

## Sample essay with feedback

Assessment Description:

Write a 1500 word critical reflection (i.e. short critical essay) investigating a specific issue in hermeneutics.

### Critical reflection #1: The Hermeneutic of Pentecost

Catchy start to set the tone

What drives us? In the field of biblical interpretation, we are working with principles that assist in the comprehension of the Scriptures. However these principles are influenced by the environment in which we encounter God and so our hermeneutic, that is our specific collection of such principles, influences our view of scripture and how we contextualize that revelation. Within the Pentecostal and charismatic (neo-Pentecostal) traditions of the Christian church, the event of Pentecost, as outlined in Acts 2, has become their foundational defining principle. In this reflection, we will examine and evaluate the expression of a Pentecost hermeneutic as expressed in each of those traditions, enabling us to reflect on whether a “church of the Spirit”<sup>1</sup> is an effective expression of biblical revelation.

Introduction as road map

What becomes clear in examining the life of Pentecostal churches is the bewildering variety of traditions that have influenced and currently serve to construct the hermeneutic within which they function. Attempts to analyze the movement in terms of the baptism and expression of gifts of the Holy Spirit are tempting in their simplicity but also tending towards an unfortunate exercise in reductionism. While such variety is daunting, it can be explained by a hermeneutic that is relatively simple, relying primarily on 4 common principles to dictate their approach to Scripture.<sup>2</sup> The first is that the NT is read through Lukan eyes and particularly in the light of the book of Acts. The second reveals the movement’s essentially fundamentalist nature in holding to an essentially literalist approach to the Scriptures. The third (which relies on the second) is that this is essentially a “subjectivising hermeneutic”, hermeneutic that demands personal application and experience. And each of these acts to underpin the hermeneutical key of the movement – the normalization of the Pentecost experience for all believers – the support for which is provided theologically, where it is argued that the unchangeable nature of God demands normative interpretation of Acts 2, biblically in terms of Joel 2:28-32, and experientially

Body 1: Initial description of “playing field”

Footnotes

<sup>1</sup> P. Adam, *Living the Trinity* (Cambridge, UK: Grove, 1982), 11-12.

<sup>2</sup> D.W. Dayton, *Theological roots of Pentecostalism* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987), 23-7; K. Warrington, *Pentecostal perspectives* (Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1998), 125.

**Comment [B1]:** Tick, tick, tick! Excellent introduction. You’ve briefly outlined the topic and then stated what the reflection will do.

**Comment [BCoNZ2]:** He’s done a great job here of describing the Pentecostal hermeneutic in not too many words but enough to give us all a good idea. He’s written the points in his own words but footnoted to say where he got the idea from.

**Comment [B3]:** Better to write ‘four’

**Comment [B4]:** ‘a’

**Comment [B5]:** Big ticks to all these points!

through the observable work of the Spirit within believers. The dispensational teachings of J.N. Darby and the early Brethren movement relating to an age of the Spirit were cultivated to add further weight to such an approach.<sup>3</sup>

**Comment [B6]:** A footnote comment: Make sure that you begin ALL main words in the title of a book in capital letters – this fits for other footnotes in your essay too.

The impact of such a key is quite wide reaching and is best expressed in the so called four-fold pattern of Pentecostalism – salvation, healing, baptism of the Holy Spirit and the second coming of Christ.<sup>4</sup> In line with the literal and subjectivising approach to scripture, baptism of the Holy Spirit is taught to be distinctive from the regenerating work of the Spirit at the new birth and to be accompanied by speaking in tongues.<sup>5</sup> Examples such as the Samaritans in Acts 8 are given show that believers may exist without the indwelling Spirit. Therefore the importance of external manifestation of Spirit baptism has resulted in more emphasis on the gifts than the fruits of the Spirit, particularly in the area of divine healing. Reflecting the entry into a new dispensation, the consequences of the fall (which are held to include both sin and illness) are dealt with by the Cross and through the Spirit. In claiming an effect of the atonement over both sin and illness, healing then becomes a redemption right,<sup>6</sup> a work of faith and a sign of the Spirit's presence. The influence of dispensationalism also occurs in the final sphere of the hermeneutical key of Pentecost - the last days as linked by Joel 2, associated with the return of Israel and the second coming of Christ.<sup>7</sup> However this is modified by the impact of Arminian thought where the church develops into a victorious body, ushering in the new millennium. The significance of this link is that it is seen as the social correlate of the doctrine of the baptism of the Holy Spirit.<sup>8</sup> Just as individual sanctification in Arminianism is potentially complete within an individual's lifetime, so the sanctification of society may be achieved prior to Christ's return.

**Comment [n7]:** Linking words

**Comment [BCoNZ8]:** The description continues but he is putting some necessary flesh on the skeleton, including mentioning the key scriptures that Pentecostals refer to. His progression of thought is clear and easy to follow. He is assuming that I, as marker, know something, but is also filling me in and proving to me that, in an academic sense, he knows his stuff and can clearly explain it.

The strengths of handling scripture in this way are primarily in the realm of experience. God is expected to come in power. There is openness to the novel and a willingness to

**Comment [n9]:** Linking words

**Comment [BCoNZ10]:** The critical reflection proper begins. And it's good! He begins by identifying the main strength he sees in the Pentecostal approach.

<sup>3</sup> Warrington, 126.

<sup>4</sup> Dayton, 21.

<sup>5</sup> *ibid.*, 23.

<sup>6</sup> M. Erickson, *Christian theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002), 853.

<sup>7</sup> Warrington, 126.

<sup>8</sup> Dayton, 165.

Body 2:  
Detailing  
argument

Body 3:  
Strengths

follow God outside the square. Faith is vibrant and relevant and personal - no longer the mold of a historical religion with foundations from 30AD and before, but in the present and future, the age of the Spirit. The appearance of Pentecostal traits such as baptism in the Spirit and other gifts are a herald to those latter days and Christ's return. What could be perceived as odd manifestations becomes an apologetic asset – this is part of God's current dispensational plan.<sup>9</sup>

**Comment [B11]:** Another footnote comment: You must include a shortened title in the footnote of a book you have already given all the details of and are referring to again. At least you have consistently done this wrong!

However such a hermeneutic has its weaknesses and they lie in the same place as their strengths – the experiential nature of life in the Spirit. There is a conflict between experience and the word. This is well demonstrated in the use as the hermeneutical key of the Pentecost experience, which can be strongly argued as non-normative in character.<sup>10</sup> This inappropriate interpretation has a range of consequences. The personality of the Spirit is essentially subordinated to power, contributing to a form of existential exegesis. Fascination with Pentecost causes power to overwhelm holiness to the extent that power and holiness are equated.<sup>11</sup> Experience dominates abiding in God and his word. This is seen in the high view of prophecy in the movement causing Warrington to wryly suggest that better exegetical preaching would lessen the need for personal “words”.<sup>12</sup> Given the prophetic nature of such preaching, he may have a point. Poor interpretation also contributes to the questionable doctrine of healing in the atonement where the vicarious bearing of our sins can be shown not to apply to physical healing.<sup>13</sup> There is a real need within the movement to develop a constructive theology of suffering, however contrary to their foundational concept of a victorious faith. Dispensationalism is a further example of doubtful interpretation, demanding different interpretative rules for the different dispensations, inevitably creating difficulties with the age of the Spirit and the future reign of Christ during the millennium as opposed to scriptures declaring the kingdom of God here now.

**Comment [n12]:** Linking word

**Comment [B13]:** 'of' not 'as'

Body 4:  
Weaknesses

**Comment [BCoNZ14]:** I've left the picky comments in so that you can see that spelling and grammar etc are very important in a formal essay. Think as if you were going to have it published – you would hate to read a novel or book that had mistakes in it, wouldn't you?!

The student has gone on to identify the weaknesses of the argument and, via the footnotes, assures me that he is aware of the objections that various scholars make.

**Comment [B15]:** You are making excellent points Brian - and that the weaknesses are, in fact, often the flip side of the strengths.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.,28

<sup>10</sup> J. Stott, *Baptism and Fullness* (Leicester: IVP, 1975), 64.

<sup>11</sup> Dayton, 93-4.

<sup>12</sup> Warrington, 78-9.

<sup>13</sup> Erickson, 857.

So why should we now look at charismatic churches and how they handle the hermeneutic of Pentecost? After all, they are a child of the Pentecostal movement. Yet they are not in the Pentecostal family. Here the hermeneutic is operating in a trans-denominational manner with churches that usually retain the distinctive doctrinal teachings of their own denominations.<sup>14</sup> While the same characteristics are present, the umbrella of the original hermeneutic serves to facilitate a co-existence or melding of the traditional and new hermeneutic approaches.

**Comment [n16]:** Linking word

**Comment [B17]:** Again you need the shortened titles in the footnotes. Also, *ibid.* should not have a capital letter.

**Comment [BCoNZ18]:** At this point he widens the scope a little to consider the charismatic wing which also deals with the same hermeneutic, but from a slightly different angle. I can see that he thinks the combination of the traditional and new approaches is a good thing but he has made this point 'objectively' and logically, as opposed to preachingly and emotionally.

The melding of approaches is a particular strength of the charismatic aspect of the Pentecostal hermeneutic. Flowing from the personal and vital relationships with God through the Spirit, churches have experienced significant spiritual renewal, noting increased participation and commitment, with an awareness that human effort is unable to replace the role of the Spirit in leading the church day by day. The emphasis on the Spirit in otherwise Father or Son oriented churches is also key. While a change in balance with respect to the members of the Trinity might, and could, be viewed as indicative of subordinationism and neglect particularly of the Father,<sup>15</sup> it is also reflective of a required balancing of hermeneutics traditionally focused on the Father or the Son to include the Spirit.

Body 5:  
Alternative &  
Critique

Not surprisingly, the problems noted in this expression of Christianity also reflect the parent movement.<sup>16</sup> However in several areas the conflict is clarified because of the background hermeneutic in place. When other models of spirituality and spiritual maturity are present, the inability of the gifts of the Spirit to produce the fruit is much more obvious. Furthermore when compared to an orthodox evangelical hermeneutic, the standing of scripture becomes a place of conflict. Its authority is threatened by the place of new revelation through prophecy and shaky exegesis, leading Culpepper to term the movement "biblically inaccurate and theologically incorrect"<sup>17</sup> Or to use MacArthur's

**Comment [n19]:** Linking words

**Comment [BCoNZ20]:** He continues to strengthen his argument by exploring it from several different angles, backed up by references to other scholars writing on the same topic.

<sup>14</sup> Erickson, 872; R.Culpepper, *Evaluating the charismatic movement* (Valley Forge, PA: Judson, 1977), 11.

<sup>15</sup> Erickson, 864; Culpepper, 165.

<sup>16</sup> MacArthur, 199-200.

<sup>17</sup> Culpepper, 72.

Body 5:  
Continuation

words, “Am I putting my emphasis on the scripture and God’s living word or on the jolly times, the feelings, the experiences?”<sup>18</sup>

**Comment [B21]:** Need capitals in your book title in the footnotes, and shortened titles, again.

So what should we make of the hermeneutic of Pentecost? Is it, as I asked at the start, a foundation for effective expression of biblical revelation? While there are undeniable strengths, it must also be admitted that the criticisms of the hermeneutic go deep, even to the foundations. At this point, the observations of McQuilkin are of pertinence.<sup>19</sup> He outlines a dogmatic hermeneutic, defining it as a set of interpretations built around a coherent system. His observation, and perhaps unspoken criticism, is that the bible loses its authority and becomes subject to the overlying structure of the system. He suggests that a prime factor in creating a dogmatic hermeneutic is experience – experience interpreting the bible rather than vice versa. While the existence of an overarching interpretative framework is not per se a problem (Calvin was quite happy to bring his systematic theology to bear on his hermeneutics<sup>20</sup>), the issue confronting a dogmatic hermeneutic such as the hermeneutic of Pentecost is the lack of breadth and integrity in its foundations, being a hermeneutic primarily driven by a single non-normative experience.

**Comment [n22]:** Linking to introduction

**Comment [BConZ23]:** The summarizing begins and he uses the work of a commentator he has found particularly helpful to add to his mounting conclusions.

But if we reject the hermeneutic as shallow and a poor foundation for an entire systematic theology, what of its strengths? Culpepper argues that for better or worse, the hermeneutic should be retained for the fruit it bears – “It is better to speak incorrectly of the 2<sup>nd</sup> blessing or a 2<sup>nd</sup> Pentecost and lay hold of the reality of the new life in Christ than to let soundness of doctrine rob us of its substance.”<sup>21</sup> While that clearly supports the benefits of the hermeneutic, it does not address the deeper dangers of the system. It would be helpful to recognize the hermeneutical key, not as Pentecost but as the Spirit of Christ come at Pentecost. Such an approach to scripture would maintain the centrality of Christ, avoid the need for dispensationalism (Christ’s reign is maintained by the Spirit) and yet still evince the life and vigor which can only be sourced through the Spirit. Let us

**Comment [B24]:** Did you mean to write ‘non-normative’ here? I think it reads accurately as ‘normative’. You would have to explain this one to me.

**Comment [B25]:** The academic handbook says that 2<sup>nd</sup> is fine but if you were publishing you would have to use ‘second’. Often written out things like this are just that much better looking (and it won’t increase your word count!)

**Comment [BConZ26]:** This conclusion is not as clear as it could be but in it he highlights his main argument about the centrality of the Spirit of Christ come at Pentecost which thus avoids the weaknesses of the Pentecostal hermeneutic but yet plays to its strengths. And he uses a pertinent cliché to leave us with.

<sup>18</sup> MacArthur, 206.

<sup>19</sup> R. McQuilkin, *Understanding and applying the Bible* (Chicago: Moody, 1992), 59-63.

<sup>20</sup> W. Kaiser & M. Silva, *An introduction to biblical hermeneutics* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 265.

<sup>21</sup> Culpepper, 72.

Body 6:  
Response to  
Critique

Body 6:  
Continuation,  
And a much too  
abrupt  
conclusion.  
Conclusions  
should draw  
together what  
has been said.  
However the  
other strengths  
of this essay left  
the marker  
satisfied.

give thanks for the revelations brought by the hermeneutic of Pentecost but let us not save the bath water in our attempts to save the baby.

### Bibliography

Adam P. *Living the Trinity*. Cambridge, UK: Grove, 1982.

**Comment [B27]:** Adam,

Culpepper, R.H. *Evaluating the charismatic movement*. Valley Forge, PA: Judson, c1977.

**Comment [B28]:** Charismatic Movement

Dayton, D.W. *Theological roots of Pentecostalism*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1987.

**Comment [B29]:** Roots

Erickson, M. *Christian theology* (2<sup>nd</sup> Edition). Grand Rapids: Baker, 2002.

Kaiser, W and Silva, M. *An introduction to biblical hermeneutics*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994.

**Comment [B30]:** M. Silva. *An Introduction to Biblical Hermeneutics*

MacArthur, J.F. *The Charismatics: a doctrinal perspective*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978.

**Comment [B31]:** A Doctrinal Perspective

McQuilkin, R. *Understanding and applying the Bible*. Chicago: Moody, 1992.

**Comment [B32]:** Applying

Stott, J. *Baptism and Fullness*. Leicester: IVP, 1975.

Warrington, K. *Pentecostal perspectives*. Carlisle, UK: Paternoster, 1998.

**Comment [BCoNZ33]:** Perspectives.

His bibliography formatting is pretty good, just this one constant mistake which no doubt will be completely gone in the next piece of work he hands in!