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PROPOSING A SHIFT FROM CLASSICAL PENTECOSTAL BIBLE READING AND BACONIAN COMMON SENSE TO A SCIENTIFIC HERMENEUTICS

ABSTRACT

Although early Pentecostals read the Bible in terms of common sense, it differed from fundamentalists' use in their theological endeavours. However, by the 1940s, the vast majority of Pentecostals adopted a fundamentalist view of Scriptures. Since the 1990s, Pentecostal scholarship has revisited early Pentecostals' use of Baconian common sense. In postmodern times, it is important to define a balanced Pentecostal hermeneutic to reconsider the use of Baconian common sense realism in Bible reading practices. A scientifically informed and Spirit-inspired inductive hermeneutic is proposed that emphasises the context of a text, leaving room for the viewpoints of other interpreters and reading in terms of contemporary encounters with God. This will enhance the exegetical process, by enabling the reader to read the Bible for its impact, value and significance.¹

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1. INTRODUCTION

The vast majority of contemporary classical Pentecostal members and pastors use literalist Bible reading practices that are incompatible with the ways in which early Pentecostals read the Bible and modern Pentecostal scholarship defines its hermeneutic. The purpose of this article is to critique current practices, by comparing them with these alternative endeavours.

Most of the Western believers read the Bible through the ages in a naive, realist and common sense way, in a this-is-that hermeneutic manner. R.A. Torrey, American evangelist of the Bible Institute (now Moody Bible Institute in Chicago), explains:

In ninety-nine out of a hundred cases, the meaning that the plain man gets out of the Bible is the correct one (quoted in McLoughlin 1959:372).

Common sense is concerned with popular conceptions of straightforward representations of what exists in fact (Marsden 1991:165). It argues that things are as they appear to be. They have no hidden meanings. The observations of one's five senses can be trusted to provide a picture of what exists. This epistemology is based on naive realism combined with a specific idea of scientific procedure and verification that is essentially optimistic and progressive. True science will always describe things as they are, and it will always confirm the Christian revelation (Marsden 1991:167).

The genesis of the Enlightenment lies, in the early 17th century, perhaps socio-politically in the Peace of Westphalia (1648) that ended the Thirty Years' War, and intellectually with the work of Francis Bacon (1561-1626). Bacon stands at the beginning of the Age of Reason – marking the transition from the Renaissance to the Enlightenment – in that he was one of the first modern scientists. Even though he did not place mathematics at the centre of natural knowledge as did those who came after him, Bacon emphasised the method of experimentation. He employed the fledgling scientific enterprise not only as a way of understanding the universe, but also as a means of ruling over nature. In this way, he laid the foundations for the modern technological society (Grenz & Olson 2010:17).

The assumption of the Baconian scientific method was that there exists a specific relation between data, hypotheses, scientific laws and the sciences. Should the objects, to which scientific theories refer, not really exist at all, then the successes of science would have had to be described as a miracle (Putnam 1984:141). Scientific realism seems to be the only philosophy that does not make the science of success a miracle. That sciences succeed in making many reliable predictions and devise better ways of controlling nature is central to the realist argument (Van Huyssteen 1987:7). It was wedded to

common sense realism, also called naive realism (Pappas 1991:27), that informed a large part of Western Christianity of the 19th century (Marsden 1982:82). The vast majority of Christians read the Bible from this perspective and scientists shared confidence in the scientific method based on common sense realism or “Baconianism” (Noll 1994:178).

Especially since the 18th century, the Scottish philosopher, Thomas Reid (1710-1796), developed the philosophy of common sense realism. The assumption of the philosophical system is that it is possible to derive accurate knowledge of external objects by way of sensation. It is possible to construct a true reflection of reality by combining these sensations with intuitively known general principles or truth that all people share (De Caro 2015:198). There is a property within an object that produces the sensation in the mind. Because all people share in intuitively known principles, through which they evaluate sensation, truth is static and not relativistic in terms of culture. Another Scottish philosopher of the Enlightenment, David Hume (1711-1776), opposed this view and argued that it is impossible to detect an object directly. People only have a memory of it in their mind (Van Huyssteen 1987:43). Epistemology is based on the self-evident truths of experience, supported by induction as the gradual process of ascertaining natural causes and combining one inductive axiom with another (Bacon 2011:16; Oliverio 2012:108).

However, this changed with a dramatic paradigm shift occurring at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century, when the scientific model of a static universe, as a result of Baconian common sense realism, was replaced by naturalism. This was the direct result of the Darwinian evolutionary paradigm. Connected to Darwin’s was Herbert Spencer’s (1820-1903) parallel theory of progressive social evolution, whereby he refuted the traditional understanding of human sin. He argued that progressive social change can be used to build the kingdom of God on earth. This is the basis for the development of the social gospel (Sandeem 2020). The paradigm shift led in at least three distinctive directions.

Modernist liberals argued that the results of scientific labour and the findings of historical importance could not be used to argue the case for the authority of the Bible. In this tradition, Schleiermacher proposed another basis for theology, in human experience, to show that religion is rooted in, and even identical with an experience essential to true humanity (Grenz & Olson 2010:42).

A second direction was found in fundamentalism that re-affirmed Baconian common sense and argued that it clearly demonstrated the factuality of the Bible and confirmed the objective authority that should be ascribed to the Bible, in response to Charles Darwin’s (1800-1882) evolution theory that life

had emerged over millions of years rather than the 6,000 years presumed by a literal reading of the Bible.

A third direction was related to the emergence of Pentecostalism, representing a “paramodern” position that affirmed in their Bible reading practices both the objective and experiential-subjective as necessary elements in reading the Bible (McCall 2010:225). They asserted that the “facts” of Scripture are clearly illustrated by the Baconian common sense method on the same level as the discovery of the facts of science (Archer 2004:39).

I will describe Baconian common sense realism and fundamentalism as an introduction to the third direction found in early Pentecostal hermeneutics.

2. BACONIAN COMMON SENSE REALISM

As stated, the Baconian common sense model dominated conservative 19th-century Evangelicalism, a movement based on a view that limits salvation to born-again believers who made a deliberate decision to become disciples of Christ. These disciples are encouraged to “win souls for Christ” by proclaiming that each person has to make an individual decision to become a Christian. Believers live in a personal and intimate communion with Jesus (Ammerman 1998:57).

Baconian common sense realism asserted that the objective existence of facts in both science and theology can be proven objectively. Bacon’s (2011:16) instauration claimed to lead to the mastery of humankind over nature through its empirical method. Its main angle in science was experimentation that was directed toward seeing how nature behaved when it was not observed. It accepts the existence of ordinary physical objects and that these objects and their non-relational qualities (or some of them) exist independently of perceivers and perceptions and are unaffected by perceivers (Pappas 1991:27-28). It was expected that it would eventually lead to the discovery of a comprehensive grammar of the language and hermeneutic of nature.² In terms of theology, it was concerned with discovering the objective “plain, clear meaning” of the Bible (Archer 2004:38).

Baconian common sense used an inductive methodology, where one determines facts from evidence, classifies the facts according to a specific coordinating parameter, and examines the evidence thoroughly, leading to a principle or law. The law or principle represented static and objective truth and it was accepted that observers in any culture or time period would discover the

2 As explained by Kuhn (1977:47) in his essay, *Mathematical versus experimental traditions in the development of physical science*.

same laws when they apply the same way of working, an assertion that was essential to common sense realism (Klein & Giglioni 2020).

Bacon (1857-1874:3:384) posed two books of knowledge of God, Scripture and nature, and these two epistemological sources interacted with each other. The two books served different purposes and were written for separate reasons. Knowledge about nature exists in the sensory realm, while Scripture concentrates on the transcendent mysteries of God. While the book of nature was written for the common person, the book of Scripture was related to natural principles that illustrated the unintelligible truths of God (Matthews 2007:71).

Bacon emphasises that the Bible was inspired by, and was not the result of human reason, and for that reason it differs from all other books. It had another (and only one) author. The expositor should bear this in mind when interpreting the Bible. The Bible contains knowledge that could not be attained in any other way, and specifically in terms of the mysteries of the kingdom of glory, the perfection of the laws of nature, the secrets of the heart of humankind, and the future succession of all ages (Bacon 1857-1874:3:384-385).

The methodology developed in Baconian common sense provided 19th-century humankind with the confidence that its epistemology is certain and firm. It implied that it was possible to discover the facts of Scripture with the same certainty as it was to discover the facts of science. This was attractive for Protestants, alongside Bacon's rejection of authority and tradition, and helpful in the Protestant polemic with Roman Catholicism (Archer 2004:39). Protestants believed that they had recovered the apostolic church of the New Testament that could now be restored, escaping the constraints of tradition, culture and history (Hughes & Allen 1988:130).

3. FUNDAMENTALISTS AND COMMON SENSE REALISM

The paradigm shift at the end of the 19th century took a second direction that became known as fundamentalism. Fundamentalism was rooted in the Scottish Common Sense school of philosophy and the Baconian scientific method, which asserted that (the same) truth was accessible to all rational people. The implication was that God's truth, whether described in the Bible or the book of nature, also represented a single, unified and static order and that all persons of common sense were capable of discovering that truth (Marsden 2006:12-13).

Hauerwas and Willimon (2014:163) argue the case that fundamentalist biblical interpretation and the phenomenon to which it reacts, higher criticism

or modernism, were in essence two sides of the same coin. Fundamentalists and modernists shared the same philosophical conviction, that “truth” and thus meaningful propositions are historically and objectively verifiable in scientific terms. This implies that the Christian faith was based on objective historical evidence (Torrey *et al.* 1895:83).

The historical-critical method as higher criticism, in contrast to common sense realism, functioned with the assertion that the Bible is the product of a long historical process and the compilation by different editors of various oral and written sources that originated in different historical settings. One could not understand a biblical text without understanding its historical context and, to grasp the context, the application of sophisticated rules and tools of historical analysis were required (Mantzavinos 2020). The implication was that anybody who used the correct historical tools would be able to understand the text.

Hauerwas and Willimon (2014:163) explain that both fundamentalism and higher criticism assumed that one could understand the biblical text without training or moral transformation. Both also accepted that the appearance of miracles described in the Bible as one of the bedrock fundamentals of the faith were limited to a specific period characterised by the *charismata* and supernatural interventions. It ceased when the canon of the New Testament was closed or with the death of the last apostle.

To define fundamentalism is a difficult task because of the diversity that characterises the phenomenon. Evangelical fundamentalism emphasises that no institution, including pope, prelate, church or synod could interpret the Bible for others. Each individual reader had the right to interpret it. The meaning and authority of the Bible did not depend on the church but on each reader, because the Bible was clear in its meaning and any reader with common sense could understand it even when it was read in translation (Vanhooser 1998:171). For purposes of this article, fundamentalism is defined as (and limited to) a movement originating among theologically conservative Protestant churches that initially organised the American Bible League in 1902 and the World’s Christian Fundamentals Association in 1919. It was based on twelve pamphlets entitled *The fundamentals* and published between 1910 and 1915. It emphasised the verbal inerrancy of Scriptures, the virgin birth and deity of Jesus Christ, the substitutionary atonement, the physical resurrection of Jesus, and his bodily return to the earth in the near future (Synan 1988:325). Fundamentalism started initially as a scholarly movement with its reformational pre-critical Scripture interpretation that enjoyed strong support from laypersons and revivalist circles and provided defensive and apologetic ammunition against “Bible critics” (Nel 2019:64).

4. EARLY PENTECOSTAL READING PRACTICES

Early Pentecostalism followed in the footsteps of the Keswickian and Wesleyan holiness movement that preceded it. They applied parts of the Baconian common sense approach with its inductive scientific method to their interpretation of the Bible (Archer 2004:41). While liberal hermeneutics, in the first part of the 20th century, emphasised the subjective sense of the Bible and fundamentalism the objective sense, Pentecostals affirmed both senses. They recognised the inspirational work of the Holy Spirit in the Bible but added their present “inspired” reading of the Bible as requiring the intervention of the Spirit in order to understand it properly, as a relevant word of God. For them, the Bible was the Spirit-Word,³ characterised by a spiritual kinship between ancient authors and contemporary readers and ongoing continuity with the New Testament church by pneumatic illumination by way of knowing in active relationship (Kalu 2008:267). The Spirit of God inspires the text by encountering, shaping and transforming readers (Moore 2016:149). Pentecostals saw the Spirit’s task as to assist believers in ascertaining the correct meaning of the Bible’s statements, commands and questions (Zuck 1984:120). They imported the subjective and experiential affirmation of the objective truth in the Bible as a condition for hearing from God while reading the Bible. In other words, they affirmed both the past inspiration of the Bible and the present inspiration of its interpretation as a work of the Spirit (Archer 2004:40-41). Both the authority of the Bible and of present experience were acknowledged, with experience and Scripture being maintained in a dialectical relationship in a praxis-oriented hermeneutics (Johns 1993:86).⁴ They emphasised the experiential and relational more than the rational, the immediacy of the text as well as the empowerment and freedom of all Spirit-filled people to interpret and appropriate the multiple meanings of texts (Kalu 2008:267). Their harmonisation of biblical interpretation with their present religious experience implies that their hermeneutics might have been overly subjective.

In reading the Bible, Pentecostals applied common sense realism by first gathering the relevant teachings of the Bible and then seeking to deduce a general unitive principle around which the teachings could be arranged. They selected a topic such as “faith”, “repentance” or “hope”, sought references to it

3 “The Spirit who inspired and preserved the Scriptures illuminates, teaches, guides, convicts and transforms through the Word today” (Land 1993:100).

4 When considering the authority of the Bible, it is important to remember that the real problem lies deeper, in the question as to how reliable the knowledge is that we might gain from the Bible? What is the epistemological status of the Bible in theological thought? If it is not possible to gain some form of objective knowledge in studying the Bible, it implies that the Bible cannot be accorded with any authority (Van Huyssteen 1987:2).

in the Bible with the aid of a concordance, and then presented a summarised accounting of the findings (Ewart 1975:60). The purpose was to present biblical teaching in a way that displayed academic respectability on the same level as that of the natural sciences, by adopting Baconian science (McCall 2010:228-229). Their pre-critical and uncomplicated hermeneutical angle was similar to the fundamentalists', although the differences brought about by their *continuationist* stance in contrast to fundamentalists' *cessationism* divided them doctrinally (Spittler 1994:106). By 1928, the fundamentalists had disfellowshipped all Pentecostals from their ranks as a result (Marsden 2006:xxi). Pentecostal theology was characterised by the theological claim that the same Spirit who had animated the apostles at Pentecost and the early church in its missionary endeavours continued to be actively, dynamically and miraculously present in the faith community and creation (Smith 2008:27).⁵

While Pentecostals read the Bible in four steps, namely observing, interpreting, evaluating and correlating the text to their experience (Traina 1952), they simultaneously interpreted it in a rigidly literal way, as though the Bible had fallen from the sky in its present form (Wacker 1984:365). The two methodologies seemingly contradicted each other. The pre-critical methodology took a word, traced it through the Bible and then presented a summary of all occurrences, presenting a literal meaning, while the other methodology emphasised a more synthetic approach. However, early Pentecostals held both types in tension, presenting a paramodern hermeneutics that was innovatively common sensical and inductive and simultaneously deductive (Archer 2004:74, 192).

They conducted their text-centred hermeneutics from a primitivist-restorationist perspective, an intention they shared with Baconians, intended to restore the early church's emphasis on the work of the Spirit. As a result, they took Luke and Acts as more authoritative than the remainder of the Bible and interpreted the Bible through the filter of what they perceived the early church experienced (Mittelstadt 2010).⁶

Attempting to describe early Pentecostal hermeneutics should be done in various respects, as premodern, restorationist, modern and even postmodern, leading to Archer's (2004:39-40) suggestion that it was paramodern, emerging within modernity yet existing on its fringes and criticising it, because it represented a socially deprived movement in both sociological and economical

5 Pentecostal theology is not essentially generative in function but rather descriptive, in Ellington's (1996:21) terms, used to verbalise lived experiences. Their beliefs do not arise from understanding *per se* but from intense experiences of encountering God.

6 It should be kept in mind that it was not the uniqueness of their experiences that set Pentecostals apart from other believers, but the way in which those experiences were theologically categorised and defined (Jacobsen 2006:5).

terms. By their emphasis on physical evidence for the Spirit's presence, they provided an alternative to scientific experimentation language that served as a protest against modernity and cessationist Christianity (Archer 2004:45).

5. CURRENT PENTECOSTAL READING PRACTICES

Research done in the second half of 2014 at the request of the National Leadership Forum of the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa (AFM) demonstrates that currently Pentecostals are influenced more by fundamentalism than the paramodern hermeneutics that characterised their predecessors (as described under the previous heading). The AFM is historically the first and largest classical Pentecostal denomination in South Africa, with 1.4 million members. A questionnaire was completed by 280 participants in AFM congregations in South Africa's nine provinces (Western Cape, Eastern Cape, Northern Cape, North West, Free State, Kwazulu-Natal, Gauteng, Limpopo, and Mpumalanga). The participants were representative of congregations in the city, mid-city, suburbs, informal settlements, rural and far rural areas and representing the racial composition in the AFM (at that stage, 84% Black, 9% White, 6% mixed race population, 1% Indian).

The research found that 96 per cent of the respondents had access to a Bible, of which 72 per cent read it in printed form and 24 per cent on an electronic device. A total of 98 per cent indicated that they read the Bible, 74 per cent on a daily basis, 41 per cent read more than one chapter a day and 30 per cent a chapter a day. The implication is that 70 per cent of the respondents spent time with the Bible on a regular basis.

While 33 per cent of the respondents used a commentary along with the Bible and 23 per cent a devotional, no less than 47 per cent read only the Bible. Approximately 35 per cent indicated that they had read all of the New Testament and 33 per cent that they had read all of the Old Testament, while 30 per cent indicated that they attended a weekly Bible study group and the same number indicated that they were not part of any formalised Bible study. Of those involved in the research, 75 per cent indicated that they were filled with the Spirit, and the same percentage indicated that they prayed more than once during the day.

When asked about the historical situatedness of the Bible, only 28 per cent believed it important that the Bible should be interpreted in terms of the context and culture of its time; 76 per cent stated that they believe both that everything that the Bible said was word-for-word true and that the entire Bible was the inspired Word of God. It seemed that many members used the Bible

in a biblicist-literalist or concordist way, using common sense realism that is a feature of fundamentalism. Kalu (2008:266-267) refers to this as “experiential literalism” or a “bumper-sticker” hermeneutical method that proclaims: “This is the word of God. I believe it and that is final!”

The shift to fundamentalism occurred in the 1940s and 1950s, when many Pentecostals, in their attempt to escape their sect status and become acceptable to the church world and society, entered into partnership with conservative Evangelicalism. Their acceptance by, and participation in the evangelical community came at a high cost when they accepted the hermeneutical angle of the Evangelicals with which they formed an alliance. This eventually led to the formulation of a hybrid hermeneutics of their own and the re-interpretation of several important theological issues. It included changing their initial pacifism into patriotic nationalism, withdrawing their support of women in ministry, and disqualifying the laity from participating in a democratic manner in worship services and ministry for the establishment of a professional pastorate and orderly worship service (Nel 2019:54-55).

To account for the discrepancies between Bible-reading practices of early and contemporary Pentecostals, it is necessary to reflect on common sense realism in terms of a new Pentecostal hermeneutic that has developed since the 1990s with the rise of Pentecostal scholarship (see Anderson 2013:223). I first pay attention to the strengths and weaknesses of common sense realism.

6. REFLECTION ON COMMON SENSE REALISM

As stated, common sense realism utilises the assumption that all human beings share with one another the ability to read a text and reach universal conclusions about its meaning. The implication is that any Christian reading the Bible in a good translation will arrive at the same conclusions about the author’s intention with the text. This is guaranteed by the use of common sense by all sensible people. However, Van Huyssteen’s (1987:15) warning is timely, that care should be taken not to transfer the realism of science in an uncritical and superficial manner to the entirely different domain of religious belief, and to theology as the reflection on the claims of religious belief.

On the one hand, it is true that common sense is an essential quality of all good biblical interpretation. What is required from the interpreter is a sound, balanced mind characterised by good judgement and sound common sense (Terry 1999:151). However, McCall (2010:233) is correct in observing that such use of the Bible precludes the function of the Bible as critiquing or correcting the community-derived filter, through which the faith community must read the Bible to hear its prophetic voice.

It should, on the other hand, also be asked how common naive “common sense” really is. Pentecostal primitivist-restorationist sentiments are based on the assumption that all people arrive at the same conclusions when they read a specific text, because they share the necessary common sense to interpret a text.⁷ They view their models as to be taken literally as direct “replicas” of that to which they refer (Van Huyssteen 1987:19). They read the Bible at face value (Kalu 2008:266). However, this represents an unreflected hermeneutics that allows readers’ unacknowledged prejudices to determine, in an unreflected manner, how they interpret the Bible. Jensen (2007:207) emphasises that one’s basic theological attitudes always inform one’s hermeneutic and may determine one’s interpretation if these attitudes are not deliberately acknowledged and borne in mind. To engage in the theological enterprise in a constructive manner requires that it should be accomplished in the awareness of one’s theological and hermeneutical assumptions of which one cannot rid oneself (Jensen 2007:189).

It is accepted as a hermeneutical consensus that all reading is done with the reader’s preunderstanding co-determining a text’s interpretation. Devout Christians read the Bible from a faith perspective, based on a history of their experiences with God, and with the expectation to hear the word of God in the Bible. An unbeliever would interpret the text probably from a more critical perspective. A consequence of reading the Bible from a preunderstanding of faith in God is that contradictions and inconsistencies found in the Bible as well as problems within the text may be ignored or missed. This results in cognitive dissonance with readers smoothing over and filling out such difficulties in the text, at times unconsciously (Hayes & Holliday 1987:123), because of their respect for the canon and its authority and the sentiments about the Bible of their faith community (or community of interpretation, in Keener’s [2016:57] terms).

For decades, the vast majority of Pentecostals did not consider the implications of their hermeneutical distinctiveness. Even Pentecostals who furthered their studies did so at faculties established by Evangelical churches and, in many instances, their assumptions and practices of theological and biblical hermeneutics eventually reflected such a conservative perspective. This led to a widespread categorisation of Pentecostal theology as a subset of Evangelicalism and mainstream Neo-fundamentalism, resulting in the shutting down of the articulation of Pentecostalism as a theological voice that requires to be listened to (Smith 2008:27). Only since the 1990s did Pentecostal scholars recover the essence of early Pentecostal Bible reading practices, specifically in the direction in which the interpretation happens, from

7 The Pentecostals should consider whether it is possible at all to conceive what the essence of the early church was.

an encounter with God to the Bible and back to the practice of the reader.⁸ For Pentecostals, the Bible is not only an explicative textbook or ethical manual; the text becomes a type of altar at which both believers and God show up (Moore 2016:151). In the process, the Bible interprets believers rather than believers trying to interpret the Bible (Cole 2017:271).

A last remark is that the Baconian common sense method of reading the text often led to a reduction of the Bible's meaning for several reasons (McCall 2010:234). In many instances, it ignored the historical context that co-determined the meaning of a text that originated in a specific historical situation and served as a response or rejoinder to it, fusing the horizons of the past and present with a pragmatic hermeneutical leap (Kalu 2008:266). The empiricist insistence on the common sense method also led to a one-dimensional reading of the text that did not allow for the possibility that a text might have a mystical or symbolic meaning. It treated the Bible as facts in the same way that science is engaged with, reducing the use of the Bible to a proof-texting system with all texts concerned with a theme taken and read together and synthesised into a cogent whole, without duly considering the different contexts and genres represented by the various texts.

Over the past three decades, Pentecostal scholarship developed a scientifically informed hermeneutic that accounts for the distinctiveness of their Bible reading practices without concessions to the Baconian common sense method or its adaptation in early Pentecostal practices. Lastly, their hermeneutic is presented in a critical manner.

7. BALANCED PENTECOSTAL HERMENEUTIC

It is accepted that Pentecostal believers (like most other non-academic believers) read the Bible, not primarily for academic reasons, but for its impact, value and significance for daily life and struggles. The problem is the extreme subjectiveness in such "personal" reading and interpretation of the Bible. Kuhn's (1970:182, 187) remarks demonstrate that the context of one's

8 Until recently, Pentecostalism was also not taken seriously as a contributor to serious theological debate. It is true that the movement emerged from the underclass, with hardly any access to formal education, as Smith (2008:27) shows. Pentecostalism also embodies a spirituality rather than a refined theological endeavour and, in its early days, it did not produce academic theology. But its implicit or low theology was verbalised by several constructive theological voices, including Charles F. Parham, William J. Seymour, A.J. Tomlinson, C.H. Mason and Aimee Semple McPherson (Jacobsen's [2003; 2006] publications reflect these early voices). Their theology was forged at the pulpit and in prayer and in the heat of revival. Although it was not a high theology that articulates an intellectual vision of the world, it was not essentially atheological or anti-intellectual (Smith 2008:28).

own assumptions and past knowledge always has a profound effect on what one learns in any area of science. The implication is clear: one's reading of the Bible always takes place against the background of fundamental assumptions about the nature of the world, which unacknowledged determine or co-determine one's interpretation of a biblical text.⁹

Is there a way that the process, whereby a scientific understanding of a text can be generated, that aims at understanding, can be, at least in some way, objective? Or should exegesis share in a hermeneutics suspecting that any objective meaning is impossible? If it is impossible for external reality to impinge upon and limit one's interpretation in some way, the whole idea of interpretation of biblical texts becomes senseless (Bernstein 1989:32). In scientific endeavours, interpretive hypotheses are formulated based on the observation of facts or hard data. The realisation that all data is theory laden is overcome by testing the validity of the hypotheses empirically on the basis of available evidence. In a reconstruction of the meaning in reference to a text, an attempt is made to convey the meaning of the particular text in the same way as empirical science that begins with data and ends in a systematic foundation of meaning (or hypotheses). In a qualified sense, controllable scientific inquiry is inherently methodical and pursuant of objectivity, because it utilises methods that consist of ordering means to achieve an end (McCall 2010:236). Scientific inquiry is qualified and limited by empirical evidence, implying that the interpretation is narrowed down rather than spiralling out of control; the same is true of hermeneutic interpretation that is limited by the text.

Lonergan (1992:585-587) explicates the problem involved in the interpretation of any text. He distinguishes between the original expression in the text, a simple interpretation that tries to render the original expression in a comparable current expression and a reflective interpretation that tries to justify the simple interpretation. What is needed to ensure some objectivity is that all potential viewpoints about a text's possible interpretation should be considered, potentially allowing for every possible interpretation to be acknowledged. Various interpretations are normally possible for each text that is interpreted (Bernstein 1989:32). In practice, it emphasises the importance that biblical texts should ideally be read within the context of the faith

9 The influence of one's assumptions in reading the text can, for example, be illustrated by the way in which many believers read and react to the "texts of terror" as found, among others, in the narrative about the gang rape and abduction of young women at festivities at Shiloh (Judg. 19-21) and the Tamar narrative (2 Sam. 13). When the assumption is used that what people in the Old Testament did must of necessity have been right "because it is in the Bible", it leads to various efforts to "cover up" what is said about characters such as the Levite and the people of Gibeah in Benjamin or David, Amnon and Absalom (Cole 2017).

community that exists in ecumenicity with the rest of the Christian church.¹⁰ “Private” interpretation of the Bible can become dangerous “blind spots” (Keener 2016:79-80) when infallibility is claimed for the interpretation of the passage, and especially so when the interpretation is ascribed to the Spirit (Zuck 1984:121). “Objective truth” implies that one arrives at the point where no further questions would have a rational sense (Husserl 1970:69), because all possible interpretations have been considered.

A problem with “common sense” is that, although it may likely be correct in pronouncing verdicts of meaning, it cannot provide exact and convincing reasons for them (Lonergan 1992:587). Interpretation fails to provide parameters for interpretation, while it is also always open to individual and group bias. Group bias operates from the start in all common sense views, according to Lonergan (1992:222). For that reason, an ecumenical consideration of meaning in texts is not a luxury, but a precondition for understanding the biblical text in a scientifically viable manner. How common one’s common view understanding of a text is can in this way be tested empirically. Interpretation is also relative to particular audiences that requires approximation of others’ (and specifically other audiences’) views, including those of the past. By reviewing others’ views, it becomes important to recover their viewpoints by understanding what dialectical laws govern their historical unfolding (Lonergan 1992:564).

An inductive biblical hermeneutic emphasises also the overall context in which the text was generated, in terms of the determination of the literary and historical contexts, the thought structure of the pericope, various word meanings within the pericope, the doctrinal context and supplemental studies, in McCall’s (2010:239) terms. A thorough use of inductive reasoning also involves the observation of evidence and examination of such evidence, in order to reach a conclusion based upon it. On the one hand, the Spirit’s role in interpreting the Bible requires spiritual devotion on the part of the interpreter. On the other hand, the interpreter must employ principles of reasoning in making comparisons, analogies and inductions (Zuck 1984:125, 127). It is proposed that such study be inductive in nature, moving from the specific to the general, because it requires careful examination of all evidence before drawing any conclusions. The direction of Pentecostal hermeneutics then moves from careful observation in terms of contemporary encounters with God through the Spirit to the text and its interpretation, before moving back to the practice where it is applied. At the same time, all interpretation is evaluated in terms of historical and current viewpoints of the text’s meaning

10 This also includes exposure to interpretations from other cultures that provide exciting alternative possibilities for understanding (Keener 2016:70).

in an ecumenical sense, enabling the discovery of a text's meaning in its own context and the rest of Scripture's witness.

An inductive study implies that logic and reasoning are used to examine the particulars of a text before drawing a conclusion. Inductive Bible study enhances the exegetical process, because it enables the reader to read the Bible for its impact, value and significance in terms of its context, place in, and comparison to the rest of Scripture as well as the viewpoints of other interpreters of the text, past and present (McCall 2010:239). A scientifically informed inductive Pentecostal hermeneutics can be analogous to the scientific method when it makes sound inferences from Scripture, interpreted by way of Spirit-inspired inductive reasoning.

8. CONCLUSION

Since the Enlightenment, science has been based on the philosophy of common sense realism that assumes that a true reflection of reality is possible by sensing external objects combined with intuitively known general principles (or truth) that all sensible people share. Epistemology is then based on the self-evident "truths" of experience, supported by induction, because the Baconian scientific method assumes a direct relation between data, hypotheses and scientific laws. Christians read the Bible from the same perspective.

A paradigm shift at the end of the 19th century changed the scientific model of a static universe as a result of Baconian common sense realism and replaced it with naturalism, leading in three broad directions: modernist liberalism that found another basis for theology in human experience; fundamentalism that continued to use Baconian common sense to demonstrate the factuality and objective authority of the Bible, and Pentecostalism, representing a "paramodern" position. While liberal hermeneutics emphasised the subjective sense of the Bible and fundamentalism the objective sense, Pentecostals affirmed both senses. The continuous inspirational work of the Holy Spirit in the believer reading the Bible was viewed as a significant subjective counterweight to the objective, with its emphasis on the inspiration of biblical authors. Pentecostals applied common sense realism when they compiled relevant teachings of the Bible and deduced a principle in a way that displayed academic respectability on the same level as that of the natural sciences. At the same time, they interpreted the Bible in a rigidly literal way, presenting a paramodern hermeneutics that was simultaneously premodern, restorationist, modern and even postmodern.

Current Pentecostals use Bible reading practices that connect to fundamentalism with its rigid literalist-biblicistic or concordist emphasis on the inerrancy and word-for-word accuracy of the Bible. It assumes that, when

sensible people read with common sense, it necessarily results in finding the author's intention with the text.

While common sense is an essential quality of all good biblical interpretation, it poses several challenges. One such challenge is that theological attitudes and hermeneutical assumptions influence the understanding of the Bible that requires reflected awareness. Another is that the Baconian common sense method of reading the text often reduces the Bible's meaning by ignoring the historical, social and literary context and genre, using the Bible in a proof-texting way. While common sense may provide correct verdicts of meaning, it cannot provide exact and convincing reasons for them. These challenges can be overcome by considering the meaning in texts ecumenically, necessitating the approximation of others' views, of both the living and the dead.

What is required of a scientific understanding of a text that is objective is a reconstruction of a text's meaning that is inherently methodical, because it uses methods that consist of ordering means to achieve an end and that is limited by empirical evidence, implying that the interpretation is narrowed down rather than spiralling out of control. Such an inductive biblical hermeneutics emphasises the context of the text, its genre and the Spirit's role in its illumination.

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