

Bradley Truman Noel, *Pentecostal and Postmodern Hermeneutics: Comparisons and Contemporary Impact* (Eugene, Oregon: Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2010), xiv pp. + 201 pp., paperback, ISBN: 13: 978-1-60608-905-7, US\$ 24.00

It is generally taken for granted in the academic setting that the Western world is Postmodern. The philosophical foundation of Postmodernity is relativity. Make no mistake about it. The Pentecostals, to survive in the future, should face the paradigm of the Postmodern mindset. There is no other way for Western Pentecostalism to confront Postmodernism except to deal with it. Thus, *Pentecostal and Postmodern Hermeneutics: Comparisons and Contemporary Impact* is meant to engage with this Western reality. Originally submitted as a Doctor of Theology in Practical Theology thesis (University of South Africa, 2007) with exactly the same title, the main emphasis of this book is to examine how the scriptural message has been interpreted within Pentecostalism and the way Postmodernity views the biblical text. Epistemology is a primary question in Postmodern hermeneutics. An epistemological solution is necessary. Postmodern epistemology developed a big threat to the Modern paradigm of understanding knowledge. It is Modernity that shaped the Pentecostal paradigm as a whole. The Modern framework occupies the Pentecostal mind. The early Pentecostal biblical interpretation is in the context of Modernity. (2-6)

The author, Bradley Truman Noel, in his bibliographical examination of the available information about early and contemporary Pentecostalism, detects that in many places there are matching notions between the Pentecostal pioneers' handling of the scriptural text and the main precepts of Postmodern thinkers. (7-8) The research is on the available literature. The data and arguments of the book were from the writings of the academicians. It is noteworthy that there is an exceptional reception of the Pentecostal scholars into the broader academy of theological studies. Pentecostals are into it. What would be the reason why Pentecostals have already penetrated the academic world? Is Pentecostal hermeneutics modernized and evangelicalized? And thus, does evangelical hermeneutics that is based in Modern presuppositions dictate the direction of Pentecostal biblical exploration? The Pentecostal academy is certain to lead the way to the better understanding of the Pentecostal experience based on the Bible. And Noel is really concerned about the passing on of the Pentecostal

tradition and its academic definition to contemporary youth whose worldview is Postmodern.

The sensitivity of the issue about Postmodern youth in North America is looked at in terms of an unparalleled candidness to any kind of spirituality that is relevant to a personal experience. *Pentecostal and Postmodern Hermeneutics* claims that Pentecostals could bring their significant contribution to the larger Christian world, not only within Evangelicalism. This contribution is a Pentecostal hermeneutic that would bring a pertinent interpretation of Christianity from a Pentecostal perspective to the current generation of young people. Hence the chapters of the book are developed and divided into eight chapters. Chapter one is presented in a manner that portrays the problem that the volume seeks to answer. Here the author identifies the problems at hand. Noel declares that: "The goal of this work is to show that in the earliest days, the hermeneutics employed by Pentecostals shared many characteristics of today's Postmodern thought." (9) Furthermore, the author states that: "This work demonstrates that Pentecostals must continue in the hermeneutical traditions of their early leaders if they are to remain relevant in the future. It is possible to adhere to the best of early Pentecostal hermeneutics, without ignoring the tremendous hermeneutical advances of the twentieth century." (10)

The next two chapters investigate the meeting place of Postmodern philosophy and Pentecostal mentality. The scope is in the area of the Modern manner of reasoning. In chapter two Noel maintains that although the vital meanings taken for granted by Evangelicalism contradict Postmodern philosophy, there are "similarities between the Postmodern way of thought and the thought patterns of the earliest Pentecostals." (17) The author develops his argument by mapping out the history of Western thinking. He reviews what are the Premodern, the Modern and the Postmodern ways of viewing knowledge. (18-29) Moreover, Noel itemizes the types of Postmodern thought as: 1). "deconstructive" or "ultramodernism"; 2). "liberationist"; 3). "constructive"; and 4). "conservative" or "restorationist". (30-31) The whole point of discussion is their extent of transformation from Modernity. In chapter three Noel astutely portrays how the Spirit encounter, the intellectual rejection and the oral narratives of the early Pentecostals explain their hermeneutical attitude. (45-69) He further notes that, as the Pentecostals matured theologically, "it became apparent that the approach of Pentecostal scholars would begin to mirror that of their Evangelical comrades as they began to employ the

traditional Evangelical hermeneutics of Modernity to the core of Pentecostal theology.” (71)

The fourth chapter deals with the contribution of Gordon Fee and his Pentecostal critics. (73-95) The main concern for Noel is the use of Modern critical approaches in Pentecostal hermeneutics. He sees Fee as an ideal representative of Pentecostal hermeneutics influenced by Evangelical values in reading the Scriptures. He also presents Fee’s concern for the authorial intent of a biblical writer and the historical precedent as a hermeneutical defect. (74-83) The author also presents the answers of William and Robert Menzies as well as Roger Stronstad to Fee’s views. (83-93) The fifth chapter is Rudolf Bultmann’s contributions to biblical demythologization (98-103) and the Jesus Seminar (103-107). The appropriation of his work in the world of the Postmodern young generation is the significance of this chapter (107-121). The sixth chapter engages with a new generation of Pentecostal scholars represented by Kenneth Archer. (122-145) He creates the term “paramodern” (127, 140-142) and comes up with a new “tridactic” Pentecostal manner in doing hermeneutical dialogue of “the biblical text,” “the Pentecostal community” and “the Holy Spirit.” (137-141) This approach is a departure from the typical Evangelical methodology.

Chapter seven addresses the Spirit’s part in the hermeneutical process. Is there any advantage to being a Spirit-filled biblical interpreter? This chapter is interesting. The observation of Noel is noteworthy: “Though most begin their work on hermeneutics by affirming the role of the Spirit in the creation and transmission of Scripture, few scholars find it necessary to include a detailed description of the Spirit’s role in illumination.” (147) After surveying the views of Pentecostals and Evangelicals about the guidance of the Spirit in hermeneutics (152-163) the author sees that Pentecostals must have “a distinctive approach to hermeneutics.” (163) He also maintains that the advantage of being Spirit-filled is the matter of “experiential verification.” (164) In addition, he traces the idea of personal experience influencing biblical interpretation from Pentecostal scholars. (164-172) Noel contends that: “For Pentecostals, the link between hermeneutics and experience is well established; their contribution to the larger Evangelical hermeneutical world is perhaps just beginning to take shape.” (174) And in chapter eight the author essentially provides a recapitulation of the chapters and reiterates the distinction made by Archer between “Postmodern and Paramodern.” (176-180)

The volume is an informative read. The surveys of ideas in Premodern, Modern and Postmodern periods are clearly presented. The

bibliographical resources for the Pentecostal mindset are pretty comprehensive. The argument of the book is well sustained. Likewise, Noel points out that additional research should be done on the influence of Modernity among the Pentecostals in other places of the globe as well as the effect of Postmodernity on non-Western young people. The particular form of the experience factor of Pentecostal hermeneutics is also necessary to be explored. Diversity of the younger generation's response to Postmodernity must be assessed. The penetration of Postmodern thinking into global Pentecostalism is also worthy to be investigated. (180-181) Noel opens new areas of research for Pentecostals in the developing world such as in Asia. The suggestions that he has for further research are appropriate for Asians to explore. Pentecostalism is thriving in Asia. Postmodernity is already in Asia. The impact of Postmodern philosophy to the Asian mind due to globalization is becoming a necessary area of study in connection to its significance to Asian Pentecostalism. Hence, *Pentecostal and Postmodern Hermeneutics* is recommended reading for Asian Pentecostals!

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