral thinkers” (47). I would qualify his comment by noting the value of the rapidly developing field of cognitive neuroscience, but Johnson would likely reasonably respond that this approach again analyzes the mechanism rather than articulating the most meaningful values of human experience.

Science and technology have advanced at a rapid pace, making important contributions within their sphere. Yet without an additional spiritual or moral framework, technology can be exploited for genocide and pharmaceuticals for feeding addiction (25). The Enlightenment dogma of anti-supernaturalism is no less a dogma than are the church creeds it sought to supplant (25). The Enlightenment construction of “nature” as an entity ruled by laws and distinct from God and humanity is problematic (37). Indeed, even Darwinian evolution challenges the Enlightenment idea of humans standing objectively above nature (38).

Hume’s argument against miracles makes sense only in his historically-conditioned Enlightenment framework (24). One might add here that a number of recent philosophers have thoroughly demonstrated the frailty of Hume’s case, including Oxford scholar Richard Swinburne (Macmillan, 1970), Baylor scholar Francis Beckwith (University Press of America, 1989), J. Houston (Cambridge University Press, 1994), David Johnson (Cornell University Press, 1999), and John Earman (Oxford University Press, 2000). For Hume’s deist context, see especially Robert M. Burns (Bucknell University Press, 1981).

In the same way, Johnson underlines the limits of historical criticism: Historical Jesus scholarship began in the eighteenth century as an Enlightenment alternative to the Christology of church tradition (27). It “is necessarily reductive since history, as a way of knowing, can only deal with human events . . . that are at least potentially verifiable”
(41). One can verify that someone was sick before prayer and well afterward, but one cannot verify historically that God performed the healing, because God “is not an object . . . in the world” subject to empirical analysis (41).

**History and Myth**

From a distance, Johnson’s apparent retreat from potentially verifiable history into “myth” might sound like Rudolf Bultmann, who provided a “safe” place for faith far from empirical testing while feeling free to jettison the historical reality of most of early Christian testimony about Jesus.

This is not, however, how Johnson employs his language of “history” or “myth.” He rejects a program of “demythologization” that is used to rid the biblical text of miracles (68). For Johnson, history is what can be verified to a high degree of probability historically, such as Jesus’s crucifixion. He even allows the possibility that it could apply to the empty tomb and the disciples having resurrection experiences. But the definition of history he uses excludes divine action, since this historical enterprise is grounded in the Enlightenment approach to reality that screens out all discussion of divine causation.

By “myth,” he does not mean “untruth,” but expressions of faith that are not strictly historically verifiable. “By ‘myth’ I mean first-order statements . . . that place human and divine persons in situations of mutual agency” (69). That Jesus died is historical fact; that he died for our sins is myth, theological interpretation. It is not untruth; it is a different order of truth, based on a worldview that acknowledges divine activity—a worldview that Johnson encourages believers to re-embrace as true. This might sound like Johnson wants to have his cake and eat it too—slicing the cake the way that he does allows enough room for separate spheres (perhaps, with Kant, objective science and subjective faith) to satisfy both secularists and believers for awhile.

But ultimately Johnson writes as a believer who encourages other believers to embrace the implications of their faith, even if they will not believe exclusively on the basis of historical evidence. Johnson ultimately challenges the poverty of an exclusively empirical
epistemology—an epistemology that, if left entirely to itself, deprives life of meaning and true relationships. Empiricism provides truth in the spheres that it addresses, but it is not epistemologically comprehensive enough to address much of the side of life that we consider most fundamental. Indeed, as noted by A. E. Taylor in his Leslie Stephen lecture at Cambridge University in 1927, even the master skeptic David Hume conceded that he could not live outside his study with the sort of radical skepticism he applied to theoretical questions (David Hume and the Miraculous, Cambridge University Press, 24–25).

Johnson’s approach is probably closer here to Chesterton (cf. 33, 282), Lewis, or Tolkien than to Strauss or Bultmann. Johnson, in fact, complains about these latter figures (18–19). Strauss, a founder of secular historical criticism, dismissed non-psychosomatic miracles as myth. Bultmann climaxed this approach by treating modern scientific thinking and the reality within human history of New Testament myth as mutually exclusive spheres.

**Does Johnson Go Far Enough?**

Johnson probably goes plenty far for his intended audience, who will view as forceful his defense of recognizing divine activity around us. Charismatics who recognize such activity regularly may feel that he could have divested himself more fully of the secular categories that sunder what he defines as history and what he defines as myth. Johnson does not mean by “myth” what, say, a Richard Carrier, would, but given the popular connotations of the term, including in much of history, would not language such as “theological affirmation” communicate more precisely? And must we necessarily capitulate to the inconsistent secularist demarcation of history to exclude divine causes, when historians are willing to use abduction to the best available explanation for other (human and natural) causes in history?

While aware of some differences from other ancient accounts of divine activity (179–82, 184), divine signs accompanying the births of some other ancient figures appear to persuade Johnson that the infancy narratives use some specific miracles as merely literary
convention to convey mythical truth, such as Jesus’ divine origin (183–84, 191). Although the infancy narratives may be exceptional, ambiguity about specific narratives sometimes stalks Johnson’s descriptions. Theologically, God could do one miracle as easily as another; historically, some are more difficult to support than others. But if Johnson’s concern is exclusively the former, why broach the latter?

He seems to be saying that the text’s message, not the historicity of its events, is the issue (against Enlightenment “literalism,” 40). Modern Western enlightenment questions about “factual accuracy or verifiability” are beside the main point that miracle stories communicate truth about “the human experience of divine power and presence” (42). Thus he speaks of “abandoning an obsession with historical evidence” (51). And indeed, no believer in miracles would insist that their reality in principle depend on every historical miracle claim being historically authentic.

Yet Scripture often attests that God can act in history by showing that he has acted in history. Whether texts use actual events or simply parables to communicate that truth depends on the text’s genre, a different hermeneutical question. If genre is a matter of debate in Jesus’ infancy narratives, most of us will not have the same reservations about reading the creation narratives (see 58) differently than we treat straightforward historical narrative (note the talking serpent, the trees bearing nonbotanical fruits, and the chief protagonist named, in Hebrew, Man).

But again, Johnson’s primary objection seems to be with the neglect of the text’s message by many who try to stand above it to judge it for historical accuracy. We need to hear the story as a whole and its theological message as real rather than fragmenting its details for pure historical analysis.

Johnson affirms real events behind the narratives, but probably “in ways closer to our own experience” (291). Yet what is “our own experience”? Johnson allows for prayer experiences such as prayer in tongues (note e.g., the positive treatment on 40, 291) and prophecy, which equates fairly well with my experience. Yet the experience of my wife’s family in Congo was a child being raised from the dead
after three hours without breathing, when an evangelist friend prayed for her. While God often, and for many of us typically, seems to work in “normal” ways, some human experiences today remain as extraordinary as many of those narrated in Scripture.

**Conclusion**

On the whole, though, continuationist readers will resonate warmly with the thrust of Johnson’s case. We will also hope that it will prove effective in challenging some entrenched paradigms in churches too wedded to the epistemic limitations of the Enlightenment.

Lines from Johnson’s conclusion offer an apt summary of his message, a fitting balancing of the tensions suggested above, and a helpful conclusion for this review (300): “Among believers . . . everything that happens is a manifestation of God’s presence and power, when they have eyes to see and ears to hear; some manifestations are more surprising and unexpected than others, and these can be considered ‘signs and wonders,’ whose function is to draw our attention, not to them, but to the One who[se] presence and power is active in every aspect of existence.”

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In the foreword to _Marginalized Voices_, Vinson Synan notes that this book “is a ground-breaking work, in a never-before-explored area of the history of the Charismatic Renewal Movement” (x). The influence of the Charismatic renewal among Protestants and Roman Catholics has been well-documented. However, until this volume, such could not be said regarding Eastern Orthodox Christianity. Timothy Cremeens,
an Orthodox priest, former Dean and Pastor of Holy Resurrection Orthodox Cathedral (Orthodox Church in America) in Wilkes-Barre, PA, and currently an Adjunct Instructor of church history at William Seymour College in Lanham, MD, has addressed this lacuna in this revision of his doctoral dissertation completed at Regent University under the supervision of Synan.

The focus of the volume is a survey of the key figures in North American Orthodoxy who sought to introduce the renewing presence of the Holy Spirit into Orthodox life at the height of the Charismatic renewal in North America. At this point, there is a bit of confusion over the precise time period of Cremeens’ study: the cover indicates 1972–1993; Synan in his foreword identifies the period 1972–1995; Cremeens himself sets the boundaries of the study 1968–1993 (1n2). Imprecise dating notwithstanding, the guiding question of the study is “why was the Charismatic Movement not embraced by the hierarchy of the Orthodox Church in North America and as a result, repudiated by the vast majority of the Orthodox faithful, clergy and laity alike” (2)?

Following a cursory survey of the rise of Pentecostalism (ch. 2) and the influence of the Charismatic Movement within Protestant (ch. 3) and Roman Catholic (ch. 4) churches, Cremeens spends four chapters examining the main figures in the Orthodox Charismatic renewal. Chapter 5 examines the influence of the Right Reverend Archimandrite Athanasios Emmert of the Antiochian Orthodox Christian Archdiocese of North America; chapter 6, the lengthiest of this survey, examines the immense role played by the Right Reverend Archimandrite Eusebius Stephanou of the Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of North America; chapter 7 surveys the work of the Reverend Father Boris Zabrodsky of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church of America; and chapter 8 examines the place of the Reverend Father Orest Olekshy, who was the main figure in the Canadian Orthodox Charismatic renewal. These chapters survey how each of these figures became aware of the Charismatic renewal and experienced it at a personal level, finding significant warm reception among the laity of Orthodox churches while frequently encountering serious opposition among the institutional hierarchies in which these clergymen served.
The final chapter of the book draws from the historical sketches of the previous chapters to adduce the reasons for the inability of the Charismatic renewal to affect Eastern Orthodoxy to the degree that it did Protestant and Roman Catholic churches. Cremeens identifies four primary reasons for this phenomenon. First, despite the efforts of these Orthodox clergymen to frame the Charismatic renewal in the idiom of Orthodox theology, liturgy, and spirituality, the Charismatic Movement was largely viewed by many Orthodox as a Protestant movement. In particular, Eusebius Stephanou, highly learned and educated in Orthodox theology, found a precursor to the Charismatic Movement in the tenth-/eleventh-century Orthodox saint Symeon the New Theologian. Nevertheless, the Charismatic renewal was unable to shake the connection with Protestantism. While this may seem trivial to those unfamiliar with Orthodox history and theology, this was a significant obstacle that proved insurmountable. Second, and related to the first reason, the Charismatic renewal was viewed as manifesting the most extreme elements of ecumenism. Again, this may seem odd to non-Orthodox Christians, but for a church that sees itself as the guarantor of “the faith that was once for all entrusted to the saints” (Jude 3), mingling with groups that have historically been labeled as “heretics” or “schismatics” was a serious matter. Third, the Charismatic renewal in Orthodoxy was virtually identified with Eusebius Stephanou, who had a frequently tumultuous relationship with the Greek Orthodox hierarchy, had embraced some of the more spurious elements of Pentecostal eschatology, and was perceived as less-than-humble by many clergy and laity. Finally, Orthodoxy has always considered itself as a “charismatic” church in its theology, liturgy, and spirituality, and so did not see itself as needing the kind of renewal offered by the Charismatic Movement. The net result was that those in the Church who endorsed the Charismatic renewal became virtually marginalized and the Charismatic renewal did not take hold in the Orthodox Church in North America.

Assessing this book proceeds at two levels. First, as a historical survey, the book does indeed achieve its goal of charting the relationship between the Orthodox Church and the Charismatic
Movement in North America during the heyday of the Charismatic renewal. This until now largely unknown story finds expression in Cremeens’ narrative and lays important groundwork for continued historical work regarding this relationship. This story virtually begs for a sequel that examines the period following that which Cremeens addresses. Two considerations especially suggest themselves for analysis. For one, the upper bound of the time period Cremeens addresses coincides with early years of the fall of communism in Eastern European countries that have long been traditionally Orthodox. How have the Orthodox in these “old countries” responded to the influx of Pentecostal missionaries in these years? Have these Pentecostal missionaries adequately understood the history, culture, and theology of the Orthodox before trying to “save” them? How has this phenomenon been received by immigrants of these countries in North America and elsewhere? On another note, the past few decades have seen a tremendous influx of “converts” from among Pentecostals and Charismatics into Orthodox communions. Has this materially affected the perception of Orthodox faithful toward things charismatic? Interestingly, since the early 1980s, there have been several students from Oral Roberts University who have joined Orthodox communions, many becoming clergy. This phenomenon provides rich opportunities for empirical research both for the reasons for such moves and for the possible influences these “converts” have had on their new ecclesial homes.

Second, at a constructive level, Cremeens has broached the subject of how the Orthodox might experience charismatic renewal. Given the historical suspicion of the Orthodox toward things non-Orthodox, future work might focus on the resources within Orthodoxy that would foster spiritual renewal. Such seems to be the opinion of Bradley Nassif in the afterword to the volume. This would mitigate the perception that others are attempting to perpetrate “Pentecostal triumphalism” in the Orthodox Church. As more Orthodox churches in North America experience a growing presence of “converts” from ethnicities other than those historically identified with Orthodoxy, perhaps a new openness to a fresh move of the Spirit may be possible, especially if the heritage of Orthodoxy were
engaged toward this end. Moreover, surveying those who have come into Orthodoxy from Pentecostal and Charismatic churches might yield insights into how they express their earlier spirituality in their new contexts.

After reading this book, I am left wondering whether the Orthodox Church needs a spiritual renewal in the mold of the Charismatic renewal of the 1970s and 1980s. Cremeens has amply documented how such an attempt once fared. Perhaps the lesson here is that spiritual renewal, required always in all churches, will take place in a way in Orthodoxy other than in the way it did in western Christian traditions. In this respect, Cremeens’ book not only exemplifies genuinely groundbreaking historical work, but also stands as a foundation for further study and reflection on how the Spirit works in various ecclesial contexts.

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The old Bultmannian approach to Luke-Acts saw the ethical concerns of the two volumes as a substitute (and a poor one) for the eschatological fervor of the early church. Institutionalization and the rise of *Frühkatholizismus* were displacing hope in the imminent arrival of the Son of Man. This position is less in vogue in the twenty-first century, but there remain vestiges of that approach in Lukan studies today.

Joseph M. Lear attempts to refute this position by demonstrating that Luke closely associates the expectation of the soon return of Christ with an ethic of shared property. The title of the book arises from the question raised by the audiences of both John the Baptist (Luke 3:10) and Peter (Acts 2:37). Lear’s study is not limited to these two passages but touches every part
of Luke and Acts, focusing especially on the early chapters of both works. The two stated aims are: (1) “to demonstrate [the] linkage of eschatology and ethics throughout Luke’s two volumes and thereby to show that sharing possessions in the last days appears to be one of Luke’s major theological concerns,” and (2) to ask, “Why does Luke think that an ethic of shared possessions is necessary in the last days?” (10). Much of the book is focused on the first objective.

Methodologically, Lear describes the study as “a literary and theological analysis” (16). He dedicates most of the work to tracing literary patterns, parallels, and structure. Lear seems to attempt to balance an author-focused approach with something like an authorial audience (although he does not use the term). His approach is text-focused with considerable time spent on the flow of the narrative and rhetorical maneuvers of the story (though without reference to ancient rhetorical handbooks), with a peppering of historical reference. The Old Testament is the only text outside of Luke and Acts that receives sustained attention, Luke’s use of the Septuagint being of particular interest to Lear.

The book is strongest in its treatment of Luke’s third and fourth chapters and the account of Pentecost and its aftermath in Acts 2–3. Here the link between a proclamation of a coming eschaton and an ethic of shared property is most pronounced, and Lear’s careful work helps to bring out emphases in the text which are easily missed. A number of passages treated throughout the book demonstrate Lear’s skill as a creative and competent reader of New Testament texts. Anyone working in Luke and Acts—especially the early chapters of each work—will likely find points to ponder in this book.

In attempting to demonstrate the close connection between ethics and eschatology in the rest of Luke–Acts, Lear sometimes finds himself on less sure ground. One point that seems particularly in need of further justification is the equivalence that Lear assumes between the sharing of property, especially as found in John the Baptist’s speech in Luke 3 and the post-Pentecost Jerusalem church, and the extension of hospitality. The two concepts have rich traditions in both Greco-Roman and Jewish literature, and while there may be overlap between the two (e.g., in both cases one certainly shares food), this study would
have benefitted from a more thorough exploration of the relationship between these concepts. Hospitality was widely accepted as a virtue, while the sharing of property, especially as radically as described in Acts, was more on the fringe. Further, the connection between eschatology and sharing property in many passages, even when lumped together with hospitality, depends on a layer or two of conjecture or uncertain connections that depend on verbal repetition or structural considerations. Lear, however, is quick to concede where a connection may be tenuous, and his argument is cumulative and does not depend entirely on any one of these connections.

On the whole, the book is an entirely worthwhile read for anyone interested in Lukan theology or the relationship between ethics and eschatology. Even if the reader is not convinced at every point, Lear offers a formidable response to the suggestion that ethics displaces eschatology in Luke-Acts.

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“I announce good news, great joy to you” said the angel to the startled shepherds (Luke 2:10). Joy was the last thing on their minds as they stood in visceral fear of the angel’s blinding brilliance. Yet, the good news was not so much in the glory attending the messenger or the beauty of the heavenly voices proclaiming the message, but in beholding the baby in a cow trough. In Luke’s writings, the proclamation of the gospel produces joy both in the supernatural and the apparently ordinary things of life. From the Annunciation to Mary to the Ascension of Jesus, Luke begins and ends his Gospel with great joy and gladness (1:14; 24:52). Throughout Acts, Luke announces the gospel of joy both in times of great revelations and ecstasies and during trouble and persecution, and in the seemingly commonplace, the daily meals and fellowship of the church.
In *Joyous Encounters*, J. Lyle Story provides a thorough study of joy in Luke-Acts; and, as his literature review demonstrates, by doing so fills a gap in Lukan studies. This study also serves to correct the mistrust and dismissal of the affections that have pervaded the church and the academy. In the first chapter the author presents Luke’s view that joy is indispensable. Whether true or false, joy has an object. True joy comes in response to a surprising visitation of God’s grace resulting in forgiveness, transformation, and acceptance as a foretaste of eschatological joy (Luke 10:20), while false joy based on materialism or egoism eventually dissipates, leaving only emptiness.

In the second chapter Story identifies over forty of Luke’s favorite joy-related words and compares their usage in charts of the Gospels to show that Luke dominates their use. For example, Luke uses words from the chara/chairō/sugchairō (joy/rejoice/rejoice with) word group twenty-three times in his Gospel and twelve in Acts for a total of thirty-five, while Matthew uses them only twelve times, Mark three, and John eighteen. With this statistic alone it is obvious that joy is in the forefront of Luke’s presentation of the good news of Jesus.

But Luke also dominates the use of words that describe joy or an activity usually resulting in joy in the charitoō/charis/charizomai word group (bestow grace upon/grace/favor highly, etc.), using these words eleven times in his Gospel and twenty in Acts for a total of thirty-one uses in Luke-Acts, while Matthew and Mark never use these words, and John only three times. Luke’s usage dominates another word group as well, euphrainō/euphrosunē (celebrate, gladden/cheerfulness), for he uses the words ten of the sixteen times they occur in the New Testament (three in Paul, three in Revelation). Similar results are found for words such as overjoyed, praise, thanks, amazed, glorify, peace, encourage, and blessed. Although one cannot assume that joy occurs in every instance of Luke’s use of these words, often the context or plain sense compels one to assume that joy is present.

Story expresses his intent to concentrate on the “joy-vocabulary in charismatic experience” (31), but Luke’s interest in words such as peace (*eirēnē*) extends beyond “religious enthusiasm, self-transcendence, well-being, celebration, and joy,” attributes Story defines as “fully charismatic” (31). Peace, praise, thankfulness, and even marvel can
be a grace from God even in the ordinary, everyday, as well as the numinous. Luke’s view of peace is more expansive, more along the lines of the Hebrew concept of *shalom*, which implies completeness and wholeness. If I have understood Story aright, then allow me to suggest that the term “charismatic” is all inclusive, since, as Siegfried Schatzman observed in *A Pauline Theology of Charismata* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1987), all the gifts—from the simple to the supernaturally astounding—are the result of God’s *charis*. Nevertheless, the way Story defines charismatic is indeed the principal usage of the word in Luke-Acts.

In chapter three Story presents “charismatic activity and joy in the annunciation/birth narratives.” The infancy narrative of the Gospel of Luke has been called a “little Pentecost” given the pervasive move of the Holy Spirit to provide creative miracles, revelation, inspired witness, and prophecy. Joy is the consistent result of the Spirit’s work in Luke 1–2. Here Story highlights Luke’s specialized use of joy words that is expressed in terms of effusive charismatic activity.

The fourth chapter focuses on Jesus’ announcement of his messiahship, which is programmatic for his ministry. Anointed with the Spirit of the Lord, he brings healing and freedom to the poor and oppressed in a new Jubilee, which is indeed a visitation of joy (Luke 4:1, 14, 18–19).

In the fifth chapter, Story relates how Jesus’ healings and exorcisms result in joy and glorification of God. When Jesus sends out the Twelve and the Seventy, the deliverance of the afflicted and the fall of Satan result once again in joy, and Jesus himself “rejoices [*ēgalliasato*] in the Holy Spirit,” an event Matthew omits in his parallel (Luke 10:21 with Matt 11:25). Story relates the three “Lost Parables” of the sheep, coin, and son in which their recovery is punctuated with rejoicing (**chairō**, **suchairō**, **chara**, and **euphrainō**) complete with feasting and music. He also shows that Luke’s Triumphal Entry focuses on the people praising and rejoicing in a loud voice for the mighty works Jesus has done.

Similarly, chapter six covers the joy that abounded in the post-Resurrection accounts while in the chapter seven he gives a lengthy presentation of the joyful encounters in Acts. The joy-vocabulary in the Gospel and patterns of signs and wonders with rejoicing continue
Throughout Luke’s account of the early church. In the eighth chapter the author notes that the fellowship of the early Christians produced corporate thanksgiving, worship, and praise to God including the joyful sharing of meals and means. However, this bliss was not a fair-weather whim. Chapter nine shows that this joy persisted despite threats, beatings, and martyrdom. This was indeed a strange joy when the apostles, bearing the marks of a beating, left their persecutors, “rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name” (Acts 5:41).

In the last chapter titled “The God of Emotion,” Story confronts the Western aversion to emotions, instead “favoring propositional language and interpretation” (327). Jesus’ holistic ministry touches the emotions because “this is where people live” (328). The mind can be converted, but if the emotions are still disordered the salvation is, at best, incomplete.

Story realistically recognizes that emotional responses to the gospel can be “both overemphasized and underemphasized” (328). Luke, in one quarter of the New Testament, stresses that emotive, thankful response is a sign that salvation and transformation have occurred. But arrogant minds and cold hearts do not hear the “good news of great joy.” Modernity and the West are the elder brother of the prodigal—we refuse to celebrate. Yet our salvation depends upon it.

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Open to the Spirit: God in Us, God with Us, God Transforming Us. By Scot McKnight. Foreword by Dave Ferguson. New York: WaterBrook, 2018. xvii + 221 pp.

Scot McKnight, Julius R. Mantey Professor of New Testament at Northern Seminary (Lisle, IL) and prolific author, writes Open to the Spirit using a pastoral rather than scholarly approach, but his words ring with the authority as he speaks from his own experience of the Spirit as well as from the depths of his biblical knowledge.
In the book, McKnight extends a heartfelt invitation to Evangelicals—particularly those who have been unmindful of the Third Person of the Trinity—to seek a personal relationship with the Spirit like the one they have with Jesus Christ. McKnight characterizes the initiation of such a relationship as both a release and a filling with the Spirit although his presupposition is that the Holy Spirit indwells every faithful Christian. The obstacle to life in the Spirit, he suggests, is that many are oblivious to that indwelling and out of fear or ignorance suppress the Source of grace within that could transform them if only they would to allow the Spirit to release God’s power through them. Much of the persuasive force of the book lies in McKnight’s testimony to his own transformation once he opened himself to the Spirit and the stories he shares of others who have experienced the transformative and sometimes miraculous move of the Spirit in their lives.

This is not the first time McKnight has gone outside the Evangelical comfort zone to attempt to restore unity of faith and practice among Evangelicals and other Christians. In an earlier volume *The Real Mary: Why Evangelicals Can Embrace the Mother of Jesus* (Paraclete, 2006), he encouraged Evangelicals to join the ranks of those who since Elizabeth, the mother of John the Baptist, have called Mary blessed (Luke 1:42–48). In the volume at hand, McKnight attempts—successfully, I believe—to re-introduce Evangelicals to the Holy Spirit and to inspire them to open themselves to the Spirit so that they too can live the kind of life that Jesus lived, “anointed with the Holy Spirit and with power” (Acts 10:38).

In his introduction (chs. 1–2), McKnight marvels that the God of the universe not only has revealed himself in the person of his Son but condescends to indwell each believer by his Spirit. He then expounds on the truth revealed in the Gospels that as a human being Jesus relied on the power of the Holy Spirit to do his mighty deeds, the implication being that if Jesus depended on the Holy Spirit, how much more so do his followers then and now.

Dividing the main section of the book into five parts, each with four or five chapters, McKnight begins by discussing how openness to the Spirit draws us to Jesus (ch. 3). The more open we are to the Spirit, the closer we come to Jesus. First, he challenges those who attempt to
substitute the Bible for the Spirit (ch. 4), and then he challenges the reverse—the focus on the Spirit to the exclusion of Scripture (ch. 5). I have rarely seen this, as, in my experience, openness to the Spirit is typically accompanied by love for the Scriptures. But it does happen, the Montanists being perhaps the earliest case in point, their zeal for the Paraclete (and their own prophecies) eventually overshadowing their zeal for the Scriptures (and commitment to the church).

In chapter 5, McKnight makes what appears to be a challenge to the Pentecostal doctrine of tongues as the initial evidence of Spirit-baptism when he cites Peter’s quotation of Joel’s prophecy on the day of Pentecost that “your sons and your daughters shall prophesy” (Acts 2:17–18; Joel 2:28–29), because on that basis he asserts that prophecy is the mark, or **sine qua non**, of the coming of the Spirit. While he does not specifically mention tongues here, the implication seems clear—for McKnight, if there is an initial evidence of the release of the power of the Holy Spirit in a person’s life, it would be prophecy, not tongues. In a later chapter (21) he enumerates four kinds of tongues: missionary tongues, private prayer in tongues, public tongues with interpretation, and singing in the Spirit (174–79). So, though he never claims to speak in tongues himself (69), he clearly considers them to be a valid gift.

As he continues his discussion of prophecy, he warns that “to deny the gift of prophecy in the church is to quench the Spirit” (74) but insists that all prophecy be tested. Like Gordon Fee, he sees little scriptural precedent for “personal prophecies” unless they are confirmed communally (221n1) and agrees with Fee as to “the absolute need for intelligibility in the assembly” (Fee, *God’s Empowering Presence*, 148, quoted in 221n3). This appears to be another vague reference to tongues, but this time public tongues for which no interpretation is given.

In the second part of the book McKnight expounds on the experience of the Spirit not as an abstract proposition but as a Person, “Someone who transcends our inabilities and can transform our abilities” (95). He identifies this as a paraphrase of a quote from Dunn’s *The Acts of the Apostles* commentary (Trinity Press, 1996, 12). The images McKnight uses for the Spirit are those Jesus himself used: *living water*, “an inner source of constant renewal and power” (100);
Paraclete, the Advocate who is ever with us; and the filling of the Spirit, the cause of true joy and celebration in contrast to the hollow frivolity of intoxication. At this point McKnight launches a broadside attack on cessationism, which by stifling the Spirit causes its proponents to miss the party: “Those who ignore or suppress the Spirit deprive themselves and others of God’s greatest gift” (103).

Since space constraints do not permit further detailed analysis, I will only sketch the rest of the implications of McKnight’s discourse on openness to the Spirit. When allowed to move freely, the Spirit transforms not only the personal lives of believers but also their communities of faith. Even their leaders, provided they are open to the Spirit, are transformed from autocrats to the kind of leader Jesus was, servant-leaders (Matt. 23:11). McKnight encourages all Christians, not just clergy, to identify and develop the ministry gift(s) by which they can best serve others. He calls on them to allow the Holy Spirit to expand the reach of their hospitality to embrace those who differ from themselves. He emphasizes the role of the Holy Spirit in making them holy. As people practice the spiritual disciplines, they become increasingly open to the Spirit, who draws them toward God, and away from sin, transforming their relationships, giving them courage and hope and sometimes miraculous healing in the face of sickness, enabling them to engage victoriously in the war against personal and systemic sin and the spiritual powers of darkness, and finally enabling them to enter joyously and wholeheartedly into a life wide open to the Spirit of the triune God.

As he does from the beginning, McKnight continues his challenge to Evangelical reservations about the Spirit, and even opposes a few Pentecostal teachings. One of these is the Pentecostal understanding of two baptisms—first, water, and, subsequently, Spirit—which he challenges by citing Paul’s reference to one baptism (Eph 4:4–5) and re-interpreting John’s prophecy of Jesus’ baptism (Matt 3:11) as a water-baptism that is also a Spirit-and-fire baptism (133). This argument is not convincing to me since he bypasses the post-Resurrection/pre-Ascension Jesus’ prophecy that he would baptize the apostles in the Holy Spirit “not many days hence,” with no mention of water being made either in the prophecy itself or in its fulfillment on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 1:4–5; cf. Luke 24:49). I also see no justification for
diluting the sharp contrast John draws between Jesus’ baptism and
his own. Even so, I see McKnight’s suggestion of a three-dimensional
baptism as his affirmation of the Pentecostal emphasis on the filling
with the Holy Spirit despite his disagreement with the subsequence
aspect.

The implicit message in *Open to the Spirit* comes through loud and
clear. Life in the Spirit is not just for Pentecostals and Charismatics—it
is for all Christians. It is the norm, not the exception. The question is,
will the church and its leaders allow the wind of the Spirit to blow freely
through it, and will its members allow the river of the Spirit to flow
freely through them? I believe the only way to respond appropriately
is to respond the way Mary did when the angel told her that the Holy
Spirit would come upon her—“Let it be to me according to your word”

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**Sculptor Spirit: Models of Sanctification from Spirit Christology.** By Leopoldo A. Sánchez M. Downers Grove,

In his most recent book, *Sculptor Spirit: Models of Sanctification from Spirit Christology*, Leopoldo Sánchez desires to demonstrate how
the Spirit works in union with the Trinity in the present. He bases
his assertion that the Spirit is a living person, a sculptor, who shapes
“Christ’s image in persons” in order to “make us God’s own holy people
now” (xiv–xv) on the framework of Spirit Christology, the foundations
of which are laid in the historical conversation about the Spirit. He
then captures his conclusions within his proposal of five sanctification
models to portray various aspects of life in the Spirit.

The first chapter establishes the need for a theology of sanctification
based on the trinitarian framework of Spirit Christology in which all
persons of the Trinity work indivisibly. Spirit Christology presents a
complement to Logos Christology, in that Jesus was both man and
God. Here, Sánchez argues that the dynamic behind the sanctified formation of Christians is congruent to the dynamic of how God acted in Jesus by the power of the Spirit. Believers share in this same Spirit by grace. In other words, we can learn about the shape of the Spirit-empowered life by looking at the life of Jesus.

The following chapter establishes the historico-theological foundation on which trinitarian Spirit Christology developed. Engagement with early church fathers, including Irenaeus, Cyril of Jerusalem, Athanasius of Alexandria, and others, establishes a pneumatic trajectory for Jesus’ life as well as for his preexistence and incarnation. In particular, Sánchez traces the patristic concerns regarding (1) the role of the Spirit within God’s plan of salvation, (2) the relationship between Jesus’ incarnation and his infilling with the Spirit, and (3) “the discontinuity and continuity between the Son of God and the adopted children of God in an account of sanctification” (59).

Spirit Christology yields at least five portrayals of Christ’s life in the Spirit, which are treated in chapters three through seven. Sánchez highlights the ways in which each of these models demonstrates aspects of holiness and serves as a lens that enables greater discernment of each person’s spiritual condition. The five sanctification models include the following: (1) the renewal model, (2) the dramatic, (3) the sacrificial, (4) the hospitality, and (5) the devotional. He approaches each model first through the Bible itself, the early church fathers, Martin Luther, and some contemporary theologians. Then, Sánchez brings these threads together to offer practical considerations for what holiness entails and how it can be fostered in the lives of believers. The renewal model deals with baptism, specifically conformity to Christ’s baptism into death and resurrection, calling believers to repentance and reconciliation. The dramatic model considers spiritual disciplines—meditation on the Word, prayer, fasting, accountability, and support—as modes of vigilance and resistance against spiritual attacks. The sacrificial model focuses on the Spirit who transforms believers into living sacrifices for the purpose of service and sharing. The hospitality model calls attention to the breaking down of racial and ethnic boundaries as the Spirit “conforms us to Christ in his own marginality and in his mission to and through marginal characters” (144). Lastly,
in the devotional model, life in the Spirit operates as an “expression of devotion to the Creator” as we embrace our “creatureliness” and submit to the creational rhythm of work, rest, and play.

The final chapter considers how the narratives and imagery of the models can engage with the hopes, needs, and struggles among North American “neighbors,” who exist both in and outside the church. For instance, Sánchez notes that current North American society has a different way of approaching the sacred, that it has shifted from an “unquestioned belief” to a questing search for a “coherent story” with more authenticity and depth. Here, clergy cannot serve as mere gatekeepers of Christian tradition but are more effective as models of spirituality. Sánchez’s five models make this connection between theory and practice, illustrating how the Holy Spirit can provide people with a coherent framework to describe their spiritual journeys and how a proper understanding of the Spirit leads them to certain spiritual disciplines and practices that will help cruci-form them (Phil 3:10) and bolster their hope in times of struggle and suffering. A robust Spirit Christology gives us purpose and meaning, belonging and community, worthwhile work and causes, as well as the proper balance between work and rest.

Sculptor Spirit is written from a Lutheran perspective rather than a Pentecostal-Charismatic one and thus omits discussions of Spirit baptism, initial evidence, and the spiritual gifts. Instead, Sánchez emphasizes the Spirit’s role in calling people to faith by the Gospel and then daily sanctifying them and keeping them faithful. Furthermore, the author grounds his scholarship within the church’s history of interpretation of the Spirit’s work, benefiting from the theocentric emphasis of the church fathers and later theologians, even Martin Luther himself.

This book is a timely and faithful reminder that much of the Spirit’s work in the world and in our personal lives may seem unspectacular and even mundane. The Spirit is found not only in the exciting drama of a healing but is also in the believer’s baptism and increasing Christo-formity (Rom 8:29). Sánchez’s description of the Spirit’s work sweeps believers into the larger spiritual drama in which God is creating things anew in the world. Within this renewal drama, each dimension of Christian life becomes filled with meaning. Within
the realization of the kingdom of heaven here on earth, we as believers can embrace our role as creatures, work toward reconciliation and greater hospitality, help and serve each other, all for the common good of the entire body.

This all being said, Sánchez’s models are flexible enough that signs and wonders can find a place within them. They certainly can find a place within the dramatic model, in overcoming barriers to the reception of the Gospel or in engaging in spiritual warfare. Certainly, the Spirit can and does move in miraculous ways to help effect reconciliation or provide for hospitality. It is not so much what we can do in the Spirit as what the Spirit of God is doing in and through us. As the late father of academic Pentecostal theology and Oral Roberts University professor Howard Matthew Ervin would stress in Pneumatology 101, we are not permanently gifted supernatural abilities through the Spirit. Rather, the Spirit can manifest any gift to the body of Christ through any believer at will. Hence, we return to Sánchez’s utilization of the motif of the Spirit as the sculptor, who forms us and refines our shape, conforming us to the cross and to the image of God’s Son.

With Sculptor Spirit, Sánchez offers fresh perspective about sanctification against which the Pentecostal-Charismatic community may understand better and evaluate further its own tradition and perspectives on the role of the Spirit.

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