EXPENDABLE CREATION: CLASSICAL PENTECOSTALISM
AND ENVIRONMENTAL DISREGARD

THESIS

Presented to the Graduate Council of the
University of North Texas in Partial
Fulfillment of the Requirements

For the Degree of

MASTER OF ARTS

By

Jeffrey P. Goins, B.A.
Denton, Texas
December 1997

Whereas the ecological crisis has elicited a response from many quarters of American Christianity, classical (or denominational) Pentecostals have expressed almost no concern about environmental problems. The reasons for their disregard of the environment lie in the Pentecostal worldview which finds expression in their: 1) tradition; 2) view of human and natural history; 3) common theological beliefs; and 4) scriptural interpretation. All these aspects of Pentecostalism emphasize and value the supernatural—conversely viewing nature as subordinate, dependent and temporary. Therefore, the ecocrisis is not problematic because, for Pentecostals, the natural environment is: of only relative value; must serve the divine plan; and will soon be destroyed and replaced. Furthermore, Pentecostals are likely to continue their environmental disregard, since the supernaturalism which spawns it is key to Pentecostal identity.
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Ecocrisis & Technology

The environmental problems of recent years, together with forecasts of even greater environmental problems looming on the horizon, have caused some rethinking of our use of science and technology. It is generally understood that the unwise use of our technological prowess is at the root of most environmental problems. We in the western hemisphere have used technology to raise our “standard of living,” which we have equated to our levels of comfort and consumption. However, while technology has allowed us to make our immediate environment more livable and enjoyable, much of the ecological costs have been borne by other parts of the world, which are made less livable by depleted natural resources, pollutants, and inescapable economic cycles of poverty. Previously, those “other parts of the world” could seem distant and unrelated to us. However, as population increases (and travel and communication technology advances), the “other parts of the world” seem ever nearer and more related. Whereas we in the West continually push the limits of per capita consumption, the so-called Third-World countries have pushed the
limits of population.\(^1\) Overpopulation has become a great problem of the Third World (a problem also exacerbated by technology which contributes to lower infant mortality rates in cultures that encourage large families). Our seemingly separate human "worlds" are physically growing closer together. On a planet of limited space, we are beginning to see some of the limits and are beginning to bump up against them. Our technology has made possible staggering levels of population and consumption, levels that are increasingly destructive of the natural environment.\(^2\) Therefore, the same technology that is making our world better is also making our world worse.

Why has our use of technology vis-à-vis the environment been so unwise? Some thinkers have put the blame on our western philosophic tradition. We inherited the Cartesian notion that we can be the "masters and possessors of nature." As a result, we afford nature no other standing than that of slave and possession. Martin Heidegger insinuates that our Western, technological outlook entails the danger of viewing all things—not just nature but even humans—as merely "resource" or "standing-reserve."\(^3\) Viewed as morally inconsequential, nature makes no claim on us. Technology allows us to unconcernedly take from nature to meet our needs, desires, and even mere whims. This has allowed the

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\(^1\) Despite their countries' population problems, those in the Third World who have the opportunity have been eager to emulate Western levels of consumption as well.


abuses of the natural environment that have created the present ecological predicament, so one argument goes. (This is why some environmental philosophers have spent great effort to develop a theory of intrinsic value for nature, thus giving it some measure of moral considerability.) These attitudes towards nature have been exported to the rest of the world as part and parcel of Western-style technology.

The Role of Christianity

In an article written thirty years ago, Lynn White, Jr. laid blame for this enchantment with “conquering” technology at the doorstep of Western Christianity. He asserted that:

Especially in its Western form, Christianity is the most anthropocentric religion the world has seen...Christianity...not only established a dualism of man and nature but also insisted that it is God’s will that man exploit nature for his proper ends...No new sets of basic values has been accepted in our society to displace those of Christianity. Hence we shall continue to have a worsening ecologic crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man...Since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious, whether we call it that or not...More science and more technology are not going to get us out of the present ecologic crisis until we find a new religion, or rethink our old one.4

White’s article sparked an ongoing debate about the blameworthiness of Christianity for the ecocrisis. Instead of finger pointing, however, the focus of the debate has shifted, as of late, to what role Christianity can actually play in ameliorating the ecological crisis. In his book Caring For Creation, Max Oelschlaeger has suggested that Christians can find a source for establishing

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earth-friendly values in the biblical accounts of creation. The Genesis narratives implicitly call for humans to be good stewards of the earth. These narratives then offer a type of "caring for creation" metaphor that could be a common basis and motivation for the broad-scale, social and political action that Oelschlaeger believes is needed to respond effectively to the environmental crisis. Both White and Oelschlaeger seem to agree that "since the roots of our trouble are so largely religious, the remedy must also be essentially religious." In fact, White even offered up St. Francis of Assisi as a point within the tradition with which Christianity could possibly reconnect to an ecologically-responsible spirituality. "I propose Francis as a patron saint for ecologists," White wrote somewhat drolly.

It is correct to say that religion must play a role in providing the solidarity needed to resolve the environmental crisis (Oelschlaeger's thesis). Religion is still a major motivating force in the world, despite what many in the modern, secular West believe. Religion may well be the only thing that could change the pervasive values that are largely responsible for our ecological predicament. Within Western Christianity, just such a rethinking of humanity's relation to nature appears to be under way.

Environmental responsibility has been taken up as a vital topic within mainstream Christian thought. As the title of Joseph Sheldon's book indicates, there has been a Rediscovery of Creation taking place in Western Christianity. Sheldon's bibliographic study cites approximately 1500 academic and popular

5 Max Oelschlaeger, Caring For Creation (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994).
6 White, "Historical Roots," p. 1207.
works from the last 30 years pertaining to "issues and topics of creation care," with hundreds of those titles relating specifically to stewardship or "Creation Theology."\(^7\) Besides the academic and popular cultural interest indicated by Sheldon's work, Christian denominations have begun to establish "official" credence for environmental concerns. Some mainline Protestant denominations, such as the United Methodists, have explicitly spelled out a stance towards the natural world and have made ecological concerns a prominent part of their social principles.\(^8\) Several Christian denominations have even established standing committees to promote environmental responsibility among their denominational members. Although ecological concerns have been taken up heartily by liberal denominations, many conservative denominations have also begun to define for themselves a role as stewards of creation. The Southern Baptist Christian Life Commission devoted its 1991 national conference to environmental concerns and offers several environmental-related materials in the ethics resources that it provides to Southern Baptist churches.\(^9\) In addition to denominational interest, some parachurch organizations have


\(^8\) see the "Social Principles" section of \textit{The Book of Discipline of The United Methodist Church}, 1992. The responsibility of the Church for ecological justice and responsibility to creation is the first topic addressed after the preface and preamble.

sought an ecumenical approach to promoting ecological awareness. In 1993, the Evangelical Environmental Network was established:

as part of a growing movement among evangelical Christians to develop a biblical response to the disregard of God's creation. It was formed in answer to the recognition by many of the world's eminent scientists that environmental problems are at their roots spiritual problems, and require a response grounded in faith.10

In early 1994, the Evangelical Environmental Network released a document on environmental stewardship entitled "An Evangelical Declaration on the Care of Creation," which has since been signed by hundreds of evangelical leaders in North America.

Christianity and Worldviews

Many Christians in mainline denominations hold religious views that, to one degree or another, are informed by science. (Many Christians, however, seem to simply partition their views into separate realms and hop between them as they see appropriate.) Most of such believers are likely to take seriously an environmental "crisis" which is substantiated by the scientific community.11 These Christians may consider it an obligation to respond theologically to problems which are pointed out by science. Broadly construed, this is what appears to be happening in mainline Christian denominations.


11 Whereas the use of science may account for the environmental crisis, science has also been at the fore in pointing out the environmental problems. I think that this, more than anything else, shows that science functions as a tool and that our ecological problems are a result of a skewed, or no longer appropriate, value system. Science is a power—and the use of power is directed by values and ethics.
This church-based environmentalism, however, is predicated on assumptions that are not shared by some religious believers. The environmentalist stance assumes that the environmental changes making up the ecocrisis are truly to be perceived as a problem. By stating this assumption, I am not asserting that the ecocrisis does not exist. I am simply saying that not all points of view may admit to its being a great matter of concern. Concern over the ecocrisis, for the most part, results from a scientifically-informed worldview that takes the independent agency of nature seriously. Such a view presumes that whatever direction the ecological crisis takes, it will be the result of the interplay of natural processes—processes which are affected by human actions but which will operate indifferent to human intentions. The ecocrisis is a major concern because the "natural" outcome could be the extinction of the human race. From this position of ecological concern, religious support is then sought for addressing the problem. However, some religious believers approach this matter from the opposite direction. Some Christians hold views that are resistant, or even antagonistic, to scientific views which accord nature genuine independent agency. These Christians hold to a different worldview from the modern, scientific worldview. Consequently, these believers start from a different worldview to understand their relation to nature. It is this religious worldview which either will give them a basis for ecological concern or will undermine any such concern.
Pentecostal Disregard for the Environment

A prime example of how a different religious worldview can affect attitudes toward the environment can be found in Pentecostalism.\(^\text{12}\) In the midst of all the environmental interest presently found within American Christianity, Pentecostal denominations remain impervious to any significant concern for nature. This can been seen in several ways, most prominent being the lack of any mention of the subject in most Pentecostal publications. As though it were not worthy of attention, the *Pentecostal Evangel* and the *Church of God Evangel* magazines—denominational organs which address issues of interest for members of the Assemblies of God and Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.) respectively—have yet to publish a feature article on, or even to devote an entire editorial to, environmental stewardship.\(^\text{13}\) The same is true of most other American Pentecostal publications as well. Also, Pentecostal denominations themselves have yet to issue any type of official position on environmental stewardship.\(^\text{14}\)

When the subject of environmental stewardship has been broached by Pentecostal denominations at all, their statements have been rife with

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\(^\text{12}\) In the remainder of this paper, the term "Pentecostalism" (and any variations thereof) is used to only denote denominational or classical Pentecostalism. This usage of "Pentecostal" is contrary to a more inclusive use which would include Neo-Pentecostal ("Charismatic" and "Third-Wave") groups. Both Charismatic and Third-Wave groups are specifically referred to as such, and therefore are not included in my use of the term Pentecostal.

\(^\text{13}\) Being "target marketed," these magazines are probably a good indicator of interests of the lay members of these denominations.

\(^\text{14}\) This is true even of the Church of God (Cleveland, TN), which has some tradition of social concern but which has not issued any official, or even unofficial, position on environmental responsibility.
ambivalence. For example, in a publication of its Office of Public Relations, the Assemblies of God does address the issue of environmental protection, the opening line stating that, "The Assemblies of God believes that everyone needs to be a good steward of all God's creation--including the earth." However, the tone of the first section of the article about stewardship is tentative, repeatedly emphasizing the temporality of nature (i.e., "As Christians we believe dominion requires good stewardship of our temporary home--earth."). Even the above-quoted opening line about being a good steward adds the earth as just one additional thing that we should manage responsibly. This section also makes its authors appear quite uninformed about environmental problems, speaking more about the right to harvest the earth's resources than about responsibility and making no mention at all of social justice issues linked to environmental resource use. Although the first part of the article deals with environmental stewardship (though tentatively, at best), the largest part of the article is actually found in the section entitled "concerns." As the subtitle indicates, this section, which takes up nearly two-thirds of the article, discusses the apprehensions that

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15 The Assemblies of God Office of Public Affairs, *The Assemblies of God Perspectives-Contemporary Issues: Social, Medical, and Political* (Springfield, MO: 1995), p. 5. This was clearly offered by the Assemblies of God as an unofficial position, but one which has become one of "those things commonly held' among members and adherents." p. 2.

16 Ibid., p. 6.

17 This passage betrays a somewhat confused notion of ecological stewardship which may result from the fact that Pentecostals link the term "stewardship" almost exclusively to management of finances (i.e., being good stewards of their money, and tithing). This link of stewardship and finances may follow from a literalist interpretation of parables found in Matthew 25:14-30 and Luke 16:1-13.
the Assemblies of God have about: people turning "their adoration from the
Creator to the creation;" the supposed link of environmental concern with the
New Age Movement; and the "overemphasis of the environment at the expense
of spiritual issues effecting life and eternity."18 Clearly then, the "commonly held"
position of Assemblies of God members is one of more concern about
environmentalism than of actual concern for the environment. When considered
at all, environmental concern is viewed with suspicion by many Pentecostals.

Pentecostal Influence: Numbers & Growth

Pentecostal's lack of environmental conscience could be easier to dismiss
if they did not make up such a large proportion of Christians in the world today.
In 1988, Pentecostals were estimated to number over 175,000,000 worldwide.19
Of that worldwide number, approximately 22,500,000 were North American
Pentecostals. Estimating from conservative growth rates, Pentecostals in the
year 2000 may number over 260,000,000 worldwide. If Charismatic and Third-
Wave groups, which have been influenced by Pentecostalism, are included, the
1988 worldwide number soars to over 350,000,000--making it the second largest
segment of Christianity. Since the 1970's, Pentecostal groups have been the
fastest growing, led by the Assemblies of God which has consistently been the
fastest growing Christian denomination since the mid-1980's.

18 Ibid.

19 All statistics taken from: David B. Barrett, "Statistics, Global" in Dictionary of
Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements, ed. Stanley M. Burgess (Grand Rapids, Mich:
Besides the tremendous numbers and growth of Pentecostalism, what the statistical figures also point out is that the majority of Pentecostals are not white, North Americans. In fact, the vast majority of Pentecostals are non-white and from the Third-World. Many of the Third-World Pentecostals have adapted Pentecostal worship and beliefs to their indigenous cultures in unique and interesting ways, making Pentecostalism a very diverse phenomenon. Despite the fact that most Pentecostals are not North Americans, Pentecostal denominations in the United States have been the pacesetters on many issues, since the U.S. is seen as the birthplace of Pentecostalism and since American cultural values are often emulated in other parts of the world.

Pentecostal Experience

Pentecostalism could be seen as an embodiment of William James’ assertion that feeling is the primary and deeper source of religion, whereas theological and philosophical formulas are secondary. At its core, Pentecostalism is an experiential religion which emphasizes personal experiences of the Holy Spirit. These Pentecostal experiences can involve intense emotionalism. It is this, often dramatic, emotive aspect which most people associate with Pentecostals. The movement has always been identified

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21 For this reason and to limit the scope of inquiry, I am concentrating this paper on American Pentecostalism. “Pentecostalism” will then be referring specifically to American Pentecostalism, and may or may not apply to Pentecostalism practiced elsewhere.
with the experience of "speaking in tongues" (sometimes also referred to as ecstatic speech, xenolalia, and, more commonly, glossolalia), wherein an individual, often in an excited psychological state, will verbalize sounds that comprise, or resemble, a language which is unknown to the speaker. Because of its ostentatiousness, the phenomenon of "speaking in tongues" has monopolized the attention of many observers from outside Pentecostalism. In fact, many non-Pentecostals simply referred to Pentecostalism as the "tongues movement." Many hostile interpreters of Pentecostalism have tried to dismiss the whole movement by discrediting or demeaning this one aspect. Within the Church, Fundamentalist Protestants were often the most vocal opponents of the practice of speaking in tongues, which they sometimes argued was "of the devil." (This is somewhat ironic considering the doctrinal similarities between Fundamentalists and Pentecostals.) Psychological interpretations treated tongues speaking as pathological. Pentecostalism was explained away by social scientists with "deprivation theories" which linked glossolalia with instances of personal and social stress. Anthropologists and sociologists have also

\[\text{22} \quad \text{It is not accurate to reduce the whole of Pentecostalism to the experience of speaking in tongues. For one reason, the many of those who consider themselves Pentecostal have never personally experienced glossolalia. Many Pentecostals, however, understand themselves to have had an experience of the Holy Spirit, even if it did not involve speaking in tongues. In their exuberant worship services, many Pentecostals have experienced the supernatural and have "felt the Spirit move." Also, Pentecostals may exercise other supernatural gifts of the Spirit, or charisms, or may rely on divine guidance for decision making ("feel God speak to them") without ever speaking in tongues.}\]

emphasized that the phenomenon of glossolalia can be found in many different cultures of ancient and modern times (Native American and African shamanism, the Delphic Oracle, etc.). However, although they may be bodily the same, these instances of glossolalia do differ in one significant way; they differ in their interpretation by, and significance for, their practitioners. The reason for the difference is that these religious experiences are embedded in beliefs, perspectives or worldviews which establish the context and, consequently, the meaning for the experiences (in much the same way that the social scientific and fundamentalist explanations are embedded in different worldviews). Continuing William James' line of thought, we see that "religious experience spontaneously and inevitably engenders myth, superstitions, dogmas, creeds, and metaphysical theologies." Religious experience and religious belief are inextricably linked, so that it is hard to tell where one ends and the other begins. Therefore, it is Pentecostalism as an interpreting matrix that gives those experiences their meaning to Pentecostals—and it is those meaningful experiences that, in turn, confirm the interpretive matrix.

Pentecostal Belief System

Consequently, to ascertain why positions of environmental responsibility have been of little interest to Pentecostals, we must understand their belief system as it establishes their identity, interprets their experiences, and makes sense of their world. Historically, Pentecostalism has been a movement of the

underclass. Consequently, as Pentecostal theologian Steven Land says, "in terms of social location most Pentecostals have not been positioned to have an ecological concern or to join Greenpeace." Social concerns of any type, in fact, have not been a prominent part of Pentecostalism. Instead, Pentecostals have put their efforts into evangelism. This fact has not changed even though the "social location" of many Pentecostals has greatly improved.

One reason that Pentecostals have continued to show little interest in social concerns, including environmental concerns, is because of their belief in the imminent end of the world—believing that Christ will soon physically return to destroy the present earth, create a new earth, and set up a new kingdom. Christians, however, will be supernaturally rescued from the earth's fate.

Beyond this particular eschatological belief, however, the fact that almost every aspect of Pentecostal thought emphasizes the supernatural makes concern for the natural environment problematic. What Pentecostals understand themselves to be experiencing when speaking in tongues or exercising other of the charisms ("gifts of the Spirit") is the supernatural. Their supernatural experiences are interpreted then as the same experience as those of the apostles. This understanding then affects the way in which Pentecostals interpret scripture. Their scriptural interpretation, not surprisingly, gives more support to their supernatural outlook. This continual focus on the supernatural pushes the locus of value squarely (and nearly exclusively) into the supernatural.

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realm, thereby devaluing the natural world. Consequently, the "saving of eternal souls" becomes paramount, and the secular life—with the natural world that supports it—become a pale secondary concern.

Also, Pentecostals understand the supernatural as an operating factor in the workings of nature. Nature then does not have genuine independent agency, since its operation is interrupted and directed by supernatural intervention. Therefore, the "so-called" environmental crisis is not really a crisis to Pentecostals because nature cannot deviate from supernatural direction. Nature will inevitably serve the divine plan.

I am dividing the Pentecostal worldview into three sections: 1) Historical; 2) Theological; and 3) Hermeneutical. As becomes apparent, this is an artificial partitioning of the thought system since the thought of each section involves aspects of the others. Therefore, this is only intended as an organizational device to better approach the Pentecostal belief system.
CHAPTER II

HISTORY & TRADITION

Pentecostal View of the Origin of the Movement

The popular Pentecostal understanding of the origins of their own movement has mythic qualities. “The American Pentecostal movement began on January 1, 1901, when a group of Bible school students in Topeka, Kansas, were filled with the Holy Spirit and spoke in other tongues as the original Christians did on the Day of Pentecost (Acts 2:4).”¹ This passage, written by an Assemblies of God minister, represents a view of the origin of the Pentecostal movement commonly held by Pentecostals. The Topeka Bible students to whom the quote refers were attending Bethel Bible College, founded by Charles F. Parham. A former Methodist minister, Parham is credited with formulating the distinctive Pentecostal doctrine of speaking in tongues as initial evidence of Baptism of the Holy Spirit. He and his students had been studying the second chapter of Acts and were expecting a restoration of the supernatural powers of the first Christian apostles with an accompanying sign. For several days they had been gathering together to pray for a manifestation of the sign of apostolic power when, shortly before midnight on the eve of the new century, one of the students (Agnes Ozman) received the expected sign and, reportedly, began

praying in the Chinese language. A few days later, Parham and several of the other students are said to have also received the sign and to have spoken in unknown tongues. From this initial miraculous outpouring of the Holy Spirit, the New Pentecost began. In revivals held throughout Kansas, Oklahoma and Texas, Parham began teaching about, and encouraging others to experience, this gift of the Holy Spirit. William J. Seymour, a black Holiness evangelist, became acquainted with Parham’s initial evidence teaching and the glossolalia experience at one of these revivals in Houston, Texas. Seymour traveled to Los Angeles and began the Azusa Street revivals which were reportedly filled with miraculous and supernatural happenings, and which drew the attention of the world to the new restoration of Holy Spirit power. From Azusa Street, this new Pentecost spread around the world, many converts were made, and many Pentecostal denominations developed as a result. For the most part, this is how many Pentecostals see their own short history.

Two things are particularly interesting about the popular Pentecostal account of the movements origins: 1) the parallels with the original day of Pentecost; and 2) the occurrence of Ms. Ozman’s tongues experience on the New Year’s Eve 1900. Regarding the first point, Pentecostals recount various details of the Bethel College incident which parallel the original day of Pentecost. Parham himself later described several exact parallels between the incident and the biblical account of Pentecost day found in the second chapter of Acts.

The accounts given by Parham and his sister-in-law have left the impression that the Bethel event duplicated Pentecost in almost every detail. They were in an upper room. Approximately 120 people were
present including 12 ministers. Cloven tongues of fire were seen resting on the heads of those receiving the experience of Spirit-baptism. One account, attributed to Parham, notes that a breeze swept the room, even though the windows were closed. Ozman was said to have spoken in tongues at the stroke of midnight at the dawn of the new century, and outside observers confirmed that actual language was spoken.\(^2\)

The event is seen by many Pentecostals as truly a second Pentecost. The fact that it happened on the eve of the new century further confirms that the Holy Spirit has again entered human history in a powerful way—a way rivaling the miraculous experience of the original apostles. I would argue that this popular Pentecostal view of the movement’s origins is mythic because its truth lies not in its historical accuracy but in its symbolic significance. In the Pentecostal view, those events mark an important change in the course of human history, even if they did not happen exactly as recounted. However, many Pentecostals do not understand it as mythic and would argue that the events truly did happen as miraculously as the biblical account of Pentecost. The historical accuracy of their accounts, however, is truly suspect.\(^3\)

Pentecost Within Human History

Consequently, Pentecostals see the movement as significant within the larger purview of human history. As they understand it, on the original day of


Pentecost (the birth of the Church), God began a new work within humanity. With the advent of the Holy Spirit, Christians were given supernatural power as displayed by the apostles throughout the book of Acts. By this power, the early Christians could overcome the evil forces of this world, such as sin and disease, and could evangelize effectively. With the establishment of Christianity as the state religion of the Roman Empire during the reign of Constantine, however, the influence of the Holy Spirit began to wane. Christianity became over-institutionalized as the Church began teaching reliance on the institution instead of reliance on the Holy Spirit. God had begun to end this "Constantinian Bondage" with the Protestant Reformation and Luther's teaching of sola fide.

The restoration of humanity to God was now entering the final stage. The power of the Holy Spirit was being restored to a faithful and willing remnant, so that they could bring to salvation any of those who would be saved (both within the "apostate" church and throughout the rest of the world) before Christ returns to establish his millennial kingdom, bringing an end to the history of this world. As it turns out, God has chosen to give this end-times power to the lowly and meek. It is no mere coincidence that Pentecostals have come from the ranks of the poor, uneducated and racial minorities. It is a foretaste of the coming kingdom where "the last shall be first, and the first shall be last." In these end times, God has poured out His spirit on a faithful few, as was done on the original day of Pentecost. Pentecostals will often look past the origins of their own movement to the original Pentecost. In fact, almost everything is seen in comparison to, or in light of this momentous event. Even though the life of Jesus is of
unquestionable importance (there would have been no Pentecost without it),
Pentecost is really the pivotal event of history, especially for this present Church Age. The new Pentecost is simply a restoring of the Holy Spirit power given to the world on the original Pentecost.

Dispensationalism

This present Church Age is often understood by Pentecostals as the Dispensation of the Holy Spirit. A dispensational view of history has been quite prevalent in Pentecostalism. Broadly construed, dispensationalism is a dividing of history based on the various covenant arrangements between God and humans. "The world is seen as a household administered by God in connection with several stages of revelation that mark off the different economies in the outworking of his total program...Most dispensationalists teach that the basis of salvation in every dispensation is the death of Christ and the requirement for salvation is always faith. It is the content of faith that changes." Therefore, Abraham had a different covenant with God regarding his salvation than Noah did in a previous, or than a Christian would in the present age. The dispensationalist system of John Darby (1800-1882) has been particularly important to the formation of the Pentecostal view. Darby was part of the Plymouth Brethren, a separatist movement of the Anglican Church, who developed a systematic, dispensational theory which divided history into seven

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dispensations. Darby’s system (or one very much like it\(^5\)) was popularized by C. I. Scofield in his reference Bible. It is interesting to note that:

> according to the Scofield Reference Bible, ‘A Dispensation is a period of time during which man is tested in respect to his obedience to some specific revelation of the will of God’ (p. 5). Each dispensation has its point of beginning, its test, and its termination in judgment due to humanity’s continual failure.\(^6\)

The day of Pentecost was the beginning point of the present dispensation; the apostasy of the church with its rejection of the Holy Spirit is indicative of failure; and now God is preparing to usher in the end of the age. The age will end with the physical return of Christ to set up a thousand year reign on earth. (Within a view that segments history so neatly, the fact that one of Parham’s student received the evidence of the Holy Spirit Baptism on the eve of the new century would hold special significance—even if this significance is only psychological or symbolic. If pushed to prove that the date was exactly 1900 years after the birth of Christ, most Pentecostals are not likely to argue for the inerrancy of the Gregorian calendar.)

Although Scofield has been important in popularizing a dispensational view among them, Pentecostals differ with Scofield in specifics. Instead of seven, many Pentecostals recognize only three dispensations, often corresponding to the Holy Trinity of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Although there is disagreement as to what periods precisely correspond to the dispensations of

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the Father and Son, Pentecostals do agree that we are now in the dispensation of the Holy Spirit. This can be seen in a famous and often repeated sermon by Aimee Semple McPherson, founder of the International Church of the Foursquare Gospel, fully entitled *Lost and Restored, or the Dispensation of the Holy Spirit from the Ascension of the Lord Jesus to his Coming Descension.*

More important than the disagreement on the number of dispensations, however, Pentecostals disagree with Scofield’s assertion that the miraculous gifts of the Spirit were no longer accessible. Accepting the cessationist arguments, such as those from Benjamin B. Warfield, and falling in line with Fundamentalism, Scofield asserted that the “sign gifts” (such as speaking in tongues, miracles, divine healing) were only needed to initially establish the Church and were confined to the apostolic age. Pentecostals have often simply glossed over this aspect of Scofield’s thought, since it was otherwise useful in organizing biblical history and providing a framework in which to fit prophetic (futuristic) scripture.

**Millennialism**

Scofield was also an important source of the millennial thought of Pentecostalism. Millennialism relates to Christ’s one thousand year reign of peace, described in Revelation 20:1-10, wherein Satan is bound and cast into a pit. Pentecostals are overwhelmingly premillennial, meaning that they believe that Christ will physically return before the millennium to establish his reign on earth. This view may be contrasted with the postmillennial view which foresaw the church gradually bringing about an era of peace and righteousness. This era would come through Christian preaching and teaching, and through the solving
of social problems. The era itself may or may not be of a thousand years, since it could be interpreted symbolically. Pentecostals are also futurist in their interpretation, expecting major biblical prophecies to be fulfilled in the imminent future. During the 17th and early 18th centuries, a different form of premillennialism was popular. This view, sometimes referred to as “historicist premillennialism,” saw the fulfillment of major prophecies as having already taken place, but believed that a literal kingdom of God to be established on earth was promised for the future. By the 19th century, the historicist view had waned and postmillennialism became prominent. This postmillennialism was challenged by the futurist premillennial view espoused by Darby. It was this type of premillennialism which Scofield popularized and to which Pentecostals generally adhere.⁷ Most Pentecostals are so inculcated by the futurists view that they probably would not even perceive the historicist view as being premillennialism.

The futurist aspect of Pentecostalism’s premillennialism is also particularly important to their view of history. Since major biblical prophecies are destined to be fulfilled, God must somehow be in control of human history. The broader flow of human history will happen as God has laid down in holy scripture. A particular individual may or may not be utilized by God to accomplish a preordained event, which allows for a measure of human freedom. However, God will inevitably find someone to work within God’s plan. This presents history as a sort of puzzle.

that could be figured out with a thorough knowledge of prophetic scripture and history. Historical and current events are then seen as either relevant to that puzzle (that is, a particular event is a fulfillment of prophecy) or is not (I guess we could call these events, "extraneous history"). Regardless of how the puzzle is assembled, the ending is always the same—Christ's physical return; the creation of a new heaven and new earth; and the millennial reign of peace.

Natural/Supernatural History

In addition to human history, God is seen as active in natural history as well. Nature does not operate totally independent of God. Instead, God supernaturally intervenes in natural history to further God’s purposes. Not surprisingly, Pentecostals have been some of the staunchest supporters of "creation science." In December of 1981, the now famous McLean v. Arkansas, "creation science," trial took place in Little Rock in which the following definition of creation science was used:

Creation-science means the scientific evidences for creation and inferences from those scientific evidences. Creation-science includes the scientific evidences and related inferences that indicate: (1) Sudden creation of the universe, energy, and life from nothing; (2) The insufficiency of mutation and natural selection in bringing about the development of all living kinds from a single organism; (3) Changes only within fixed limits of originally created kinds of plants and animals; (4) Separate ancestry for man and apes; (5) Explanation of the earth’s geology by catastrophism, including the occurrence of a worldwide flood; and (6) A relatively recent inception of the earth and living kinds.

Leaving aside the issue of the "scientific-ness" of creation science, let us look at what adherence to these ideas would mean for a view of natural history.

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Acceptance of a creation-science view flies in the face of some the currently cherished scientific theories, such as the evolution of species. Unlike the theories of evolution and uniformitarianism which assume vast amounts of geological time, creation science has a more compressed view of natural history. Furthermore, creation science sees certain cataclysmic changes punctuating natural history. Suddenness is an important characteristic of creation science, as opposed to the unrelenting steadiness of the currently-accepted views of nature. In many ways, this conflict between creation science and evolutionary theories seems a replay of the competition between catastrophism and uniformitarianist geological theories in the early 19th century. In fact, the debate may simply be a continuation of that 19th-century debate. It is no accident that catastrophism is listed as the sixth point in the above definition of creation science. The main issue in both the 19th-century and the present-day confrontations is whether God has a role in natural history or not. Whereas the modernist theories try to explain nature without reference to God, creationist theories give God a prominent role in the unfolding of natural history — a role as initial creator, occasional destroyer, and as the catalyst for, and director of, the development of life.

As with human history, Pentecostals see God as actively moving natural history in accordance with divine will. God has supernaturally intervened in natural history, most prominently through earth-destroying cataclysms like

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Noah’s flood. In fact, the premillennial beliefs of Pentecostals even involve an as-yet-unrealized cataclysm. Whereas God’s last catastrophic act was the destruction of the earth by water, God’s next catastrophic act will be the utter destruction of the earth by fire following the physical return of Christ. In the Pentecostal view, the destruction of this world is necessary for the fully-consummated, eternal kingdom of God to be established. The natural world will inevitably come to an end. In Pentecostal estimations, the world’s end is not a distant possibility but an ever-impending reality.

Salvation History

To Pentecostals, human history is synonymous with salvation history. It is the history of God’s plans and workings for the salvation of humankind. The entire movement of human history is placed within this soteriological framework. This reflects the fact that personal salvation is the most important value (and the highest priority) since the matter of salvation involves eternal consequences. God is acting in history to save those individuals who can be saved. The significance of the age in which a person lives lies in the covenant relationship that determines their salvation. Otherwise, historical events, as understood by scriptural prophecies, only serve to prove that God is in control.

However, salvation does not extend to nature. Humans are unique in that they are both natural and spiritual (or supernatural). Their spiritual aspect partakes of eternity, whereas nature is purely temporal. According to the apocalyptic view of premillennialism, this natural world will be utterly destroyed by God in due time. Although humans are working out their eternal salvation
within the natural world, human redemption is "salvation out of a doomed creation." This being the case, nature's designate role is that of servant to the spiritual and eternal. Interestingly, the only mentions of the natural environment in the Pentecostal Evangel and the Church of God Evangel, official magazines of the Assemblies of God and Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.) respectively, have been the occasional poem or prose piece wherein nature is seen as God's cathedral or a cause for meditation on spiritual truth. In an article entitled "Reflections Among the Redwoods," an Assemblies of God minister describes how the Sequoia trees of Kings Canyon National Park are like the unmovable truth of God:

I meditate in confidence on the splendor of this divine unfolding—this stately sequoia of the spiritual realm. I know that the incomparable word of my Creator-God cannot be overruled by so-called scientific explanation. Neither can it be dissolved by enactment of any court of fallible men. Such powers do not dispose of Him any more than they can dematerialize a giant redwood.

Nature's value is symbolic, pointing beyond itself to the supernatural. (This is not unlike a common Medieval Christian view of nature.) Nature is simply the backdrop for the human salvation drama. Eventually, the drama will end. Nature then will no longer be needed and will be destroyed. God has already issued a death sentence for nature. It is just a matter of time before the sentence will be executed.

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11 George Holmes, "Reflections Among the Redwoods," Pentecostal Evangel. 7 July 1985, p. 5.
Interpretations of Pentecostal Origins

Although Charles Parham is credited with developing the Pentecostal doctrine of initial evidence, his original conception was somewhat different from the version now received by Pentecostals. He had originally envisioned speaking in tongues as a supernatural tool for evangelizing the world before the Second Coming of Christ. Parham had spent the summer of 1900 visiting Holiness religious centers, thereby becoming acquainted with the Holiness movement's assertion that an outpouring of the Holy Spirit would be manifest in a "latter rain." Parham believed that Christ would soon return to establish a kingdom of a thousand years. Christ's return would be preceded by a worldwide revival, a last days' harvest of souls. Just as the Holy Lands (Palestinian) agricultural cycle involved an early-season harvest and then a late season or "latter rain" harvest, the salvation drama of human history had its "early rain" harvest with the initial establishment of Christianity and now awaited its "latter rain" harvest. Parham had also heard isolated reports of incidents of speaking in tongues within the Holiness movement. Upon returning to Topeka in September of 1900, Parham began his Bible college and directed his students to search the Bible for a definitive sign that evidenced the reception of the Holy Spirit power. The account of Pentecost found in the second chapter of the book of Acts was found to be the key. On the day of Pentecost, speaking in tongues accompanied the filling of the Christians by the Holy Spirit. Parham saw this as especially significant in light of his belief in the imminent worldwide revival effort. If the

12 Goff, *Fields White Unto Harvest*. 
Spirit-baptized Christian could supernaturally speak in a language unknown to that believer, as he understood the apostles to have done by the account of Pentecost, this would make that Christian an instant missionary. Parham had probably already formulated this understanding of the mission utility of speaking in tongues before starting his Bible college in Topeka.\textsuperscript{13} When he and his students actually spoke in tongues, however, this sealed his conviction, and he began to actively preach the formulation.

"The early Pentecostals did not consider speaking in tongues the message of their movement, but rather a means by which the message was confirmed, legitimized and propagated. The message was 'Jesus is coming soon.'"\textsuperscript{14} Parham and the early Pentecostals believed that Christ would return within their generation. However, this was problematic, since they also believed that Christ would not return until the fulfillment of the Great Commission, whereby the gospel is preached to all nations.\textsuperscript{15} To evangelize in all nations within a single generation would certainly require divine intervention. In Parham's reckoning, the Baptism of the Holy Ghost with its resulting tongues ability was just such intervention. Robert M. Anderson spells out the early Pentecostal reasoning thus:

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid., pp. 72-75.
\textsuperscript{14} Anderson, \textit{Vision of the Disinherited}, p. 90.
\textsuperscript{15} The Great Commission belief was often derived from an interpretation of Matthew 28:18-20; Acts 1:8; and Mark 16:15-16.
Only one sign of the end remained to be fulfilled: the global propagation of the gospel -- 'not the gospel of the churches, but the Gospel of Christ and the Apostles.' For this task God was restoring to the Church in these last days the true baptism in the Holy Spirit. Those who would take part in the last great mission of evangelism must receive this baptism to avoid wasting thousands of dollars, and often their lives in vain attempts to become conversant in almost impossible tongues which the Holy Ghost could so freely speak,' and to receive 'the power for witnessing in your own or any language of the world.'

Speaking in tongues was almost exclusively understood as xenolalia (also referred to as xenoglossia and xenoglossolalia) by those in the early Pentecostal movement. Xenolalia is speaking in an actual human language which is unknown to the speaker. Glossolalia may be considered a broader term, meaning simply speaking in a language unknown to the speaker. Although glossolalia may be understood as being of a human language, it often refers to the speaking of a "heavenly," "angelic" or "spiritual" language. The distinction between xenolalia and glossolalia becomes important in the history of the Pentecostal movement. The early Pentecostals held the expectation that the xenolalic speech would be a tremendous missionary tool. When it did not succeed on the mission field, Pentecostals recast the significance of tongues speech.

By 1909 many Pentecostals were becoming skeptical of missionary tongues, at least as a widespread phenomenon. Tongues--now primarily understood as glossolalia--served as proof of one's reception of Holy Spirit baptism and, with the assistance of a divinely inspired interpreter, carried a message of hope and assurance to individual congregations.

16 Anderson, Vision of the Disinherited, p. 84. [The last two quotes within this passage are from Parham's A Voice Crying in the Wilderness (p. 28); and Everlasting Gospel (p. 69), respectively.]

17 Goff, Fields White Unto Harvest, p. 16.
Deprivation and Escapism

Instead of a mighty tool for world evangelism, glossolalia became, among other things, a tool for the Pentecostal to cope with a poor station in life. Although this was a moderating of the role for tongues speech, its function was still very important for its Pentecostal practitioners. Historically, Pentecostal membership has drawn heavily from the ranks of the socially and economically deprived. Despite all of its racial and other diversity, Pentecostalism has consistently been a movement of the poor and working classes. Poverty and lack of education have often been the few things that Pentecostals have had in common. Recently this has been changing, especially in the United States where education and income levels of Pentecostals have risen with the general population's. Historically, however, deprivation has been a part of Pentecostals' circumstances. Therefore, that tongues speech (along with the other gifts or experiences of the Holy Spirit) could offer "hope and assurance" made it an important coping mechanism, so that the Pentecostal could deal with the genuinely hard times that often accompany poverty. Their initial hope for relief from the trials of this world resided in the quick return of Christ. With the missionary task taking longer than expected, Christ's return could no longer be expected as utterly immediate. Pentecostals had to adjust their expectations, and to cope with their situation in the meantime.

Once the belief in the Second Coming ceased to be an immediate individual expectation, it could no longer hold the central place in Pentecostal thought. Thus, speaking in tongues, which retained its immediacy, moved to the center of Pentecostal ideology. The former hope of immediate physical escape from their unhappy world through the
Second Coming was replaced by the reality of immediate psychic escape through ecstasy.¹⁸

Deliverance, which had previously been understood only as a pending historic event, was now also understood existentially. Hope was both pushed to the future and internalized. While still holding the belief that Christ would soon return, Pentecostals shifted the emphasis towards personal experience of the Holy Spirit, which they understood as an experience of the coming Kingdom of God in the present.

The themes in Pentecostal meetings—radical conversion, sanctification or holiness in daily living, divine healing from all sickness, [Holy Spirit baptism evidence by speaking in tongues,] and the premillennial rapture of the ‘Bride of Christ’—all contained a release within the individual’s religious psyche which portrayed a future release from the problems faced in the here and now. More importantly, they provided comfort in this life in dealing with disappointments and fears.¹⁹

After this theological shift (whereby the utter dominance of eschatology made room for the other more experiential elements) came institutionalization and the establishment of Pentecostal denominations. These denominations often resulted from rifts within the movement based on doctrinal differences. After several years of splintering, the Pentecostal denominations were set—and no new Pentecostal denomination has arisen since the early 1930's. However, despite differences, the themes mentioned in the above quote [with the exception of “sanctification”] remained common to all those denominations.


¹⁹ Goff, Fields White Unto Harvest, pp. 11-12.
Robert Anderson points out an obvious consequence of the Pentecostal shift from eschatological expectation to an institutionalized “ecstatic escapism.” It has promoted maintenance of the social status quo. History appears to support Anderson’s contention, considering that Pentecostals tended to remain impoverished, seldom improving their overall economic condition until after World War II, which coincided with a marked rise of income levels in the United States generally.

The Role of Miracles

The escapism, for which Anderson argues, may have its roots in the very sectarian split that gave birth to the Pentecostal movement. In his book, *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism*, Donald W. Dayton maintains that Pentecostalism emerged from a split within the American Holiness movement of the late 19th century between the postmillennialist and premillennialist camps. In the early half of the 1800's, the Holiness movement was overwhelmingly postmillennial. However, events in the latter part of the 19th century (i.e., the Civil War, immigration, industrialization and urbanization), caused much social dislocation and fostered a certain amount of disillusionment.

The postmillennial vision became unthinkable to many in this context. Instead of a world growing better and better, many saw only progressive decline and a world growing worse and worse. Indeed, the literary battles between the postmillennialists and the premillennialists often turned on an empirical issue: Was progress or decline the better description of the direction of the culture? Postmillennialists and their near cousins, the more liberal advocates of progress, appealed...to growing literacy, the
advance of missions, the growth of science and commerce, and so on. Premillennialists were those who began to have doubts about these dreams.\footnote{Donald W. Dayton, \textit{Theological Roots of Pentecostalism} (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, 1987), p. 161.}

Anderson emphasizes that it was the poor and socially dislocated who were most likely to feel dubious about social progress. By doing so, they made it a self-fulfilling prophecy (at least for themselves). They can be contrasted with the faction of the Holiness movement which rejected Pentecostalism and which became upwardly mobile, contends Anderson. However, "for the Pentecostal, success in achieving ecstatic religious experience became in large part a surrogate for success in the social struggle." But besides the personal struggle for success, Pentecostals also rejected the struggle to better society. Instead, they emphasized personal piety and conversion of individuals. "The Salvation of individuals was the true gospel; the salvation of society--the Social Gospel--was the false gospel."\footnote{Anderson, \textit{Vision of the Disinherited}, p. 229.}

Even though the socioeconomic status of Pentecostals has greatly improved, the attitude concerning social activism is still quite prevalent today. In an official statement from 1989, the Assemblies of God maintained that, "The Church will not finally change the world prior to the Second Coming. Righteous political and social actions are important, but the main thrust of the Kingdom is the spiritual transformation of individuals who make up the body of Christ."\footnote{\textit{The Kingdom of God as Described in Holy Scripture}, an official statement of the General Presbytery of the Assemblies of God, August 4, 1989 (Springfield, Mo.: Gospel}
Even more tellingly, as a reason for rejecting participation in ecumenical organizations, the Assemblies of God says, "We believe the emphases of the Ecumenical Movement to be at variance with what we hold to be biblical priorities, frequently displacing the urgency of individual salvation with social concerns."\(^{23}\)

Although Anderson’s emphasis on socioeconomic status to explain the origins of the movement is valid, it is simply not complete. For one thing, if socioeconomic factors explained its appeal in toto, then Pentecostalism should have simply dissolved in America when its demographics changed. Yet, the period of socioeconomic rise has coincided with Pentecostalism’s greatest period of growth. Besides sociological reasons, psychological and ideological factors surely played a role in the formation of the movement, and in its continued appeal.

Although early adherents in the United States came from diverse racial, regional, and religious backgrounds, nearly all came from one economic class, the working poor...Of this relatively large class of people, only those who had a predisposition ‘to understand religion as a matter of the heart in which miracle has a central place’...were attracted to the movement.\(^{24}\)

It explains why many aspiring but frustrated Americans, disillusioned by the failure of the Populist movement, and unable to effectively change their status in society, turned to a developing religious movement which promised tangible changes in the imminence of the Second Coming. What Anderson’s thesis fails to explain is why the movement affected some, but not all, Americans. That the movement drew its strength from

\(^{23}\) Bylaws of the General Council of the Assemblies of God, Revised August 8, 1995, St. Louis, Mo., Article IX, Section 11 (b).

\(^{24}\) Faupel, The Everlasting Gospel, pp. 17-18 [italics mine].
the poor and working classes is certain. But it is equally true that the movement was vehemently rejected by considerable numbers within those social groupings...a sociological explanation explains some but not all of the questions...[because] theological interpretations did matter and carried great weight...In addition, the matter of religious motivation cannot be reduced to simple sociological models. In the end, what seemed sheer nonsense to some became an abiding assurance to others...acceptable doctrine merged with sociological needs to create fierce devotion.25

A pivotal issue that demarcated those within and without a Pentecostal mind set, even for those within the poor and working classes, concerned the place of the miraculous. Those within the Pentecostal mind set believed that “miracle has a central place” in understanding Scripture and the world. Those who were closer to the modernist, scientific mind set rejected this as “sheer nonsense.”

The difference between the postmillennial and premillennial views (which Dayton argues was a crucial split in the Holiness movement for the development of Pentecostalism) may serve as a good example to understand this divergence of views. 19th-century Postmillennialists held views similar to the liberal progressives and tried to inform their theology with insights from the modernist, scientific outlook.

Naturalistic explanations of historical development which were embodied in Darwinism and higher criticism led to conclusions that threatened the very foundations of Christian belief. The dominant Protestant response was to ‘sanctify’ the resultant secularization with Christian symbolism. Postmillennialism provided the framework on which this reformulation could be constructed. Progress in history was retained, but God’s working in history was now perceived as coming primarily through natural rather than supernatural means. Scientific investigation and education were the principal tools to be employed in future development...Those who abandoned the postmillennial view of history did so in part as an attempt to shore up the foundation for the traditional [supernatural] understanding of the Christian faith and the accuracy of the biblical account upon which

25 Goff, Fields White Unto Harvest, pp. 12-13 [italics mine].
that belief had been grounded...They sought to show that the "facts" of Scripture correlated with the "facts" of history and the natural order.\textsuperscript{26} Pentecostals were part of the conservative concern about the secularization of the culture, which they understood as a critical assault on the supernatural understanding of Christianity. This "secular" assault was equated to a moral decline of the culture.\textsuperscript{27} Fundamentalists also defended a supernatural interpretation of Scripture. However, the Fundamentalist defend miracles as a historic fact, whereas Pentecostals insisted that miracles are a contemporary possibility. This placed Pentecostals within a worldview that was in nearly diametric opposition to the dominant scientific worldview. This still appears the case today. Pentecostals operate from what Margaret Poloma argues is a "sacred weltanschauung" into which "the instrumental rational reasoning process so characteristic of science and bureaucracy are absorbed." She goes on to argue that Pentecostalism's recent growth is not in spite of, but because of its supernatural emphasis as a "protest against modernity."\textsuperscript{28} As such, it would surely have more appeal to those individuals of a particular psychological make up—not just to those in impoverished social conditions, but to those with a "predisposition to understand religion as a matter of the heart in which miracle has a central place."

\textsuperscript{26} Faupel, The Everlasting Gospel, p. 111. [emphasis original]

\textsuperscript{27} Ibid., p. 113.

\textsuperscript{28} Margaret M. Poloma, \textit{The Assemblies of God at the Crossroads: Charisma and Institutional Dilemmas} (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1989.)
The Importance of Roots

In this preceding section, I have emphasized origins in defining classical Pentecostalism. I believe this is appropriate for several reasons. Many of the original issues—such as emphasis on personal experience of the Holy Spirit; concern about secularization; rejection of social activism; and the supernatural worldview as an genuine alternative to the modernist worldview—remain pertinent for Pentecostal identity.

What has changed, however, is the socioeconomic standing of Pentecostals and, consequently, how they have adapted those issues to their new position in the world. According to many observers within and without Pentecostalism, they have not adapted well. Because of their rising affluence, the lives of many Pentecostals have become less of a hardship. Therefore, their personal experiences of the Holy Spirit, which previously helped them cope with genuine hardships, now appear more like self-indulgence. “Surely there are those in the Pentecostal/Charismatic ranks who have felt...deep conviction. Yet, much of what goes on today in the Charismatic movement in the name of ‘spirituality’ seems to be weighted on the side of fun and frivolity.”

John MacArthur’s criticism of Charismatic practices is intended for contemporary Pentecostals as well. Also, the Pentecostal concern for secularization has taken a similar path. While still seeking to remain separate, Pentecostals have, in effect, redefined holiness. Instead of being “in the world, but not of the world,”

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they have become “of the world, but not in it.” Edith Blumhofer, in her study focused on the Assemblies of God, asserts that:

While Assemblies of God (like other Pentecostals and evangelicals) often formally object to secular popular culture, they have participated enthusiastically in the creation of a parallel popular culture that offers Christian variations on everything from rock bands and night clubs to soap operas, talk shows, sex manuals, and exercise videos.  

In recent years, the Assemblies of God clearly included some who were moving from cultural alienation to endorsing Christian alternatives, a trend accelerated by prominent televangelists. They tended to ‘sanitize’ the secular popular culture by adding ‘Jesus language,’...Instead of perceiving the church as an alternative to the popular culture, they regarded it as a forum for Christian forms of the secular.

Blumhofer concludes that, “earlier hopes to make the church an alternative to the methods and message of the popular culture fade as the parallel Christian popular culture is embraced.” In the creation of the parallel popular culture, Pentecostals have redefined holiness as separateness. For the most part, they do not offer an alternative to the values of popular American culture, but only offer an alternate route to realize those values.

From an ecological viewpoint, this is unfortunate. As understood earlier in the Pentecostal movement, holiness involved a simpler lifestyle, one not valuing conspicuous consumption. Although not ecologically motivated, this earlier holiness lifestyle resulted in its adherents being more environmentally responsible. Such simpler lifestyles have been promoted by some

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31 Ibid., p. 255.

32 Ibid., p. 8.
environmentally-concerned Christians. However, by adopting American
middle-class values, Pentecostals instead pursue a consumer lifestyle—a lifestyle
which exacerbates environmental problems. In the ecological view, the only
difference between Pentecostals and other Americans is that Pentecostals may
purchase more “Christian” consumer goods. The result for the environment,
however, is obviously the same, regardless of whether the goods are Christian or
not.

Ironically, in accommodating itself to American middle-class values,
Pentecostalism has also garnered more adherents than ever. But many
Pentecostals are now wondering if they have lost their way in the midst of their
popularity.

All in all, then, Pentecostalism has paid a steep price for moving uptown.
Its uncritical identification with the values of middle America represents a
major loss of prophetic vision. In 1976, church historian Martin E. Marty
perceptively noted that in times past Pentecostalism “was “true” because it
was small and pure, but now it is “true” because so many are drawn to
it.”

In light of the recent directions that Pentecostalism has gone, it is little wonder
that the first years of the movement are now described as its heart and not
merely its infancy, and that a restoration movement within this restorationist


CHAPTER III

THEOLOGY & DOCTRINE

Non-Systematic Nature of Pentecostal Theology

I earlier stated that Pentecostalism is first and foremost experiential religion. Not surprisingly then, the major emphases of the movement have not been on systematic theology and doctrines. Instead, the emphasis has been on the Pentecostal experience with the Holy Spirit. "To be Pentecostal primarily presupposes that one partakes of the common Pentecostal experience, and only secondarily presupposes commitment to a common 'confession' of doctrine."¹ Yet, although a secondary commitment, doctrine is still quite important to Pentecostals. This is why it is not incorrect for both of the following statements to be considered accurate:

First, most Pentecostals, especially the classical groups, are not creedal and theological movements. Experiences with God provide a basis for their faith. They produce statements of faith that outline basic doctrinal commitments, but do not tool out comprehensive creeds or systematic theologies. This is intentional; Pentecostals believe that tight creeds can be divisive and that they can unduly restrict the understanding and experience of God...They also believe that systematic theology can be

comprehended intellectually but not lived out experientially, a situation Pentecostals abhor.²

Contrary to stereotype, Pentecostals are deadly serious about correct doctrine. They habitually define themselves in doctrinal terms, and some of the deepest wounds they have inflicted upon themselves have come from brawls over technicalities of belief.³

This is not to say, however, that systematic treatments of Pentecostal theology have never been attempted. Indeed, there have been such Pentecostal and Charismatic efforts.⁴ Attempts at systematic theology have received mixed responses from Pentecostals. Some Pentecostals have assumed that a systematic treatment of Pentecostal theology is inevitable and desirable, as long as it is properly constructed so as to be “worthy of the name Pentecostal.”⁵ Others, however, have dismissed even the attempt at systematic theology as being merely a traditional approach to theology foisted upon non-traditionalist Pentecostal spirituality.⁶ At very least, such efforts seem contrary to the general orientation of Pentecostalism because its theology has historically been populist or “folk” theology. Such folk theology is seldom intended to be systematic or


academic. Instead, it is "preached" theology which is usually meant to be devotional, motivational, and inspirational. This preached theology relies more on a "common sense" interpretation of Scripture than on any philosophic or scholarly approaches. With the de-emphasis on systematized thought and a greater emphasis on scriptural interpretation, hermeneutics becomes very important to Pentecostal theology (so important that it merits a section of its own). In fact, a clear delineation of a distinctively Pentecostal hermeneutic has been the objective of several recent articles in the two most important academic journals dedicated to Pentecostal study, Journal of Pentecostal Theology and Pneuma: The Journal of the Society for Pentecostal Studies.

Common Beliefs

Also, in a situation where experience, non-systematic beliefs, and hermeneutics are all emphasized, a plurality of thought seems inevitable—and this has been the case within Pentecostalism. This does not mean, however, that there are no common doctrinal stances among Pentecostals. Doctrinally, Pentecostals are similar to Fundamentalists, in that they accept the five fundamentals: 1) the verbal inspiration and infallibility of Scripture; 2) the deity and virgin birth of Jesus Christ; 3) substitutionary atonement of Jesus' physical death; 4) the physical resurrection of Christ; and 5) Christ's bodily return to earth. Despite doctrinal similarity, Pentecostals have generally tried to distinguish themselves from Fundamentalists, preferring to be viewed as something other

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than just "Fundamentalism with a difference." Although accepting all five fundamentals, Pentecostals have sought to preach the "Full Gospel," which consists of five doctrinal themes (three of which differ with fundamentalist doctrine): 1) justification by faith in Christ; 2) sanctification as a second definite work of grace; 3) divine healing of the body through the atonement; 4) the Second Coming of Christ; and 5) the baptism in the Holy Spirit initially evidenced by speaking in tongues. The second of these themes—sanctification as a second work of grace—became a doctrinal issue which led to the creation of the Assemblies of God denomination, which rejected the view that it is distinct from, and subsequent to, justification. Therefore, of the five themes, only four remain as common throughout Pentecostalism. Beyond these four traditional themes, I will also discuss the Pentecostal understanding of "spiritual warfare" and the "Kingdom of God," both of which contribute to their lack of concern for the environment.

**Justification**

The Pentecostal understanding of justification is taken from the Reformed tradition. Justification is the pardoning of a person's sins by that person's faith in the propitiatory work of Christ's death on the cross. Justification is the same as "salvation" and comes only through faith, not through any good deeds.

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6 Edith L. Blumhofer, *Restoring the Faith*, pp. 5-6. Assemblies of God maintained closer association with fundamentalists than did other classical Pentecostals.

Justification is undeserved and comes about only because of the grace of God
("For by grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own
doing; it is the gift of God— not the result of works, so that no one may boast"). Taking a cue from the Wesleyan tradition, justification is often linked to a
conversion experience that may be filled with emotion. This conversion or "new
birth" experience is also considered an experience of the Holy Spirit. This can
be seen in the subtle distinction often made between baptism of the Holy Spirit
and baptism in the Holy Spirit. "For while every Christian, on becoming a
Christian, has been baptized of or by the Spirit-as-agent (I Cor. 12:13a),
Pentecostals believe that not every Christian has yet been baptized by Christ-as-
agent in or with the Spirit-as-element (Mark 1:8 par.; I Cor. 12:13b). That is,
Pentecostals believe that the Spirit has baptized every believer into Christ
(conversion), but that Christ has not yet baptized every believer into the Spirit
(Pentecost)."

Healing

Divine healing has been a prominent feature throughout the lifetime of the
Pentecostal movement. Theologically, it is an extension of the doctrine of
atonement and is interpreted from I Peter 2:24. As faith in Christ offers


11 Frederick D. Bruner, A Theology of the Holy Spirit: The Pentecostal Experience and
p. 60.

12 Ibid., pp. 140-142.

13 "He himself bore our sins in his body on the cross, so that, free from sins, we might
live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed." (New Revised Standard
movement is being called for.

In crucial respects, the Pentecostal movement is less mature today than it was in the early years. Modern Pentecostals do not need to romanticize their past in order to learn from it. The first generation resisted the blandishments of secular society in order to preach a gospel that challenged the culture in more than superficial ways. Modern Pentecostals might recover that vision. They might discover, as church historian George Marsden has put it, that grace is not cheap and forgiveness is more than good manners. They might discover that in the beginning, the movement survived not in spite of the fact that it was out of step with the times, but precisely because it was.  

If it is to survive as a distinct movement and not simply be swallowed into evangelicalism, Pentecostalism must refashion an understanding of its own origins. As Pentecostalism approaches crossroads in the continual determination of its identity, "it must look to its origins as a source for theological and spiritual renewal."  

To whatever direction Pentecostalism heads, an understanding of its origins will inevitably play an important role in justifying that direction.

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36 Grant Wacker, "Wild Theories and Mad Excitement," p. 28.

salvation, so too it offers healing—divine, miraculous healing. At times, the linking of faith to healing made the use of medicine and doctors an issue among some Pentecostals. If one did seek medical attention, this could be interpreted as a lack of faith. A similar situation exists in Christian Science, a religious movement that also has its roots in 19th-century America and that, traditionally, has rejected the use of modern medical science. However, most Pentecostals have come to embrace the use of modern medicine, at least as a counterpart to divine healing. This can be seen clearly in that Oral Roberts, who gained fame as a Pentecostal healing-evangelist, opened a hospital and medical school as part of his ministry. Even more than showing God's concern for people's physical well being, divine healing is considered an important display of God's power. It is another indicator of the restoration of apostolic power and is important as one of the "signs and wonders" useful for evangelism. Also, it is sometimes linked to spiritual warfare and exorcism.

The healing ministry of the church is based on the apostolic commission given to the disciples during Jesus' lifetime: 'He called his twelve disciples to him and gave them authority to drive out unclean spirits and to cure every disease and every sickness... As you go, preach, saying: "The kingdom of heaven has come." Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse lepers, cast out demons...’ (Matt. 10:1, 7-8; Mark 6:7-12; Luke 9:1-6). It is obvious, then, that healing and deliverance from demonic power are integral parts of evangelization...As in the life of Jesus, healing and teaching are considered aspects of one activity, namely, preaching the gospel.\(^{14}\)

The main reason for divine healing is not physical well being—although that is a reason—but is to display the supernatural, miraculous power of God.

Second Coming

The premillennial belief of Pentecostals has already been discussed. It should be noted that Pentecostals have been overwhelmingly premillennial. The only real controversy has been over when the “rapture of the Church” will occur. Pentecostals believe that a seven-year Great Tribulation will precede the return of Christ to set up his millennial kingdom. Pre-tribulationists believe that Christ will supernaturally remove, or “rapture,” the Church before the period of tribulation. On the other hand, post-tribulationists believe that the Church will remain on earth through the Great Tribulation. There is even a position which argues for a mid-tribulation rapture. In this debate, most Pentecostals have adhered to the pre-tribulationist view, which has allowed them “on the one hand to pessimistically preach impending doom with ‘wars and rumors of wars’ as a sign of the end, while on the other hand optimistically offering ‘the blessed hope’ of the rapture of the church.”

Although an intensive period of disasters, wars and pestilence is inevitable, Christians will be miraculously rescued before it becomes unbearable.

Spirit Baptism Initially Evidenced By Tongues

The initial evidence belief would be important if only because it is the one distinctly Pentecostal doctrine. Beyond that, however, it is important because

it clearly shows what is important in Pentecostal estimations. Speaking in
 tongues is important as initial physical evidence simply because of the
importance of what it is supposed to evidence, the baptism of the Holy Spirit. It
is really the power that comes with the "baptism" that is important. Tongues then
may be an "initiation event" signaling that the baptism has occurred, but it is
really the baptism that is desired. Subsequent instances of tongues speech (i.e.,
gift of tongues, praying in tongues) primarily serve to make better use of the
power that comes with Spirit baptism. This point is made by Donald Johns in his
exegesis of Luke and Acts:

"Speaking in tongues is essentially one kind of experience, produced by a
certain kind of contact with the divine Spirit. The first time this kind of
contact occurs is the initiatory event of being baptized in the Spirit, but the
same kind of inspired speech can be the result of subsequent contacts as
well...Luke is concerned with believers being 'baptized' in the Spirit,
initiated into powerful charismatic service, but Luke is even more
concerned with the service itself. Subsequent 'fillings' are to direct and
empower believers to serve in specific settings to spread the gospel."

Being baptized with the Holy Spirit means "receiving power from on high." It is
the initiation into the supernatural, a foretaste of Christ's future kingdom.

The 'partakers of the Holy Ghost' have tasted the powers of the world to
come. They have been brought into contact with a power that belongs to
the next age, but it is available to them in this age. In this way, the
baptism of the Holy Spirit is intended to be the gateway into the
supernatural. It is not a goal; it is a gateway. It is intended by God that

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16 Donald A. Johns, "Some New Directions in the Hermeneutics of Classical
Pentecostalism's Doctrine of Initial Evidence," in ed. Gary B. McGee, Initial Evidence:
Historical and Biblical Perspectives on the Pentecostal Doctrine of Spirit Baptism
thereafter the Spirit-baptized believer should walk in the supernatural. In fact, if I may put it this way, the supernatural should become natural.\textsuperscript{17}

The author of the above quote goes on to say that the Spirit baptism empowers the believer for witnessing, prayer, teaching (and understanding Scripture), exalting Christ, guidance, health, and unity—all of which are understood to be done supernaturally.\textsuperscript{18} (The linking of Spirit baptism to empowerment was an important issue even for the original formation of Pentecostalism. Dayton asserts that the Holiness movement’s shift from linking Spirit baptism to sanctification (Wesleyan perfectionism) to linking Spirit baptism to empowerment for service was crucial for the shift from post-millennialism to pre-millennialism.\textsuperscript{19} Therefore, the initial experience of speaking in tongues is important because it signifies that the believer’s eyes have been opened to the supernatural. The believer has crossed over from the natural mind to the spiritual mind.\textsuperscript{20}

Spiritual Warfare

Notions of “spiritual warfare” have existed throughout the history of the Pentecostal, although their prominence has waxed and waned at various times.

\begin{footnotes}
\item[17] Derek Prince, \textit{Baptism in the Holy Spirit} (Springdale, Penn: Whitaker House, 1995), p. 52. Although Derek Prince now has an independent ministry, he was formerly a Pentecostal minister and a missionary for the Pentecostal Assemblies of Canada; and this quote expresses well the generally accepted Pentecostal conception of Spirit baptism.
\item[18] Ibid., pp. 54-74.
\item[20] “But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.” I Cor. 2: 14, King James Version.
\end{footnotes}
Although usually not dominant, "spiritual warfare" has been a prevalent theme (and indeed has been included by some prominent interpreters as an important and distinctive Pentecostal doctrine.\textsuperscript{21} ) Early in the movement, Pentecostals, often being relatively powerless themselves, were probably drawn to the language of power (e.g., "power over Satan in Jesus' name").\textsuperscript{22} However, early Pentecostals did not make demonology a central concern. The influence of William Branham, in the late 1940's and 1950's, may have made the ideas of spiritual warfare more central to Pentecostal thought. Branham was a Pentecostal healing-revivalist who reported face-to-face encounters with angels and demons, and who taught that demonic spirits were the root of sin and sickness. Healing then was equated to demon exorcism.\textsuperscript{23} More recently, some similarities to Branham can be seen in the ministry of another healing-revivalist, Oral Roberts. Besides individual ministers, Pentecostal denominations have also addressed supernatural matters such as demonic possession (or "demonizing"). As recently as 1972, the Assemblies of God approved an official statement affirming the existence of demon possession, but warning against "unscriptural overemphasis on demonology."\textsuperscript{24} Many Pentecostals have

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\textsuperscript{21} Anderson, "Pentecostals Believe In More Than Tongues," pp. 62-63. \\
\textsuperscript{22} Cecil M. Robeck, Jr., "Sign, Wonders, Warfare, and Witness," \textit{Pneuma} 13 (Spring 1991) pp. 1-5. \\
\textsuperscript{23} C. Douglas Weaver, \textit{The Healer-Prophet, William Marrion Branham: A Study of the Prophetic in American Pentecostalism} (Macon, Ga: Mercer University Press, 1987), pp. 61-65. \\
\end{flushright}
apparently not heeded such warnings, considering that ideas about spiritual warfare and demonology have become immensely popular, due in no small part to some popular novels. "Frank Peretti's novel, This Present Darkness, has become known as the 'bible' for an increasing number drawn not only from classic Pentecostal and charismatic circles but from what has become known as the Third Wave and even other 'non-aligned' Evangelical Christians who view the world through the lens of spiritual warfare."\(^{25}\) Although their faithfulness to biblical views is suspect, Peretti's novels do portray a moral and cosmic dualism that many Pentecostals have eagerly embraced. In the novels, actual angels and demons struggle to gain advantage one over the other. Humans in this world are the focal points of that battle, influencing it for the good through prayer and for the worse by yielding to demonic power. Exorcism and prayer are the two great weapons that Christians wield in this warfare. Peretti's stories "though clearly fictitious on the historical level, [have] been taken as 'true' or 'real' on a theological level in many circles in the church today...The novel accurately depicts the nature and means of spiritual warfare as perceived by a number of Christians today."\(^{26}\) Rudolph Bultmann asserted that the good news in the New Testament (kerygma) had been wedded to a mythological, pre-scientific worldview that modern persons could no longer accept. The mythical worldview was three-tiered with heaven above, earth in the center, and hell below. God

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\(^{26}\) Ibid., p. 57.
and the angels resided in heaven above; and the demons in hell below. Both the
divine and the demonic intervened supernaturally into the center, into the natural
world. This was the mythical worldview that Bultmann believed that modern
persons could not accept because of the advent of the scientific worldview. He
believed that the task of the theologian was to untangle the gospel from the New
Testament worldview (to "demythologize" the gospel) and make it relevant to the
present age. In many ways, Pentecostals have flatly rejected Bultmann’s ideas
and have instead sought to "re-mythologize" the gospel, so to speak. A
supernatural worldview, not unlike the one described by Bultmann as
unacceptable to modern persons, has been accepted by many Pentecostals.27

Kingdom of God

Pentecostals see the Kingdom of God as both a future and a present
reality. It will be fully consummated when Christ returns but does break into the
present reality through the focal point of the individual believer. “The Kingdom
comes in a measure whenever a person receives Christ as Savior, is healed or
delivered, or is touched in any way by the divine.”28 Although it does break into
the present, Pentecostals have tended to emphasize the future aspect of the
Kingdom. “The future consummation of the kingdom of God—the time when all

27 Guelich contends, however, that Peretti’s is not a three-tiered, but a two-tiered
(strongly dualistic) worldview where the invisible, supernatural level penetrates into the
human level. Ibid., p. 53.

28 “The Kingdom of God As Described in Holy Scripture,” official statement by the
General Presbytery of the Assemblies of God, adopted August 4, 1989 (Springfield, Mo:
evil and rebellion will be eliminated—is the fervent hope of the Christian."\textsuperscript{29}

Pentecostals often understand the Kingdom of God as "an idealized state of future ahistorical bliss"\textsuperscript{30} which differs little from their idea of heaven. The real Kingdom of God is spiritual and lies in the future, although it occasionally breaks into the present world via individual believers. The whole of this present creation is not being transformed into the Kingdom of God. Only the lives of individual believers can be transformed by participation in the spiritual Kingdom of God now.

\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.

CHAPTER IV

SCRIPTURAL INTERPRETATION

The Present Hermeneutical Debate

Hermeneutics has become a central focus of Pentecostal scholarship. In 1993, Murray Dempster, editor of the journal *Pneuma*, stated that, "In the annual meetings of the Society for Pentecostal Studies over the last decade, no topic has been investigated with greater frequency or intensity than the topic of hermeneutics."\(^1\) The interest in hermeneutics has not waned, judging from the continual flow of articles on the topic. Recently, a Pentecostal scholar has even asserted that "the real issue in Pentecostalism has become hermeneutics."\(^2\)

One reason for the interest is that the clear articulation of Pentecostal hermeneutics is seen by scholars as crucial to the continued growth and effectiveness of Pentecostalism into the 21st century. One Pentecostal scholar expresses these sentiments when saying: "Not only is a Pentecostal hermeneutic a vital necessity if we are to have an effective ministry to our 'modern' world, it is inescapable. A Pentecostal hermeneutic will either be a well articulated, canonically based expression of normative Christianity, or the


twentieth century Pentecostal movements will wither after the deaths of their charismatic leaders and become...religious oddities."³ In the early part of its history, Pentecostalism was rejected by both secular culture and mainline Christian denominations. To a large extent, Pentecostals existed in isolation and, consequently, had little need to justify or articulate their use of Scripture. The recent rise in numbers and affluence levels of Pentecostals (and the legitimizing effect of the mainly middle-class Charismatic movement which has Pentecostal roots) has broken the isolation and has put Pentecostals in a position of power—a position which entails an opportunity to change the face of the Christian religion but which also invites closer scrutiny from outside its ranks. Pentecostals have often found themselves unable to adequately respond to outside critiques, since they lacked the *lingua franca* of an academic, theological vocabulary. "One of the real problems which has faced the Pentecostal has been the anomaly between his love for Scripture as a prime witness to the person of Jesus and his work of salvation, and his apparent lack of ability to comprehend Scripture in terms of those categories which appear to predominate in non-Pentecostal theological circles, whether conservative or liberal."⁴ In order to widen their sphere of influence and to legitimate themselves in the face of increased scrutiny, Pentecostals have begun to overcome some of their previous distaste for academic discussion. They have begun to see a need for quality

³ Mark D. McLean, "Toward a Pentecostal Hermeneutic," *Pneuma* 6 (Fall 1984), p. 36.

scholarship which will incorporate historical-critical and literary genre insights into their Scriptural interpretation. Academic journals, such as *Pneuma, Paraclete* and the *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*, have provided a forum for such quality Pentecostal scholarship. Within this new academic context, some Pentecostals see an opportunity to more clearly delineate (or possibly even redefine) Pentecostal identity. This is another reason that the scholarly debate has focused on hermeneutics, which inevitably involves discussion of what is essential to Pentecostal identity. “What is at stake in the present hermeneutical debate is...Pentecostal identity.”

Although not unanimous, most scholars agree that what are not essential to the Pentecostal identity are doctrinal statements. “Doctrines may be challenged and even overturned without striking at the very heart of Pentecostal faith because the central emphasis of Pentecostalism is not a teaching which must be believed or a proof which can be deduced and defended against all challenges, but a God who must be reckoned with in direct encounter.”

In other words, it is the spirituality of Pentecostalism which emphasizes a supernatural experience of God that is distinctively Pentecostal. What is essential to Pentecostalism is the assertion that “the spiritual and extraordinary supernatural experiences of the biblical characters are possible

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[and desirable] for contemporary believers." Therefore, a Pentecostal yet scholarly hermeneutic would be one that is "extrapolated from the spiritual ethos of classical Pentecostalism" but that also incorporates historical-critical and literary genre research. At present, no consensus has emerged as to the specifics of such a hermeneutic. However, Pentecostal scholars have consistently exhibited a "desire to move away from a hermeneutical system that is heavily slanted toward rationalism which tends to downplay experience [and] the role of the Holy Spirit." It should be noted that, even though the emphasis on Pentecostal spirituality (over against doctrinalism) is becoming accepted among scholars, many denominational leaders and laypersons still "habitually define themselves in doctrinal terms." In fact, the leadership of one Pentecostal denomination, the Assemblies of God, has begun to stress doctrinal conformity, fearing a decline of adherence by its more educated seminarians and ministers.

Borrowed Hermeneutics

Although scholars are in the midst of establishing a distinctive hermeneutic that can serve Pentecostalism in the 21st century, it is not as if

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Pentecostals are interpreting Scripture with no hermeneutic method. As with their adoption of the dispensational theological framework, some Pentecostals have simply adapted Fundamentalist and Evangelical hermeneutical approaches which already have an academic foundation. Although borrowing from these hermeneutics provides a basis for academic respectability, it also creates a problem which is unacceptable to many Pentecostals, namely the wedding of Pentecostal hermeneutics to a rationalist epistemology.

With its strong commitment to a critical-historical exegesis, traditional hermeneutics has opted for an epistemology that either abdicated faith for reason, or conversely sought to validate faith epistemologically by a category of special pleading in the interests of propositional theology...a strict adherence to traditional evangelical/fundamentalist hermeneutical principles leads to a position which, in its most positive forms, suggests the distinctives of the twentieth century Pentecostal movement are perhaps nice, but not necessary; important but not vital to the life of the Church in the twentieth century. In its more negative forms, it leads to a total rejection of Pentecostal phenomena.

In Pentecostal estimations, traditional hermeneutics too heavily favor reason at the expense of pneumatic and experiential emphases. Pentecostals wish to make a prominent place in their hermeneutics for the experience of the individual (within a community of faith) and the guidance of the Holy Spirit. The use of traditional hermeneutics does not satisfy many Pentecostals, leading them back to the academic “identity” struggle discussed above.

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11 Mathew S. Clark, What is Distinctive, pp. 25-27.
The Common-Sense Hermeneutic

Although the academic debate could entail profound consequences for the Pentecostalism of the 21st century, it presently is not a matter of much concern for the general Pentecostal populace, who have traditionally seen little use for academia in matters of religion. Although the scholarly dialogue may be needed to make Pentecostalism culturally relevant in the “modern” world, it is not needed to make it personally relevant for Pentecostal believers. Consequently, many Pentecostals will continue to interpret Scripture by the same common-sense or “pragmatic” hermeneutic that has been used since the inception of the movement. This approach places “little or no significance upon the historical context of Scripture nor would it be concerned with the author’s original intent (the historical-critical method).” Therefore, the “operative principle of interpretation [is] the conviction that exegesis is best when it is as rigidly literal as credibility can stand.” Thus, Pentecostals may appreciate little real historical and cultural distance between themselves and the text. “Biblical statements [tend to be] understood at face value with no appreciation for the ancient context in which they were delivered.” Similarly, Pentecostals can be said to conflate

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original inspiration and present-day illumination of Scripture by the Holy Spirit in a way comparable to the Wesleyan notion of "double inspiration--an inspiration active in the formation of the Bible and an inspiration active when Scripture is read today"\textsuperscript{18} (for the same Holy Spirit is understood as operating in both instances). Instead of apprehending the text rationally, Pentecostals seek to "re-experience" the text.\textsuperscript{19} A clear example of this can be seen in the paradigmatic application of the Lukan account of Pentecost.

We believe that the experiences of the one hundred and twenty in Acts 2:4 - 'And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance' - is the Scriptural pattern for believers of the whole church age.\textsuperscript{20}

The second chapter of Acts is clearly the pivotal passage for Pentecostals, who seek to replicate the tongues experience in their present lives. Pentecostals, in fact, seek to replicate all the miraculous acts of the apostles--healing, miracles, and other "signs and wonders"--described in the remainder of Acts and elsewhere in the New Testament. But, again, it is the narrative account of Pentecost that is truly central to Pentecostal identity. "Through that kaleidoscope of variety which characterized Pentecostalism locally, nationally, and even


\textsuperscript{19} Archer, "Pentecostal Hermeneutics," p. 66.

\textsuperscript{20} Carl Brumback, "What Meaneth This?" \textit{A Pentecostal Answer to a Pentecostal Question} (Springfield, MO: Gospel Publishing House, 1947), p. 192; quoted in Stronstad, \textit{Spirit, Scripture & Theology}, p. 15. Stronstad claims to have selected this quote "at random as an exemplar of Pentecostal hermeneutics. This affirmation of Pentecostal hermeneutics, however, could have been written in any decade of the Movement's history, or by anyone within the Movement." p. 16.
internationally one aspect stood constant—the pragmatic hermeneutics which looked to Pentecost as the pattern for contemporary experience."\(^{21}\)

That Pentecostals understand this hermeneutic as common sense betrays the fact that their presuppositions are not put to analysis. "This pragmatic Pentecost-as-pattern hermeneutic is simply assumed to be self-evident and self-authenticating."\(^{22}\) Yet, self-evident common sense is actually loaded with assumptions—the common sense of Pentecostals being no exception.\(^{23}\) It is not disparaging to say that the Pentecostal hermeneutic begins with presuppositions (although a separate argument could possibly be made against particular presuppositions). Stronstad is quite correct when he asserts that "every interpreter, Pentecostal and non-Pentecostal alike, brings both cognitive and experiential presuppositions to his interpretation of the text."\(^{24}\) It may be said that some Reformed theologians presuppose the adequacy of reason for interpreting Scripture, while some Evangelicals assume that an experience of saving faith may also be needed to adequately interpret Scripture. The presupposition which guides Pentecostal scriptural interpretation is what was earlier cited as essential to Pentecostalism—"the spiritual and extraordinary

\(^{21}\) Stronstad, *Spirit, Scripture & Theology*, p. 15.

\(^{22}\) Ibid., p. 17.

\(^{23}\) Karl Popper makes a similar point about common sense, although he sees common sense as assumptions that should be put into a falsification process and that should not exist unquestioned. *Objective Knowledge: An Evolutionary Approach* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972; revised, Clarendon Press, 1979), pp. 32-105.

\(^{24}\) Stronstad, *Spirit, Scripture & Theology*, p. 65.
supernatural experiences of the biblical characters are possible [and desirable] for contemporary believers.” Once assumed, the charismatic experience of the Pentecostal then verifies that this presupposition is true; and, in a circular fashion, the presupposition serves to interpret the experience as being the same as that of the apostles and other biblical characters. For the most part, this circularity goes unnoticed by the Pentecostal interpreter who understands it simply as being common sense.

Experience Versus Doctrine

Because of the role of experience in the hermeneutic process and because of the emphasis on Scripture, doctrine should be a secondary consideration (assuming that we do not consider the hermeneutic presupposition itself a doctrine). Therefore, doctrines accepted by Pentecostals, especially the distinctive Pentecostal doctrine of tongues speaking as an initial evidence of Holy Spirit baptism, may be understood as an outgrowth or merely descriptive of the Pentecostal experience.

For Pentecostals, doctrine is not essentially generative in function, but rather descriptive. A generative understanding of the way in which doctrine is utilized could, for example, begin with the statement the Bible is inspired by God and from that deduce that it is, therefore, inerrant. But Pentecostals, on the other hand, utilize doctrine to describe and verbalize lived experience. Formal doctrinal statements, which are deductive in nature, are, among Pentecostals, an attempt to organize and understand described experience and do not attempt to serve as proofs for those things which lie completely outside the realm of experience. Beliefs are not derived from understanding, but arise from intense individual and corporate experiences...Pentecostals base their faith first on the God that

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25 Ibid., p. 53-78.
they have met and know in relationship, and only then do they attempt, with greater or lesser success, to articulate their experiences in normative, doctrinal ways. This is not to say that, for Pentecostals, doctrine is unimportant, but it is to recognize that the basic fodder of the doctrinal process within Pentecostalism is the experience of the community of faith.26

As discussed previously, Pentecostals adhere to only one uniquely Pentecostal doctrine, the “initial evidence” doctrine. Since most of the other Pentecostal doctrines are borrowed wholesale from evangelical/fundamentalist sources, it is often argued as to how well these doctrines describe Pentecostal experience. Again, this is indicative of the ongoing struggle of Pentecostals to clearly articulate their experiences and identity. In order to define themselves doctrinally, Pentecostals have made use of the ready-made doctrines of other Protestants. The expediency of borrowing from other traditions, however, has been at a cost of Pentecostal “identity” confusion. Pentecostals have vacillated between defining themselves experientially or doctrinally. As stated before, denominational leaders have begun to emphasize doctrinal identity, whereas the laity have leaned towards emphasizing charismatic experience. Traditionally, however, once a doctrine has been accepted, both leadership and laity have seemed willing to defend it vigorously.

Scripture Through Lukian Lenses

Pentecostals have most clearly defined themselves when they have stayed within the confines of Lukian texts, since their hermeneutic seems

26 Ellington, “Pentecostalism and the Authority of Scripture,” pp. 17-18. [emphasis original]
geared for such.\textsuperscript{27} Considering their presupposition and the centrality of the Pentecost narrative in Acts, this should not be surprising. As Walter Hollenweger said, "The Pentecostals and their predecessors based their views almost exclusively on the Gospel of Luke and the Acts of the Apostles."\textsuperscript{28} It can be said that Reformed Protestants, who generally esteem reason more than do Pentecostals, read Scripture through the eyes of Paul. The Pauline epistles, which are more akin to theological treatises than are the narratives of Luke, provide a focus by which these Protestants can interpret the rest of Scripture. On the other hand, "Pentecostalism reads the rest of [Scripture] through Lukan eyes, especially with the lenses provided by the Book of Acts."\textsuperscript{29}

Pentecostals and Postmodern Environmentalism

Since the Lukan texts are written as historical narratives, Pentecostals must draw out principles from literature that is not essentially didactic. Ironically, the Pentecostal emphasis on narrative interpretation is similar to the hermeneutical emphasis found in postmodern, academic circles.\textsuperscript{30} Many postmodern scholars have been advocates for, or at least sympathetic to,

\textsuperscript{27} This can be seen clearly in Roger Stronstad's strong exegesis of Lukan texts in \textit{The Charismatic Theology of St. Luke} (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1984).


\textsuperscript{29} Dayton, \textit{Theological Roots}, p. 23

environmental ethics. One might then think that Pentecostalism would be a prime candidate for developing ecological values and stewardship principles based on the creation narratives of the book of Genesis. This might well be true if Pentecostal hermeneutics existed in isolation. But instead, hermeneutics is inextricably enmeshed within the whole of the Pentecostal experience. As such the hermeneutic reflects what is important to Pentecostals, namely supernatural experience. Quite obviously, this will also be true of a scholarly hermeneutic which is “extrapolated from the spiritual ethos of classical Pentecostalism,” should such a hermeneutic ever be fully developed. This emphasis on the supernatural, in itself, seems to run counter to taking ecocrisis seriously. Beyond that, however, such supernaturalism will inevitably influence which biblical narratives are given priority, and will affect what is emphasized within a particular narrative. Consequently, Pentecostals will always place much greater significance on the Acts narratives than any other narratives, since Acts is crucial to establishing their identity. Admittedly, this does not exclude them from drawing out principles from other parts of the Bible. Nevertheless, when Pentecostals bring their supernatural emphasis to something like the creation narrative, they are more likely to see another example of God’s supernatural intervention--much like the divine intervention which will soon bring an end to creation--than they are to see principles of stewardship for themselves. This clearly shows itself in the language of a doctrinal report by the Assemblies of God:
In Genesis 1:1 to 2:3 God is the subject of most of the sentences. We read that God created, God said, God saw, God divided, God called or named, God made, God set or appointed, God blessed, God rested, and God sanctified. In summary then, we see that the Bible points us to God as the Creator in every step of creation. ‘Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear’ (Hebrews 11:3). ‘For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast’ (Psalms 33:9).

How much stewardship is needed from humans when God can intervene to adjust natural history, or to scrap it all together, to fit the divine will? From the Pentecostal perspective, the honest answer is “not much stewardship at all.” Instead of redirecting their attitudes, the Genesis narratives are simply used to reinforce the Pentecostal’s lack of concern for the environment. Even if Pentecostals could find a biblical mandate to care for creation, this mandate would still have to be prioritized within Pentecostal thought. Such a mandate would obviously remain a secondary (or even tertiary) concern for Pentecostals, who would still emphasize such supernatural and absolute concerns, such as rescuing souls from eternal perdition.

Besides emphasizing the supernatural, Pentecostals also use the Bible for support of their premillennial expectancy. As I discussed previously, in the futurist premillennial view, history appears as a puzzle which may be pieced together by use of biblical prophecies. Pentecostals constantly look for biblical “signs of Christ’s returning.” Many of these biblical signs, such as “wars and
rumours of wars,"\textsuperscript{32} are general enough to be used as evidence of the end for almost any time period. Even certain things like vegetarianism can be a sign of the end times.

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils; Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, \textit{and commanding} to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving...\textsuperscript{33}

Vegetarianism has been advocated by some environmentalists as a practical lifestyle change that would be beneficial for the environment. To many Pentecostals, however, this appears as just another sign of the nearing end of the world.

\textsuperscript{32} Matthew 24:6, King James Version

\textsuperscript{33} I Timothy 4:1-3, King James Version [italics original]
CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

Deprived No More

Contemporary Pentecostals are heirs to a movement originating among the socially dislocated. However, that period of social and economic deprivation has substantially passed, at least for many American Pentecostals. Therefore, although they give insight into the origins and early appeal of the movement, deprivation theories cannot fully explain Pentecostalism. At best, deprivation—be it social, economic or psychological—may explain why some individuals are drawn to the Pentecostal worldview. Sometimes, however, deprivation theories are simply used as *ad hominem* attacks on Pentecostals and their worldview. Pentecostals are especially sensitive to this latter maneuver and, consequently, tend to see all those who rely on deprivation theories as, "want[ing] to find a weakness in those individuals who participate in religious movements, particularly those which express strong emotion or have an ecstatic quality, such as Pentecostalism."\(^1\) According to some Pentecostals, the deprivation theorists are attempting to discredit Pentecostalism merely by showing it to be the view of the poor and uneducated. However, contemporary Pentecostals are not nearly as socially and economically deprived as the movement's early adherents.

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Whereas it is understandable that earlier Pentecostals were in no real position to address social concerns, it is less so of today's Pentecostals. Being no longer "deprived," Pentecostals still have generated little interest in social concerns, such as environmental issues.

Options For the Future

What Margaret Poloma says of the Assemblies of God is true of Pentecostalism in general. The growing numbers and improved socio-economic status has created a crisis of identity for Pentecostals, putting them at a crossroads. Two options seem viable for Pentecostals. These options are the path of dogma or the path of exegetical theology. It is not likely, however, that either option will be conducive to developing a genuine concern for the environment by Pentecostals.

The Doctrinal Route

Edith Blumhofer has shown that leaders of some denominations, by stressing doctrinal purity, have begun down the dogmatic path. She observes, among the Assemblies of God, that, "By the late seventies denominational leaders sensed growing diversity in their ranks and opted to impose a greater degree of conformity..." To ensure more adherence to approved doctrine, the denomination began to examine the beliefs of ministerial candidates more thoroughly; review the curriculum of its Bible colleges and other institutions; and

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require tenured faculty at colleges to be members of Assemblies of God churches and conform to the moral standard required of their ministers. This trend towards conformity of doctrine and behavior can also be seen in the recent issuing of, and emphasis on, doctrinal position papers by many Pentecostal denominations. Blumhofer says that,

Such attempts to assure doctrinal purity represent...a further narrowing of identity. One-time participants in a fluid and surprising restoration could by the eighties isolate six issues on which right belief was critical. Only one of these was distinctively Pentecostal: tongues speech as initial evidence of Spirit baptism.

This narrower doctrinal identity of Pentecostals is not likely to lend itself to environmental concern. Three of the specific doctrines which are considered by Pentecostals as critical to their identity are: 1) tongues speech as initial evidence of Holy Spirit baptism; 2) divine healing; and 3) premillennialism. Also their commonly-held beliefs about the Kingdom of God and spiritual warfare together establish and reinforce a supernaturalism that characterizes Pentecostalism's lay movement. This supernaturalism even extends to their understanding of the common Christian belief of justification which becomes interpreted as an initial (yet somewhat deficient) experience of the supernatural. Pentecostalism's unremitting emphasis on the supernatural demonstrates, and further reinforces, the locus of value which is placed squarely in an other-worldly realm. This world is a “temporary home” wherein the salvation drama is allowed to play out.

Nature is temporal; the human spirit (and the divine) are eternal. John Oman, in

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4 The Assemblies of God has issued 20 such papers since 1972.

his classic book *The Natural and the Supernatural*, asserts that:

the distinction between the Natural and the Supernatural is between comparative value and absolute. This is not, however, different from the division into ‘things seen and temporal’ and ‘things unseen and eternal’, because, though in the end this may mean the fleeting and the enduring, immediately ‘temporal’ and ‘eternal’ are not distinctions of time, but of value.\(^6\)

In the Pentecostal view, humans are working out their eternal salvation, which is an absolute value, within this natural world, which has only comparative or relative value. This is not simply a matter of there being two types of values, because these values are not equal. Relative values are prioritized by absolute values, and not vice versa. Ultimately, relative values derive what value they have from absolute values. This being so, nature’s designated role is that of servant to the spiritual and eternal. The fate of nature then is irrelevant, as long as it serves the supernatural—which nature must do in the Pentecostal’s futurist premillennial view. In fact, in this view environmental degradation is understood as one of the preordained signs confirming that the end is near. Nature, even in its dying, serves the divine will.

Similarly, the supernaturalism expressed in their doctrinal positions also leads Pentecostals to view the supernatural as operative in natural history. Consequently, Pentecostals reject modern science which accords nature independent agency, and accepts that the demise of nature will be the result of natural processes. Pentecostals opt instead for a Creation Science that assigns the overall guidance of nature to the supernatural which has previously

intervened in natural history cataclysmically and may do so again in the future. This further confirms that nature, although having some measure of independence, is subject to God's plan for human salvation. In the end, nature is not the concern of the people of God but of God himself.

One possible result of this doctrinal emphasis is the utter absorption of Pentecostalism into Evangelical Christianity. As mentioned above, the initial evidence doctrine is the only distinctively Pentecostal belief. Doctrinally, Pentecostals stand quite close to Evangelicals in general, even though Evangelicalism involves a fairly broad spectrum of beliefs. Pentecostals stand particularly close to Charismatic Evangelicals, who share the Holy Spirit experiences and maintain a similar worldview. In fact, it would be very hard to make any real doctrinal distinction between Pentecostals and Charismatic Evangelicals.

Even the premillennial belief, which is so important to Pentecostal thought, is not distinctive to it but is shared by many Evangelicals. Their emphasis on this doctrine, however, would put Pentecostals at a place within the Evangelical spectrum which is also unlikely to foster environmental concern. Al Truesdale, writing about the premillennialism to which some Evangelicals adhere (and which is shared by Pentecostals), states the implications for environmental concern clearly:

So long as evangelicals hold to an eschatology that understands the world to exist under a divinely imposed death sentence, we should expect no major change in their disposition toward the environment or the environmental movement. They will continue to interpret the environment problems as among the first fruits of an imminent expression of divine
wrath against 'the late, great planet Earth.' Invitations to participate in sustained efforts at solving environmental problems will be thought of as futile at best, and as defying God's will at worst.  

The Distinctive Route

If Pentecostalism takes the path of exegetical theology, it may be possible to establish a distinctive Pentecostal identity. This is what many Pentecostal scholars believe. However, the outlook for environmental concern looks little better by this path. All of the Pentecostal hermeneutic methods (scholarly and popular-traditional) emphasize the supernatural. The experience of the supernatural is what is understood as being "distinctively Pentecostal." Pentecostal doctrines then would be derived from Pentecostal experiences. Although this may furnish grounds for a break from some Fundamentalist doctrines, it will continue to reinforce the supernaturalist view and the environmental disregard related to it. Pentecostals are not likely to need help in finding a "supernatural" message in biblical literature, especially since the New Testament exhibits a similar worldview and expectancy of Christ's imminent return.

Even a sophisticated explication of Pentecostalism, such as the one by Steven Land, is unlikely to provide a solid basis for environmental concern. In his book, Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion For the Kingdom, Land asserts that Pentecostalism is not a theological system but is a particular type of spirituality. Pentecostalism is a spirituality whose integrating center is located in the

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affections. These affections operate "by a certain 'grammar' and exist in a reciprocally conditioning mode with the beliefs and practices." Land terms these Pentecostal affections, as they are interrelated to beliefs and practices, "apocalyptic affections" since they are made up of "the distinctive eschatological reality and vision of Pentecostals." Land is clearly attempting to reconnect Pentecostalism with the roots of the movement, which emphasized Christ as the soon-coming King. However, he is attempting to reconnect with the early fervor of the movement in a way that is more socially responsible. Land would like to refashion Pentecostal eschatology to incorporate an "already-not yet" understanding of the Kingdom of God (the idea for which Land is indebted to G. E. Ladd). In this view, the Kingdom of God is already here, but not yet fully realized. It is the responsibility of those believers who are already experiencing the Kingdom to bring a fuller realization of that Kingdom into the world. Following the logic of Land's thought, Pentecostals, with their fuller experience of God's Kingdom, should be the most responsible of any Christians for bringing the not-yet-consummated Kingdom into their present circumstances. What Land is advocating appears something very close to postmillennialism. (At very least, it is a de-apocalypticizing of the eschatology because the Kingdom for which Pentecostals have a passion is not completely "an idealized state of future,

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9 Ibid.

ahistorical bliss.”¹¹) He is advocating activity beyond merely bringing persons into the Church. In fact Land even says that, “the kingdom of God is larger than the church and therefore there is an implicit ‘post-millennial’ activism contained within the premillennial expectancy.”¹²

The one significant problem with Land’s refashioning of Pentecostalism is that the affections which he asserts are central to Pentecostalism are still “apocalyptic.” Premillennial expectancy still requires premillennial belief. Eschatological fervor still requires belief in the imminent return of Christ, which would inevitably undermine any serious movement toward “post-millennial activism.” Environmental disregard would still be the most appropriate response to a soon-ending world.

Environmental Dead End

Pentecostalism may well be at a crossroads in determining its future identity. Whichever road it takes, it appears that regard for the environment is not likely to result. For Pentecostals, creation will likely continue to be expendable. Since Pentecostals have little basis on which to establish a concern for the environment, any road towards the future is still apt to be an environmental dead end.


¹² Land, Pentecostal Spirituality, p. 223.
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