

PENTECOSTAL HERMENEUTICAL CONSIDERATIONS ABOUT WOMEN IN MINISTRY

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ABSTRACT

At first, the Pentecostal movement made no distinction between genders in the ministry. Anyone anointed by the Spirit was allowed to minister, whether to pray for the sick, testify about an encounter with God, preach or teach. The emphasis was not on the person of the one ministering, but on the Spirit equipping and empowering the person. Due to Pentecostals' upward mobility and alliance with evangelicals in order to receive the approval of the society and government since the 1940s, women's contribution to the ministry faded until in the 1970s some Pentecostals with an academic background started debating about Pentecostal hermeneutics; questioning also the omission of women from ministry. Although many Pentecostals still read the Bible in a fundamentalist manner, the article proposes a hermeneutical strategy—in accordance with the way early Pentecostals interpreted the Bible—that moves from the experience with the Spirit to the Bible, allowing one to experience the confusion and conflict necessarily associated with contradictory statements found in the Bible about issues such as women in the ministry. While the author agrees it is important that discrimination against women in the church should cease, the purpose of the article is not primarily to discuss this discrimination; it is rather to show how a movement's hermeneutical viewpoint and considerations can cause the movement to change its stance about an important issue such as women in ministry.

Keywords: Hermeneutics; Pentecostal; women; ministry; experience; hermeneutics of suspicion; mythic archetype; historical prototype

INTRODUCTION

In its early years, no professional pastorate existed in the Pentecostal movement. People were evaluated to be qualified to minister when the Holy Spirit gifted them for ministry within the church, whether to teach or preach, pray for the sick or demon possessed,

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or encourage the sick and bereaved. In many cases, Pentecostal denominations then awarded certificates to people whose ministry proved to be effective as an evangelist or missionary (Burger 1987, 181). Anyone could participate in the worship and evangelistic services to preach or pray, prophecy or interpret the speaking in tongues, or to lead interested people to the Lord. Worship services were not planned; anyone could at any stage interrupt when the Spirit led them to, and participate by bringing a testimony, singing a song, bringing a “message from the Lord” (whether in the form of prophecy or interpretation of tongues) or praying for someone that the Spirit indicated had a specific need; implying that access to God was not controlled by a few professionals (Archer 1996, 67). It must be conceded that it led in many instances to chaotic episodes where persons who were not qualified (and in some cases emotionally disturbed) participated in services and caused havoc. Leadership of the local assembly and national denomination was also decided by the Spirit who gifted whoever he wanted; the assembly and church recognised those gifted for leadership and elected them to show the way and lead. It was again not always without problems; the early Pentecostal movement was scarred by several schisms that can be related to leadership divisions. However, one of the results was that women featured strongly, not only in participation in services but also in leadership and ministry. What counted was the anointing of the Spirit resting on a person and qualifying the believer for a specific ministry; women and men were free to follow the call to preach the gospel (Blumhofer 1985, 137) and all were encouraged to be soul-winners, testifying to what God did in their lives (Land 1993, 42).¹ Several examples can be cited of successful female preachers in the movement; the only requirement for a successful preacher was that people get saved and healed, and it happened in the ministry of women preachers as well. Pentecostals perceived that the Spirit did not

1 The early Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa (AFM) was also characterised by a reactionary anti-church tendency in response to what it perceived as the formalism and creedalism of the historical churches (Burger 1987, 181). This might be largely the result of the treatment many of the early members of the AFM received at the hand of these historical denominations when they became convinced of the Pentecostal message and left their earlier churches, as Burger (1987, 181) and Langerman (1983, 83) claim. Part of the counter-reaction was that Pentecostals held a dim view of all professional church leaders, while they organised themselves along the New Testament concept of voluntary ministry of the whole body of Christ, with certificates issued for elders, deacons, workers, missionaries, pastors and evangelists (Langerman 1983, 83–84). All who campaigned and witnessed actively were recognised as “workers” and they received “workers” certificates. No titles were used and believers called each other “brother” and “sister”. No worker received a salary (Burger 1987, 181). And women were found in all the categories of participants in the ministry of the early Pentecostal movement. This is also the case in terms of the early African people who joined the Pentecostal movement in South Africa. In general, the African people can be viewed as a patriarchal grouping where men have more power than women. This is confirmed by African culture as a culture that often favours men. The position of women in Africa today within society and religion tends to be prescribed by male authority. That their unchanging set of norms prescribed is enshrined in a culture that appears not to be changing can be seen in the rituals and ancestral worship. As a result, most of the traditional practices within the African culture are agents of female oppression (Choabi 2015, 15). However, in Pentecostal churches women played and still play an important and essential role in the ministry as they supplement male leadership.

distinguish between the genders in his empowerment for ministry in their churches.² And the church was driven by an urgency to reach all with the Pentecostal message due to their expectation of the imminent second coming, encouraging believers of all ages and sexes to witness because the early Pentecostal movement was to an important extent defined by its eschatology of premillennialism and expectation of the imminent rapture.³

The earliest converts to the Pentecostal message were from the lower classes of poor and illiterate blue-collar workers who did not engage in complicated philosophical and theological debates about the nature of Scriptures and ways and means to interpret it (Spittler 1985, 75). They listened to the voice of the Spirit in subjectivism when they read the Bible and believed implicitly that God wanted to repeat in modern times what he had done in biblical days. The experiences of people related in the Bible was appropriated in terms of what they expected God to do for them, and when they witnessed about their encounters with God they utilised biblical language to describe their experiences.

May (2017, chapter 1) emphasises that Pentecostals utilise an explicit supernatural, experiential worldview that, although certainly not unique to Pentecostalism, is seen as being directly transferred from the supernatural worldview described in the Bible that perceives God as above and beyond creation yet in and among his people and testified to by signs and wonders, the transcendent God who is immanent (Archer 1996, 77). Poloma (1989, xix) characterises this Pentecostal worldview by “its belief in and experience of the paranormal as an alternate *Weltanschauung* for our instrumental rational modern society.” The supernatural forms one of the defining factors of Pentecostalism, revealing a willingness and eagerness to acknowledge that there is an active role for the Holy Spirit in hermeneutics which goes beyond other more conservative approaches. The supernaturalistic horizon of Pentecostalism is marked by living “in and from the eschatological presence of God” (Archer 1996, 64). For this reason, Pentecostals shared their encounters with God by unashamedly referring to his intervention in their daily affairs, as they perceived it.

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- 2 In its first Constitution that was passed on 4 October 1921, the AFM decided that ministries should consist of pastors, elders, deacons, evangelists, missionaries and workers; that certification was done for those with recognised ministries; and that no mention is made about sexes because male and female members were certified to serve in the respective functions (Langerman 1983, 87–89). At the same time, 21 people received certificates: one elder, two evangelists and eight deacons were ordained and they were all male, as well as 10 workers of which eight were women (Langerman 1983, 92). The early Pentecostal movement saw women volunteering as missionaries, pastors, teachers, Sunday school workers, contributors to the welfare projects of the churches, musicians, and all other ministries. However, they also participated in the practice of spiritual gifts, speaking in tongues and interpreting it, prophesying, in healing and deliverance ministry, etc. Male and female believers also prayed for others to receive the experience of Spirit baptism with success.
 - 3 Pentecostals literally desired to evangelise the world in their generation (Archer 2009, 25) because “The fields are before us and white unto harvest ... Foreign countries should be occupied, and the gospel given to them as rapidly as possible” (in an early sermon, reprinted in Willis 1986, 20).

CHANGE IN HERMENEUTICAL STANCE

At the end of the Second World War it had become clear that Christ's second coming was not as imminent as expected and the Pentecostal movement organised itself for a longer stay in the world (Holmes 2013, 265). The socio-economic status of some Pentecostal members also changed in time, the movement became more mainstream and increasingly more concerned with middle-class values, eventually leading to more formality and order in the worship service and ornate buildings with pulpits and choir stalls (Anderson 1979, 31). Corporate authority was reorganised and male dominance appeared in conformation with the standards and requirements set by Pentecostalism's new partner, Evangelicalism (Poloma 1989, 235).⁴ In its bid to become acceptable to the community and government, Pentecostals allied with the evangelicals, the only Christian group willing to tentatively recognise its existence. However, especially in the fundamentalist part of the Evangelical movement, women were not allowed to partake in the ministry, due to the fact that some Scriptures seem to forbid them while encouraging women to live out their calling in the home and in subjection to their husbands (1 Cor 14:34; 1 Tim 2:9–10; 5:14; 1 Pet 3:5). In the Hebrew Bible also, women could only inherit when there were no male descendants and men were forbidden to wear women's clothing, while the New Testament emphasises that woman were created for the sake of man.⁵

Now Pentecostals revisited their practice of allowing women to participate in the ministry and worship service.⁶ Their synod decisions discriminated against women because of their sex and the new policies were backed up with references to biblical texts, especially Paul's pronouncements about the silent role women were allowed to play in the assemblies he established and their role in marriage as the sex that was created

4 Bebbington (1993, 183) defines Evangelicalism as a term evangelicals prefer to use to refer to themselves in terms of a cluster of four assumptions that they hold: the authority and sufficiency of Scripture; the uniqueness of redemption through the death of Christ upon the cross, often linked with a specifically substitutionary theory of atonement; the need for personal conversion; and the necessity, propriety, and urgency of evangelism. Evangelicalism is not confined to any one denomination; it is not inconsistent to speak of Anglican evangelicals, Methodist evangelicals or even Roman Catholic evangelicals because the movement is transdenominational. It represents a trend within the mainstream denominations that treats the potentially divisive matters of church ordering and government as of secondary importance (Bebbington 1993, 183).

5 This led to Aquinas's (*Summa theologiae* I q.92, a.1) viewpoint that man is the starting point (*principium*) and goal (*finis*) of woman; woman was not created from the head of the man (so that she should not rule over him), nor from his feet (so that she should not be despised), but from his rib, so that man and woman should remain together inseparably all their lives; by "nature" woman is subjected to man, since in man the rational power of discernment is present more abundantly and so the woman falls short of the man in power and dignity; in relation to the whole of creation, while woman is among its good things, individually woman is "something deficient and unsuccessful" (*aliquid deficiens et accasionatum*) compared with the man.

6 In the AFM, a new constitution promulgated in 1946 limited lay workers to elders and deacons while the pastorate was formalised and limited to males (Burger 1987, 305–306; Langerman 1993, 92).

after and from man.⁷ Brumback (1946, 314–315) apologised for the earlier viewpoint and admitted that the Pentecostal movement was previously “perhaps a bit lenient” in its enforcement of clear Scriptural injunctions found in 1 Corinthians 14:34, 38 that clearly prohibits women to actively partake in any form in the worship service. Kulbeck (1958, 14) reacts to Brumback’s admittance, and adds that the movement was influenced by new ideas concerning women’s rights, while it made the mistake of emphasising the exception in the New Testament rather than the rule. It should also be kept in mind that the movement reacted against the legal attitude of other groups. At the same time, she explains, it should be kept in mind that women did not receive undue prominence; they represent only a small percentage of the ministry and their voice was not heard when doctrinal and governmental decisions were taken.⁸

Cooperation with evangelicals in the USA led to an alliance with the National Association of Evangelicals (NAE) in 1942 (Robeck 1988, 635; cf. website of NAE, <http://nae.net/about-nae/history/>, accessed 6 February 2017). Acceptance by the evangelicals came at a cost as Pentecostals accepted their hermeneutical stance, a fundamentalist-dispensational hermeneutic characterised by literalism and inerrancy (Kärkkäinen 1998, 80). While the early movement had read the Bible prayerfully with the expectation to experience what the biblical witnesses described,⁹ now they read the Bible as the ultimate authority that determines their teaching (Falwell 1986, 53). For instance, at first most Pentecostals were pacifists, declaring that they could not participate in the killing of people who the state declared to be the enemy (Robeck 1997, 107), but now they changed their viewpoint to accommodate the evangelical perspective. A professional pastorate was also established to replace the involvement of the laity in accordance with the practices and standards set by evangelicals (Clark 2017, 16), because Pentecostals changed their hermeneutical perspective when they accepted the viewpoint of verbal inerrancy and infallibility of Scriptures, essential elements of a fundamentalist use of the Bible (Ammerman 1998, 61).

For fundamentalists viewing the Bible as verbally inspired, literal, inerrant and authoritative, the “letter of the law” is important. Their experiential spirituality determined that Pentecostals read the Bible in a less rational and literal way, leaving room for the direct dictates of the same Spirit to interpret Scriptures who also had initially inspired it. This does not imply that they did not hold a high view of Scriptures

7 The influence of Augustine’s view that identifies the original sin in the Garden of Eden with the sexual act (reading Rom 5:12 in the Latin translation as *in quo* – “because (or in that) all sinned” should not be underestimated as it shaped Evangelicalism’s view of the doctrine of predestination and original sin (Küng 2006, 86), leading to a general misogyny in this movement.

8 This was also the experience in the AFM, where certain women played a role in the women’s ministry, welfare ministry and children’s ministry, but in the meetings of the leaders of the church where policy and doctrine were decided, their voices were mostly silent (Langerman 1993, 93). They took care of the meals for the delegates to the church meetings where policy was written.

9 Kärkkäinen (2007, 10) describes the essence of Pentecostalism as the personal and direct awareness and experiencing of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit by which the risen and glorified Christ is revealed and the believer is empowered to witness and worship.

but to them the “spirit (Spirit) of the law” was more important (Cargal 1993, 163). In practice, previously they “listened to the voice of the Spirit in their hearts” (or rather, insights developed in their minds) about what the interpretation of a specific Scripture entails, and sometimes it did not coincide with the results provided by an exegetical study of the text. Now they accepted a new way of reading the Bible, in most cases determined by a grammatical-historical exegetical way of interpreting it (Archer 2009, 189–199).

Since the 1970s, more and more Pentecostals qualified in graduate studies at universities and they engaged in debates about Pentecostalism while they were also responsible for establishing theological colleges and later seminaries (Lewis 2016, 10). At the same time they grounded Pentecostal practice in various theological research projects, of which especially Pentecostal hermeneutics proved to be very influential in the movement. An empirical study needs to be done to determine to what extent Pentecostalism can still be identified with fundamentalism; however, it might be possible that a majority are still aligned with fundamentalist thinking. If the tendency to avoid newer translations of the Bible in order to utilise exclusively the King James Version (1611, and *Afrikaans Ou Vertaling* 1933, Revised 1957) is seen as a trait of a fundamentalist use of the Bible, then a large part of the Pentecostal movement is prone to interpret the Bible in this fashion (Lederle 1988, 162).

Fundamentalism is a modernist phenomenon with both modernism and fundamentalism having their epistemological roots in the Enlightenment ideal of “objectivity”. The basic presupposition is that reality is objectively knowable; only what is objectively knowable is real, leaving out any room for supernatural intervention. History is also seen as what is knowable, and is described in historicist terms as *wie es eigentlich gewesen ist* (as Leopold von Ranke in 1871 described history’s goal; cf. Carr 1961, 3). Fundamentalists set their camp against modernism¹⁰ that found the meaningfulness of the Bible for people living in the twentieth century in the “kernels” discovered through means of historical criticism which represents a critical, objective historical reconstruction of the origins and development of ancient texts. Fundamentalists accept that the Bible in its entirety is objectively and historically true and reject any notion that the biblical narrative contains myths and legends from surrounding nations. However, what fundamentalism and modernism share is even more important than in what they differ, in that both utilise the philosophical presupposition that only what is historically and objectively true and knowable, is meaningful (historicism; Archer 2009, 23–24; Cargal 1993, 165–166).

10 The challenges proposed by modernity included the evolutionary theory in both its social and biological implications, which leaves little room for the supernatural and personal aspects of God; higher criticism that originated in Germany, specifically in the interpretation of the Old Testament and that effectively undermined the authority of the Bible; and comparative religion studies which relativised Christianity and deprived it of its unique and absolute character (Anderson 1979, 31; Archer 2009, 22; Marsden 2006, 25–26).

When the Bible is read in a literalistic, prescriptive sense, where no room is left for its historical situatedness and context-oriented meaning because the Bible is granted the status of a final authority on all issues, the ministry of women cannot but be excluded from the church. The biblical prescriptions are clear; for instance, think of Paul's injunction that as in all the churches of the saints, the women must keep silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak out, but must place themselves in submission, as the law also says. If they want to learn anything, they should ask their own husbands at home, for it is inappropriate for a woman to speak out in church. And if anyone ignores this, he should be ignored (1 Cor 14:33–35, 38).

EARLY AND LATER PENTECOSTAL HERMENEUTICAL PERSPECTIVES

As stated, from the 1970s more and more Pentecostals engaged in academic theological endeavours,¹¹ leading to a recurrent debate about Pentecostal hermeneutics (Archer 2009, 6). The observation is that a modern consensus seems to be developing within these circles that a Pentecostal hermeneutics consists of some factors that, interestingly enough, concur to a large degree with how early Pentecostals thought about the Bible.¹² It starts with the experientialist practices that characterise the Pentecostal movement (Cox 1995, 299–321), combined with its original egalitarian impulse and inclusive ethos in contrast to the fundamentalist approach that is primarily rationalist, hierarchical and exclusive (Holmes 2013, 269). Anderson (1993, 233) correctly observes that Pentecostalism predated fundamentalism and it is essentially different from it. While fundamentalists consider the Bible as inerrant and evangelicals consider it as sufficient and authoritative, Pentecostals consider it as inspired and illumined (Holmes 2013, 268). Fundamentalists and evangelicals read the Bible to hear the word of God; Pentecostals listen to “their hearts” where the Spirit applies the biblical message in terms of the situation that the contemporary readers find themselves in. This is the main difference,

11 Exposure to academic theology posed certain dangers for the Pentecostal movement. McKay (1994, 18–19), for instance, describes Pentecostalism in terms of “prophetic Christianity” and argues that there are only two ways to study the Scriptures, on the one hand objectively and analytically, interesting in itself, but imparting little or nothing of the life of God to the student, and on the other hand by a way that draws the reader into an encounter with God and gives life. McKay is critical of the approach to the Bible which is primarily implicit in academic circles and is concerned that the Pentecostals are in danger of losing its distinctive dimension through dialogue with academia and imitation of its hermeneutics. He argues that there is a clear tension between that which is done within the academy, and that which is done (or has been experienced) by those who have been baptised in the Holy Spirit. Pentecostals aligned themselves with evangelicals by adopting the methods of historical criticism while maintaining a commitment to the reliability of the biblical narratives (Kärkkäinen 1998, 81).

12 Hollenweger (in an interview with Hudson 2001, 46) describes it as a main challenge that Pentecostals should determine what type of theological method and hermeneutics, and what manner of doing theology corresponds to Pentecostal spirituality.

in the way the revelation of the word of God is expected, with Pentecostals allowing also for extrabiblical revelations.

Fiorenza (1995, 8) states that fundamentalists in practice use the Bible to oppress women (Tucker 2016, 62 discusses several instances). Scriptural authority and biblical quotations support patriarchal attacks and the feminist struggle for women's liberation is denounced as "godless humanism" that undermines the biblical institution of the family and marriage. It legitimates women's subordinate role and secondary status in patriarchal society and church (Fiorenza 1984, xiii).¹³ In response, Fiorenza (1984, xii) suggests that feminists utilise a "hermeneutics of suspicion" when they interpret contemporary androcentric interpretations of biblical texts as well as the texts themselves. A critical dialectical mode of interpretation of the Bible allows one to recognise the ambiguities of Scripture when it comes to women and non-elites while it also empowers one to draw out the Bible's potential to end relations of dominance and exploitation (Fiorenza 1984, xiii).

No biblical interpretations are disinterested, impassive, detached, objective, value-free, non-ideological and non-political; all interpretation operates against a political context and most are utilised to reinforce the status quo. For this reason, biblical interpretation should be seen as the site of competing discursive practices (Fiorenza 1984, 152). Pentecostals also read their own preunderstanding into the text; they *eisegete* biblical texts like everybody else. And they must take responsibility for the effects that their interpretations of biblical texts carry for their practice by critically examining the preunderstandings that they bring to the text.

Fiorenza (1984, 10–14) makes an important distinction between the Bible as a "mythic archetype", where the historical assumptions of the Bible are posited as normative and authoritative, and as "historical prototype", where the Bible is recognised as being written and read from within particular historical contexts determined by different ideologies. The way one views the Bible will determine what one does with the androcentrism, patriarchy and kyriarchy found in the text.¹⁴ If read with a hermeneutics of suspicion, one can distinguish between texts that legitimate oppression and others

13 As a male I am disqualified to speak about the experience of women at the hands of the patriarchal church and for that reason the voice of a woman is used to describe what may be an important way to look at the issue of women and the church's ministry.

14 For instance, Thomas Aquinas (*Summa Theologiae* II–II q.177, a.2) did not allow women in the preaching and teaching office, using the following arguments: above all because it is the condition of the female sex to be subject to the male—teaching as a public office in the church is a matter for those set over others (*praelati*) and not subordinates, which now essentially include the women precisely because of their sex; the senses of males are not to be stimulated to lust by women preaching, in the tradition of Augustine who described *concupiscentia* or *libido* as the original sin; and women were generally not so distinguished in matters of wisdom that one could appropriately entrust a public office of teaching to them. Küng (2006, 119) reminds that Aquinas's viewpoint should be seen against the background of and as a reaction to the "heretical movements" where women played an important role in ministry.

that are liberating to change the Bible into a source, or resource, for women's struggles for equal treatment and liberation (Fiorenza 1984, 14).

Pentecostals represent a variety of hermeneutical approaches but most view the Bible as a space, beside others like visions, dreams, ecstatic experiences and prophetic revelations, where God encounters people and reveal himself. Pentecostals, in other words, also allow for extrabiblical revelations in the form of prophecies, interpretation of dreams and visions, speaking in tongues and its interpretation, and other means. These revelations are to be tested and distinguished in order to ascertain that they come from God's Spirit, and the best way to do so is to compare them with the biblical witness. Next to these Spirit-experiences Pentecostals also read the Bible as the book that contains the stories of God's great deeds, in which God becomes recognisable to us (Barth 1998, 43), providing for an encounter with God in the same terms (Ellington 1996, 17).¹⁵ For that reason, Pentecostals are not merely interested to find out what a text means or what it meant for the first listeners/readers, but in their reading and studying of Scriptures they expect to experience the transformation when they hear the Word of God, that always results in a new creation. They expect to experience first-hand what the Bible witnesses about God's encounter with historical people. Scripture is "Spirit-Word", implying a dynamic interaction between written text and the Holy Spirit (Kärkkäinen 1998, 82). When read in fundamentalist fashion, the Bible as mythic archetype necessarily results in Pentecostal rejection of women in ministry.¹⁶ When read as historical prototype, the Bible becomes a "site of contradiction and conflict", as experienced in Pentecostal church synods debating the admissibility of women in ministry.¹⁷ When deliberating about women in ministry, however, it is necessary that Pentecostals follow the guidance of the Spirit who uses women in all kinds of ministry and in many instances effectively, along with their reading of the Bible in terms of what the Spirit reveals about the church

15 Most Pentecostals would agree with Luther's view that the word of God is found in the Bible *contra* Calvin's viewpoint that the Bible contains the word of God. For this reason, Barth plays an influential role in the way they view the Bible.

16 And women were required to wear hats or headgear during worship. The AFM in 1975 investigated biblical evidence for the head covering of women in 1 Corinthians 11 and came to the conclusion that women should continue wearing hats as a symbol to demonstrate the divine order of authority, where the man is the head of the woman in the same manner as God is the head of the man. Even though the symbol changed with time, the church accepted that the principle stayed the same and the hat was seen as a way of expressing piety and respect. Women in the ministry were especially encouraged to wear a covering of the head, not as a social custom, but in obedience to a Scriptural principle (Burger and Nel 2008, 88). Fortunately, contemporary women do not take notice of decisions taken by church meetings chaired and held by men!

17 This happened in the AFM when in 1971 the theological basis of women in ministry was investigated, leading to the acknowledgement of the calling and ministry of women in the church and in 1977 the formulation of the church order that allows women with recognised ministries to be recommended and called in the same manner as prescribed for pastors. In 1980 the first women were allowed into full-time ministry, although only in 1998 women were allowed to become presiding pastors of larger assemblies (Burger and Nel 2008, 354–355).

and ministry. And this should always be done as part of a faith community, as the next section suggests.

A HERMENEUTICAL STRATEGY

Archer (2009, 213) posits that a Pentecostal hermeneutical strategy should discount three elements to negotiate meaning. Meaning is filtered through the faith community, its spiritual ethos and a narrative tradition that engages the biblical text with the guidance of the Spirit who inspired the Word. The relationship between Scripture, Spirit and community is interdependent and in dialogue with each other, and can be demonstrated from Acts 15 where the three elements play a determinative and important role in the interpretive approach when the early Church discussed the requirements set for Gentile Christians in terms of the *Torah* (Thomas 1994, 43). The direction of the interpretive process in Acts 15 moves from the believing community to the biblical text; reversing the normal order of exegetical processes that start from the text and move to the context. If the Acts 15 synod moved from Scripture to the contemporary situation, chances are that it would have made it compulsory for Gentile Christians to keep the *Tora*, since many texts in the Hebrew Bible emphasise the importance of obeying the prescriptions of the covenant God made with Israel at Mount Sinai. Another factor is that the Spirit enables the listening community to enlighten them in the interpretive process, into a new understanding of God's will. This might imply that the Spirit leads the community to act in a way that is inconsistent with the text; for example, the many instances where God is depicted in the Hebrew Bible as a violent actor in the history of his people might be relevant where the faith community decides to rather follow the Spirit in pacifist ways of reaction to certain events. The community testifies to the experiences attributed to the Spirit and then engages Scripture to validate or repudiate the experience or issue. What is needed is a dynamic balance between individual believer, Spirit, Scripture, and the faith community (Ellington, 1996, 28), making the Bible central to the rule and conduct of the church. And what is essential is that the Spirit takes what the inspired biblical authors intended to say and discloses its significance for the contemporary community (Pinnock 1993, 4) in terms of what the Spirit reveals in the contemporary situation. The original meaning is determinate and cannot change, but God's Spirit utilising the text in a new situation uses this witness to create relevant significance for contemporary people.

Pentecostal hermeneutes reason that it implies that while a non-believer can derive meaning from the biblical narratives because they represent a literary production that invites interpretation, only Spirit-filled believers can understand the contemporary significance of the text, as "a word from the Lord". Language and other grammatical aspects do not change the Bible into the Word of God but only the Spirit's use of the biblical witnesses (Stronstad 1990, 12), revealing the will of God to people in a specific situation. The Bible is not the pure word of God, it can be argued, neither is it the pure word of man, but it becomes something new, an incarnated word (Becker 2004, 43).

And as was the case with the revelation of the incarnated Word in Jesus Christ, human beings' encounter with this word transforms their lives and paradigm. Pentecostals use passages such as John 14:26; 16:13 and 1 Corinthians 2:10 to explain why they emphasise the role of the Spirit in hermeneutics. They distinguish between the original Spirit-inspired author that grants the texts ultimate authority and the current Spirit-illuminated interpreter with less binding appropriation; but these illuminated meanings of biblical texts exercise far more power over Pentecostal believers because they are perceived to carry divine sanction and authority (Arrington 1994, 101; Cargal 1993, 180–182). The assumption is that the Spirit bridges the gap between past and present, leaving room for multiple meanings of biblical texts when they are applied to different settings, especially situations that the original author did not experience. The risk of subjectivism and abuse of passages are evident; the other option, however, is to listen to and become a victim of the “letter of the law”.¹⁸ Limiting the meaning of a text to the intention of the original author (if such intention could be negotiated at all) is considered too restrictive; understanding involves the creative capacity of the interpreter to open up new insights through the creative transcendence provided by the Spirit who teaches and leads into all truth (Stronstad 1990, 17).¹⁹ This is, however, not representative of a reader-response method; the actual guidance of the Spirit forms the centre of Pentecostals' witness about the revelation of the word and will of God in their lives.

An important part of Pentecostal preunderstanding concerns an experiential basis consisting of religious experience and encounter with God. By accepting the authority of both the Bible and experience, Pentecostals put the two concepts into a creative dialectical tension (Archer 2009, 63). They tend to move from their experience of God to the Bible; they *eisegete* their experience into the text. In reading the text, they at the same time interpret it through the lens of their own situation and the “still voice of the Spirit” speaking in their minds, applying the biblical truth to their situation. If their experiences, however, are not supported by experience, they should be considered suspect. Positively, the authority of Scripture is not founded upon the bedrock of

18 Thomas (1994, 54) is aware of the subjective element when a clear role for the Spirit is indicated in the interpreting process, but argues that it is tangible and necessary for the believing community to function effectively. He argues that controls should be built into the paradigm that would help to limit the range of interpretations, but he refuses to stifle the Spirit's role through mere “academic lip service”. In practice, many examples can be given where people “heard the voice of the Spirit” in their Bible-reading practices that led to disastrous results because of the human tendency to hear what one wants to hear (cp. 2 Tim 4:3).

19 Pentecostals do not all agree about the importance of the experiential dimension. Menzies (1994, 117), for one, happily adopts a more traditional evangelical approach to hermeneutics by reasserting the importance of the historicity of the text (and, therefore, the need for historical-critical methods) for all evangelicals. This is in response to Cargal's apparent “ahistorical” approach. Menzies states: “Cargal is probably right: Pentecostalism, because of its pragmatic and experiential focus, may easily be attracted to the ahistorical vision inherent in post-modern thought. This however is a weakness, not a strength.” Menzies's concern with Cargal's approach is the threat of diminishing the role of the text by more reader-centred approaches. Menzies would want to hold on to rational categories for control.

doctrine (that rests on human interpretation of Scripture) but doctrine rather rests on the experience of encountering God through his Spirit.²⁰ For this reason, patriarchy and androcentrism can be challenged and corrected even though the Bible has clear (and contradictory!) pronouncements about these issues. And the process does not damage Pentecostals' faith in the Bible because they interpret the Bible as mediated through an encounter with God as Spirit and the outworking of that encounter (Holmes 2013, 276). The Bible does not have the last say; Pentecostals listen to the Spirit while reading the biblical witness and interpret it through what they perceive God wants to say to them in their specific situation and what they experience as his revelation in their situation. Pentecostals do not give their lives for the "truth" of biblical pronouncements and the defence of doctrinal statements; the implication is that they may think critically about their practice and position. This does not imply that Pentecostals are not serious about doctrine; however, they base their faith first on God that they meet in a relationship, and interpret the Bible in terms of their encounter (Ellington 1996, 17–18). And they emphasise that the community of faith has received the *charisma* to judge and evaluate carefully (*διακρίσεις πνευμάτων*) whether a message is from the Spirit of God or from another spirit (1 Cor 12:10; New Living Translation). Distinction is needed to determine which spirit rules in a community characterised by racial and gender prejudices and discrimination against those who are socially, economically or educationally disadvantaged (cf. Fiorenza 1993, 156–157).

Most Pentecostals would agree with Fiorenza (1984, 10–14) that inspiration is a result of the breath and power of the Spirit and is not to be located in the Bible alone. For Pentecostals, inspiration with its inherent authority resides with the Spirit who empowers believers by illumining the Bible. Early Pentecostals interpreted an injunction such as that slaves should obey their masters (Eph 6:5; Col 3:22; Tit 2:9; 1 Pet 2:18) in terms of the Spirit who would lead into all truth, and would reveal the will of God for new situations and challenges. For them, intellectual assent to truth is always to be accompanied by a vital, personal experience with Christ (Menzies 2007, 79).

WOMEN, MINISTRY AND THE BIBLE

When one moves from the Bible to experience, it is difficult to justify the notion of women in ministry theologically. However, when the direction of the movement changes it resolves the confusion and conflict related to the issue of women in the ministry. What is necessary in Pentecostal hermeneutics is that the movement be restricted from experience to the Bible, with experience critically analysed by way of reason and

20 "Traditional, diachronic methods have produced a pseudo-scientific, left-brain scholarship which has reduced biblical texts to lifeless corpses. In the last decade or so, people in the academy and in the church have become disillusioned with this colourless rationalism and have called out for a more intuitive, right-brain hermeneutic. This has left room for new methodologies allowing for participation instead of detachment, imagination instead of reason, holism instead of atomism, story instead of history" (Stibbe 1993, 79).

Pentecostal communal tradition in order to decide which experiences are normative in terms of the Spirit's revelation of God's plan of salvation for humankind (Holmes 2013, 279). Pentecostals experience the Spirit who empowers them to live out the implications of that experience, and to interpret the Bible through the lens of that revelation. What is of primary importance are our experiences that make up our lives and make sense of it. Pentecostals value experiences that they have with the Spirit that transfer values and a mind-set that honours God (Fiorenza 1984, 81).

While Paul also refers to a woman who is prominent among the apostles (Junia, Rom 16:7), his prohibition that women may partake in ministry, at least in the worship service, should not pose a challenge to Pentecostals who read the Bible in a specific way. From the practice of the contemporary church they derive that the Spirit anoints women in the same manner as men (and children as well as old people) to minister to one another. In fact, they find that Paul's injunction in 1 Corinthians 12:7 is shown to be true in their experience that each believer, including women, is given the ability to manifest the Spirit for the common good of all, including the local assembly. All Spirit-filled believers are equipped with different gifts in order to uplift, encourage and comfort fellow-believers in the faith community.

Pentecostals' support of non-discrimination on the basis of gender and age should not rest on the modern culture of human rights, but on the egalitarian impulse that characterised the early Pentecostal movement as well as its predecessors, the holiness and divine healing movements, and the early church. The Spirit will lead them to treat all people the same as happened in the ministry of Jesus and they will find confirmation for their behaviour in Scriptures when they read it from their perception of the way the Spirit guides them.

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