

BOOK REVIEWS

Chris E. W. Green, *Sanctifying Interpretation: Vocation, Holiness, and Scripture*, 2nd edition (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2020). xvi + 237 pp. \$18.95 paper.

In *Sanctifying Interpretation*, Chris E. W. Green proffers a constructive bibliology for classical Pentecostals that redirects attention away from an overt focus on epistemology, toward the much-overlooked *sanctifying* Spirit-Word dynamic of Scripture. Reminiscent of ascetic exhortation, the book argues for a *sensibility*, “an attitude toward interpretation” (xii), espousing that the challenging, *purgative* process of biblical interpretation sanctifies (xi-xii). His approach re-emphasizes the Spirit’s role as the one who makes present the words and works of God not just in the text but also through the lives of its message-bearers.

Being a second edition of his earlier monograph, Green presents the same argument for a soteriologically inclined Bible reading and interpretation through the lens of Christian identity and vocation, adding textual case studies and practical guidance to make his proposition clearer and more accessible. In broad stroke, he presents his arguments in three parts of vocation, holiness, and Scripture.

First, Green elaborates on the Christian vocation as part and parcel of Christian identification with Christ (15). In fact, with Christian conversion comes belonging and collaborative participation in the works of Christ. Interpreting Scripture, then, should come from the outflow of our identity in Christ and our participation in his priestly and prophetic vocation to the world (18-20). Green writes: “Joined to him in the washing of water and by the indwelling of the Spirit, we receive Christ’s priestly sensitivity to ‘the need, the chaos, the darkness of the world’ and his prophetic passion to enter into that darkness as ‘the light of the world’ (Mt. 5.14)” (25). Both priestly and prophetic vocations stem from our identity and participation in Christ.

With this understanding, the church, not just the individual, is recognized as a medium (and sacred space) for God’s transformative work in humanity.

Second, Green provides a corrective to the Pentecostal understanding of holiness. In Wesleyan fashion, he surmises holiness as a product of love, a relational outflow of abiding love in God (85). The process of sanctification comes from the “constant re-energizing and re-ordering of our loves. . . . The Spirit frees us from loving the wrong things, then more deeply, trains us to love the right things the right way” (86). The weight of holiness, however, does not just result in loving God and our neighbors, but even strangers and enemies (100-101).

Interestingly, Green promotes not just a sanctified life washed in the love of God, but also sanctified worship (i.e., liturgical practice) that posture Christians towards “sacred awareness of and openness to the Spirit” (116). He exhorts Pentecostals to crucify their self-made judgments and emotions into conformity with Christ (117-118).

Third, Green brings to a climax his exploration of vocation and holiness by using it as the foundation for a hermeneutic that recognizes the sanctifying effect of pneumatic interpretation (125). He writes: “the Scripture does not merely tell about salvation. By the Spirit’s grace, the Scripture works salvation, renewing our vision of the world by transforming us at the depths of our being” (127). A hermeneutic that recognizes the living, renewing, and transformative Word through the Spirit’s charism, allows readers and interpreters to grapple with even the most difficult texts and embody the persistence, world-defying love, and wisdom of one who trusts in an unfathomable God.

Hence, Green asserts that when biblical interpretation is recognized as a sanctifying process built on identification with Christ and participation in the Triune God’s mission, the method *per se* does not matter as much as the conformity to Christ that results from it. Once again, readers of *Sanctifying Interpretation* are reminded that the author’s aim is not a methodological process but rather a *sensibility* toward Scripture.

The book succeeds in re-directing attention towards the oft-forgotten sanctifying role of Scripture. Hermeneutics, for the most part, has a critical component that sometimes subsumes pneumatic charism. However, hermeneutics, as Green proffers, remains to be a divine-human collaboration. It is a work of God in and through believers; it is also the priestly and prophetic vocation of the church to the world. Green succeeds in emphasizing this message not just through a forward-moving dialectic, but also through textual studies of difficult pericopes used as evidence for his argument.

Green’s strength also lies in a writing style that induces reflection and meditation. He remains academic and irenic, as evidenced by his mastery of scholarly literature across traditions. Yet, like a priest and a prophet himself, Green speaks to readers and invokes a change of paradigms. His masterful demonstration of *sanctified* interpretation (tinged with Barthian and Wesleyan sensibilities) demonstrates a bibliology reflective of Holiness Pentecostals. Undeniably, the integrative use of vocation and holiness in the interpretative process is a good addition to the ongoing discussion of Pentecostal hermeneutics.

The publication of *Sanctifying Interpretation* 2nd edition presents once more the growing hermeneutical prowess of Holiness Pentecostals in North America. Much of the ideas and ethos in Green’s pages reflect

the message of Holiness Pentecostal scholars like Steven Land, Cheryl Bridges Johns, Rick D. Moore, and John Christopher Thomas. His work also builds on Barth and Wesley, as well as Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Daniela Augustine. Non-Wesleyan Pentecostals would benefit from seeing the Holiness-Pentecostal hermeneutic at work, especially on *difficult-to-expound* texts.

Moreover, Green uses the filters for discerning interpretation and experience—Scripture, the Holy Spirit, and the Community. Holiness Pentecostals have been appropriately espousing the community orientation of the Spirit and the Word. The Spirit-Word dynamic, which Land and Moore (among others) have carefully articulated in their writings, serves as the backbone to Green's understanding of sanctifying interpretation. Accordingly, the Spirit-Word dynamic and the triangle of discernment make Holiness Pentecostal hermeneutical method distinctive in the global Pentecostal circles. Truth be told, the distinctiveness of their hermeneutical method is worth emulating.

In conclusion, through the second edition of *Sanctifying Interpretation*, Green once more espouses a Pentecostal approach to bibliology that does not subsume the sanctifying work of the Spirit in the interpretative process. Moreover, through Green's meditative dialectic of vocation and holiness, readers are moved towards a transformed understanding of hermeneutics, recognizing that salvation, and its accompanying progressive sanctification, is a necessary component of pneumatic interpretation, embodiment, and proclamation of God's divine message.

I recommend this book to a variety of readers, especially pastors, theological educators, and even laypersons. Green's writing centers on one thought: sanctification matters. If Pentecostal/Charismatics are serious about their identity as Spirit-empowered people, then Christian identity and vocation should be demonstrable in a sanctified life and a sanctified reading of Scripture. Green's provocative proposition deserves to be heard by the global Pentecostal/Charismatic family.

Lora Angeline Embudo Timenia
Asia Pacific Theological Seminary, Baguio, Philippines

Jerry M. Ireland, *The Missionary Spirit: Evangelism and Social Action in Pentecostal Missiology*, (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2021). 202 pp. \$17.01 (Kindle)

This book is a breath of fresh air that brings clarity and direction to the expanding enterprise of Pentecostal ministries of social concern.