
A table of contents for *Anvil* can be found here:

https://biblicalstudies.org.uk/articles_anvil_01.php

MARK STIBBE

This is That: Some Thoughts Concerning Charismatic Hermeneutics

Mark Stibbe defends himself against his critics by offering an exposition of the characteristic shape of the hermeneutic he uses. Far from it being an interpretative model influenced by post-modernism that is happy to use the text of Scripture as a jumping-off point for prophetically inspired words for today, he claims to offer a dynamic reading that fuses critical understanding and Spirit-inspired insight, light and heat.

Introduction

There has been a great deal of discussion in recent years concerning charismatic hermeneutics. Many people have been asking whether there is anything distinctive about the way in which charismatics interpret and expound the Scriptures. Over the years, I have discerned three main approaches to biblical interpretation behind charismatic exposition:

1) Some charismatics have simply adopted the hermeneutics of conservative evangelical scholars (i.e. a methodology that uses historical criticism in order to exegete the original meaning of biblical texts).

2) Others have adopted the subjective approaches associated with post-modernism. In other words, they are primarily interested in a prophetic, contemporary reading of a text's significance.

3) A few have adopted a mediating hermeneutic which tries to be both objective (using the historical critical programme of the Evangelicals) and subjective (using an emphasis on charismatic 'reader response').

Over the last few years, my name has been increasingly linked with the second of these positions. In other words, I have been presented in various books and articles as a person who has no real concern for the original meaning of biblical texts and who has a tendency to indulge in 'ridiculous' and 'far-fetched' interpretations of Scripture.[1] The sole justification for this caricature is a chapter

1 Those who have made this judgement include Mark Smith (*Testing the Fire. A Biblical Analysis of the 'Toronto Blessing'*: St Matthew Publishing Ltd, Cambridge 1996), Lloyd Pietersen, ed (*The Mark of the Spirit? A Charismatic Critique of the Toronto Blessing*; Paternoster Press, Cumbria 1998), and John Lyons, 'The Fourth Wave and the Approaching Millennium: Some Problems with Charismatic Hermeneutics (*Anvil* 15 (1998), pp 169-180).

in a popular book I wrote entitled *Times of Refreshing*.[2] This was not a scholarly work. It was written for the popular Christian market, and was intended as a user-friendly reflection on what the British media were somewhat unhelpfully calling 'The Toronto Blessing'. The part of the book that caused problems for some Evangelicals involved a charismatic reading of Ezekiel 47. There I proposed an analogy between the stages of the river flowing from the Temple and various 'waves' of revival in the twentieth century. I equated stage one of the river with the emergence and growth of Pentecostalism, stage two with the charismatic renewal, and stage three with the 'Third Wave'. I then suggested that the Toronto phenomenon might be the 'sea-fret' of a fourth 'wave'. This was a big claim (albeit tentatively stated); I therefore encouraged the reader to test this interpretation. Since this has created controversy for a minority of scholars, I would like here to describe the hermeneutic that I work with both as a writer and as a preacher. In what follows I will identify seven characteristics of the charismatic methodology that I normally employ. Using Luke's account of Peter's sermon in Acts 2, I will show how my hermeneutic not only pays careful attention to the original *meaning* of a text, it also pays prayerful attention to its contemporary, prophetic *significance*.[3] In other words, I hope to highlight the fact that my method of biblical interpretation is far closer to what I have called the third approach in charismatic hermeneutics (see above).

An experiential reading

The context of Peter's sermon in Acts 2 is of critical importance to our discussion here. Peter's message is delivered when the Day of Pentecost had fully come (Acts 2:1). In other words, Peter preaches on day fifty after the Shabbat of *Pesach* or 'Passover'. This special day was known as *Ha Atseret*, 'the fulfilment' or 'the culmination'. It was the climactic day of the Feast of Weeks – the weeks referred to being the seven weeks between Passover and Pentecost (seven weeks of seven days making forty-nine days in total, the fiftieth being *Ha Atseret*).

The Festival of Pentecost was one of the three main pilgrim festivals in First and Second Temple Judaism, the others being Passover and Tabernacles. While Passover celebrated the Exodus from Egypt, Pentecost celebrated the giving of Torah on Mount Sinai. There the Lord descended upon the mountain with fire and God gave Moses and Aaron the Ten Commandments and the Law (Exod. 19:16-25). Israel subsequently chose to reject God through consistently worshipping idols. After the exile, however, the prophets began to declare that God was going to restore his people, renew his covenant, and bring about a new Sinai event:

> 'This is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after that time', declares the LORD. 'I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts' (Jer. 31:33).

2 M. Stibbe, *Times of Refreshing: A Practical Theology of Revival*, Marshall Pickering, London 1995.

3 The astute reader will spot the fact that this paper actually demonstrates and models my charismatic hermeneutic. In other words, in the course of my argument, I actually model a *this is that* relationship between charismatic hermeneutics and the method of Peter's exposition in Acts 2.

The crucial thing about this statement is the prophecy concerning the writing of Torah upon peoples' hearts rather than on stone tablets. The novel aspect of this covenant would be this: that people's remembrance and understanding of the Torah would arise out of God's revelatory activity in their minds, and their obedience to it would be driven by the Spirit's work in their hearts. No longer would Torah be something external but internal. The fire of God's Spirit would brand the Word of God upon the human heart rather than inscribe it on tablets of stone.

When Peter stood up to preach in Acts 2, he did so in the context of the fulfilment of this promise. The fire had indeed fallen on the day of *Ha Atseret*. The one hundred and twenty disciples in the Temple in Jerusalem had been filled with a power that resembled 'tongues of fire', and they subsequently uttered words of jubilant adoration in unlearnt foreign languages. Then Peter stood to preach. He too had the fire of God's Spirit burning in his heart. As he preached, this unschooled fisherman quoted one Scripture after another – Joel 2, Psalm 16, Psalm 110 – to drive his point home.

How is it that Peter knew which Scriptures to cite? Did he and the other eleven hold a brief consultation to decide which proof-texts to quote? Or is it the case that his immediate use of certain Scriptures is conclusive evidence that the Spirit has imprinted the Word upon his heart? I suggest that it is the latter and that Peter's handling of Joel and the Psalms is a sign that he has entered into that renewed covenant foretold in Jer. 31:31-34. On the very day that the Jews celebrated the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, Peter receives the Torah through the *ruach ha kodesh*, the Holy Spirit.

If I was to identify the first characteristic of a charismatic hermeneutic it would be this: that the hermeneutical process often begins with the Holy Spirit working upon a person's heart and impressing him or her with a burning sense of the relevance of certain Scriptures for his situation. Of course, this is not unique to charismatic spirituality. It has ample historical precedent in Christian mysticism and in seasons of revival.[4] However, this is normally the place where charismatics *begin* – with a sense of a rich harmony between biblical texts and present experience.

When I received a burning sense of the significance of Ezekiel 47 for twentieth-century revival movements, I would argue that this was an experience that is common to charismatic interpreters and expositors. This sudden recollection of Scriptures that exhibit a surprising accord with present experience of the Spirit is where charismatics most often begin the so-called 'hermeneutical circle'. For this reason, charismatics place a very high value on the Spirit-inspired process of recollection and revelation in the interpretative event.[5] A biblical precedent for this

4 In his *Narrative of Surprising Conversions*, Jonathan Edwards could write that 'persons commonly, at first conversion, and afterwards, have had many texts of Scripture brought to their minds, which are exceedingly suitable to their circumstances, often come with great power, as the word of God or Christ indeed'. Of course, by the time Edwards wrote *Religious Affections*, he was more cautious about this particular phenomenon, though still welcoming it when it was genuine rather than fanciful.

5 During the First Great Awakening, Jonathan Edwards was particular struck by the way in which the Holy Spirit excited people in the remembrance of Scriptures that harmonised with their circumstances.

principle can be located in John 14.26: 'But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and remind you of everything I said to you.' Charismatics believe that the prophetic exegesis of Scripture can only happen if the person doing the interpretation has been baptised in the Holy Spirit. Baptism in the Spirit is the doorway to the prophetic generally, and to charismatic or prophetic hermeneutics in particular.

An analogical reading

The second thing that is noteworthy about Peter's exposition is the way he interpreted the Scriptures 'analogically'. Having experienced the pentecostal outpouring of the Spirit, Peter proceeded to illuminate that experience by referring to Joel 2:28ff, introducing it with the phrase 'This is that' (Acts 2:15, AV). In Acts 2:33 Peter could proclaim: 'Having been exalted to the right hand of God, he (Jesus) has received from the Father the promise of the Spirit, and has poured out this (*touto*) which you both see and hear' (Acts 2:33). When he used the word *touto*, Peter was speaking about the empowering presence of God made manifest in both visible and audible ways. He was speaking about experience of the Spirit.

For Peter, interpretation of the Scriptures began with analogy, with a *this is that* dynamic. It began with what he could see and hear of the Spirit's activity in the community of faith. He then related this activity to parts of the overarching story of the Bible. How Peter actually did this needs to be located within his cultural horizon. He used a Jewish form of exegesis known as *pesher* interpretation. The *pesher* approach to the Scriptures was practised in the Qumran community. There the interpreters began with events in their own history, and then related these analogically to texts in Habbakuk. In doing this, they expressed themselves with the following verbal construction: 'This is that which we read in Habbakuk...'

It is this Jewish *pesher* approach which Peter used at Pentecost.[6] One of the reasons why Peter employed it was because he was a Jew speaking to Jews.[7] Peter began his sermon by addressing his listeners as Jewish men (*andres Ioudaioi* – Acts 2:14) and as men of Israel (*andres Israelites* – Acts 2:22). Furthermore, he indicated that he was using a *pesher* approach to the Scriptures by using the phrase 'this is that': 'This is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel' (Acts 2:16). The expression, 'this is that' (*touto estin to*) is a sign that Peter was most probably using an accessible (i.e. non-esoteric) form of *pesher* interpretation.

This analogical method is a significant characteristic of charismatic hermeneutics. Thus my interpretation of Ezekiel 47 was an instance of *pesher* or analogical interpretation. There I began with the Spirit's activity in twentieth-century

6 This seems to have been Peter's favoured way of interpreting the Scriptures. For another example of *this is that pesher* exegesis in the Petrine corpus, see 1 Pet. 1:24-25

7 Peter's combination of Psalm 16 and Psalm 110 is based on the similar phrase 'at my right hand' in both passages. This is a typically Jewish exegetical strategy known as *gezerah shawah* (one of Hillel's seven rules for Midrashic interpretation). Interestingly, this particular rule has to do with the discernment of verbal analogies. It seems particular pertinent, therefore, to speak of an 'analogical' dimension to Peter's hermeneutic. One might argue from this evidence that Peter was naturally disposed to think analogically.

western revival movements and then discerned an analogy in Ezekiel 47. Though I still have a profound sense of resonance between the two, my charismatic approach was vulnerable to several criticisms that I can now see were weaknesses in the *pesher* approach as a whole:

> 1. *Pesher* interpretation was notorious for ignoring the original meaning and context of biblical texts (as is particularly evident in the Qumran commentary on Habbakuk). Though I did subject Ezekiel 47:1-12 to an historical-critical analysis, it was too brief and insufficiently thorough. As my critics pointed out, the river of life in Ezekiel 47 does not have four waves! Had I been more rigorous, I might have been more cautious.
>
> 2. *Pesher* interpretation made large claims concerning the fulfilment of prophecy. The acceptable face of this method is seen in Acts 2, where Peter saw Joel 2:28ff as being fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost. However, in my own reading of Ezekiel 47:1-12, I sounded as if Ezekiel had prophesied the four waves of the Spirit in the twentieth century. It would have been better to say that the river of life in Ezekiel 47 functions as an illustration of these revival movements.[8]

A charismatic hermeneutic begins with the story of what God is doing now, and then proposes analogies with the over-arching 'meta-narrative' of Scripture. As in liberation theology, the key thing is therefore to contextualise one's exegesis. Of course, the major difference between charismatic and liberation theology is that the former focuses on liberation from spiritual oppression while the latter focuses on social oppression. However, both present a challenge to conventional hermeneutics. In the case of charismatic interpretation, the challenge lies in the question, 'Is there a story of what the Spirit is doing right now in my life and in my community?' Or, as my friend Max Turner puts it in a comment about Simon Magus:

> It is notable that a magician of some prowess even offers money to purchase the ability to convey the power of the Spirit he sees brought by the laying on of hands (Acts 8:17-19). It is an interesting and sobering question whether Simon Magus would be tempted in the same way by what he saw (or did not see) in many of our churches today.[9]

A communal reading

Another feature of Peter's exposition is its communal nature. Notice how Peter is said to stand 'with the eleven' when he preaches (Acts 2:14). The important point to note here is that Peter's methodology was visibly communal in nature. He did not stand on his own in a solitary pulpit. Nor did he speak in the first person singular. Rather, he stood with his team of fellow-apostles and he spoke in a *We-*

8 We cannot claim with any certainty that Ezekiel prophesied the renewal movements of the twentieth century. The most we could claim is that there is a *sensus plenior* in Ezekiel 47, intended by the divine author but not necessarily by the human one, and that it is in this realm of dynamic meaning that the analogy between past text and present renewal is justified.

9 M. Turner, *Power From on High: The Spirit in Israel's Restoration and Witness in Luke-Acts*. JPT Supplements 9, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield 1996, p 440.

Thou address. Though Peter admittedly remarked that the sermon was couched in his words (2:14 – *rhemata mou*), he used 'we' when he was speaking of the testimony to Jesus: 'God has raised this Jesus, something about which *we* are all witnesses' (Acts 2:32). When the sermon came to an end, the crowds did not turn to Peter alone when they enquired what they should do. 'And hearing [this] they were cut to the heart, and they said to Peter and to the remaining apostles, "What shall we do?"' (Acts 2:37).

One of the characteristics of a charismatic approach to Scripture is this: that biblical interpretation is undertaken in a community and for a community. It is not an isolated, 'ivory tower' enterprise. People in the charismatic tradition interpret and expound the Scriptures within the context of a community that believes and operates in the charisma of prophecy. In his essay, 'The Work of the Holy Spirit in Hermeneutics', Clark Pinnock makes the following point about the importance of the prophetic community in charismatic hermeneutics:

> It is important that individual Christians exist in a network and community of committed others, because so often truth emerges not from the struggles of the individual, but from the life of the whole community which participates in the Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14). By interacting with people who share our faith, we are more likely to rise above our own fragmentary perceptions and conceptions of the truth. The community of faith is the best context for understanding Scripture. We need one another. How else are we going to see our limitations and transcend them?[10]

Charismatic hermeneutics takes place within a community of shared experience. The experience referred to is not just the 'fellowship of the Holy Spirit' in the contemporary life of the charismatic church or churches in question. It is the 'fellowship of the Holy Spirit' enjoyed by all those who have been baptised in the Spirit, going right back to the book of Acts (and even further back, to the charismatic history of ancient Israel). It is this sense of being part of a continuous stream of charismatic experience that produces such a rich fusion of past and present horizons in the charismatic interpretation and exposition of Scripture.

However inadequate my reading of Ezekiel 47, one thing needs to be stressed: it arose from the shared experiences of the global charismatic community. It also arose from a sense of continuity between what Ezekiel prophesied for his own faith community and what we were experiencing in the renewal today. Though I would not want to say that Ezekiel prophesied what has recently been experienced in thousands of churches, I would want to speak about what John McKay calls 'the doctrine of shared experience'[11]. As Rodman Williams has put it:

> When a person stands within the same pneumatic experience as the Biblical writers did, he then has the spiritual capacity to receive what the Scripture teaches. Without such standing, Biblical exegesis and interpretation falls far short of such truth.[12]

10 C. Pinnock, 'The Work of the Holy Spirit in Hermeneutics', *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* (hereafter *JPT*) 2 '1993', p 23.

11 J. McKay, 'When the Veil is Taken Away: The Impact of Prophetic Experience on Biblical Interpretation', *JPT* 5 '1994', pp 26-29.

12 R. Williams, *Renewal Theology, vol. 2*, Zondervan, Grand Rapids, MI 1990, pp 241f.

In the enterprise of charismatic hermeneutics, the interpreter believes passionately that he or she is standing within a community of the Spirit whose origins go back to Acts (to Peter and those with whom he stands in Acts 2:14). It is this sense of 'pneumatic continuity' that lies behind a great deal of charismatic interpretation and exposition of Scripture.

A christological reading

Returning to Peter's sermon in Acts 2:14ff, it is quite remarkable how christocentric it was. Indeed, Peter's experience of the Spirit led him into a thoroughly comprehensive Christology. As recorded by Luke, of course, we probably have the mere headlines of what Peter actually said:

a) *The historical Jesus.* Peter introduced Christ as Jesus the Nazarene, a man (*andra*) approved by God (Acts 2:22). He started, in other words, with a real, flesh-and-blood, person.

b) *The charismatic Jesus.* Peter went on to describe Jesus as a man accredited by God 'by powerful deeds (*dunamesi*) and wonders (*terasi*) and signs (*semeiois*)'.

c) *The crucified Jesus.* Focusing on the charismatic nature of Jesus' ministry did not lead to a neglect of the cross. The phrase *prospezantes aneilate* (Acts 2:23) is particularly vivid: 'fastening, you killed him'.

d) *The risen Jesus.* The bulk of Peter's preaching consists of an exposition of Psalms 16 and 110, and an apologia for the resurrection of Jesus Christ (Acts 2:24-32).

e) *The exalted Jesus.* From v. 32, Peter moved from the resurrection to the ascension. Jesus had been exalted to the right hand of God, from where he had poured out the promised gift of the Father, the Holy Spirit.

f) *The divine Jesus.* In v 36 Peter concluded his sermon by calling Jesus not just Christ but 'Lord'. The use of the word 'Lord' – reserved in the OT for Yahweh – highlights that Jesus is divine. He is the 'Lord of the Spirit'.

Looking at Peter's sermon, one has to conclude that Jesus Christ was its central theme.

It is sometimes said of charismatics that their emphasis is more on the Spirit of God than on the Son of God. In reality this is not so. One of the great fruits of the experience of 'baptism in the Holy Spirit' (rediscovered this century by both Pentecostals and charismatics) has been a fresh sense of the glory and lordship of Jesus Christ. I have made this particularly clear in my new book *Thinking Clearly About Revival.*[13] The biblical foundation for this is of course Paul's claim in 1 Cor. 12:3 that no one can genuinely say 'Jesus is Lord' except as a result of charismatic revelation and motivation. Further evidence is provided by the promise that the *parakletos* will bring glory to Jesus (John 16:4). One of the things that Lyons fails to point out about my exegesis of Ezekiel 47 is the fact that it emphasises the central importance of Jesus Christ as the divine source for the living waters of refreshing.

13 M. Stibbe, *Thinking Clearly About Revival,* Monarch, Tonbridge Wells, Kent 1998. See ch. 6, 'The Focus of Revival'.

My experience of a *this is that* resonance between contemporary waves of the Spirit and Ezekiel's prophetic vision resulted in my heart being drawn nearer to Jesus, not further from him. As I have demonstrated in my book *Know Your Spiritual Gifts*, this 'test of Christology' is crucial for the discernment of the truth-value of prophetic claims.[14]

This 'test of Christology' is critical to any evaluation of a prophetic interpretation or utterance. John Lyons – influenced no doubt by the current fashion for deconstructionism at Sheffield University – tries to argue that I have undermined my own desire to use this test by denigrating conventional exegesis of the canonical Scriptures. However, I have consistently argued (and indeed demonstrated) that conventional exegesis of Scripture must still go on in the charismatic enterprise. Indeed, if Lyons was to come and hear me preach he would find me passionately committed both to the authority of Scripture and to its original meaning and context. This is always something I value and the evidence for it is in my reading of Ezekiel 47. For Lyons's claims to be valid he would have to prove that what I have written is in some way inconsistent with the critical orthodox position on the person and work of Jesus Christ. The fact that he fails to do that is evidence that his efforts to undermine my thesis are themselves open to being undermined (surely an inglorious testimony to the pointlessness of much deconstructionist criticism!).

An eschatological reading

One of the tasks of the Spirit is to heighten the sense of Christ's return. In this respect it is interesting to note, as we look at Acts 2, that Peter too had an intense sense that 'the end is nigh'. The original version of Joel 2:28 reads, *meta tauta*, '*After these things* I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh'. Peter felt the freedom to change this to *en tais eschatais hemerais*, '*In the last days* I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh.' That Peter was compelled to do this is evidence that the Holy Spirit intensifies 'the sense of an ending'. For Peter and for Luke, the Holy Spirit was most emphatically the eschatological Spirit. As Bob Menzies has recently written, Peter's adaptation of Joel 2:28 shows that

> The Pentecostal bestowal of the Spirit is an event of the *Endzeit*, that period of God's deliverance which precedes the Day of the Lord.[15]

One of the distinctive things about charismatic interpretation and exposition is its emphasis on both the 'now' and the 'not yet' of the kingdom of God. Charismatics claim to experience the kingdom now, particularly as they witness manifestations of the Spirit such as tongues, prophecy and healing. But they also testify to the 'not yet' dimension of the kingdom. They know that the kingdom has not fully come, and that they are living in the last days. Consequently, there is an intensified sense of the imminent return of the coming king in their biblical interpretation. At Azusa Street, a writer for the Apostolic Faith was to say,

---

14 M. Stibbe, *Know Your Spiritual Gifts: Practising the Presents of God*, Marshall Pickering, London 1997, ch. 7.

15 R. Menzies, *The Development of Early Christian Pneumatology, with Special Reference to Luke-Acts*, JSNT Supp. 54, JSOT Press, Sheffield 1991, p 216.

> 'Jesus is coming soon', is the message that the Holy Ghost is speaking today through nearly everyone that receives the baptism in the Holy Ghost.

What Steven Land calls 'a recovery of the eschatological vision' is therefore a distinctive feature of pentecostal and charismatic hermeneutics.[16] The famous pentecostal interpretation of the 'former and latter rains' is evidence of this (Joel 2:23). These 'two rains' were regarded as a proleptic reference to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in the first century ('the former rains'), and to the final pentecostal outpouring in the twentieth century ('the latter rains').[17] Whether or not one regards this as a responsible interpretation, it does highlight the eschatological urgency that characterises pentecostal/charismatic spirituality and hermeneutics.

With that in mind, it may interest the reader to note that the eschatological dimension to my reading of Ezekiel 47 was actually very restrained. John Lyons claims that I have written in *Times of Refreshing* that the Toronto phenomenon is the precursor of the *parousia* (which, in turn, he implies I associate with the advent of the third millennium). In fact, the overall tenor of my thesis in *Times of Refreshing* (and elsewhere) nowhere supports this. I have always been very guarded about such a view and have nowhere in my writing or in my preaching given dates or times for the return of Jesus Christ.[18] I have nowhere identified myself with the Manifested Sons of God movement, nor with Restorationism (as Lyons implies). I have merely stated the possibility that the Toronto phenomenon might one day be seen as the prelude to a much larger, world-wide movement of revival. So, while there has certainly been plenty of evidence of eschatological fervour in the Toronto phenomenon as a whole, there is an absence of eschatological speculation in *Times of Refreshing*. Even though my exegesis does attempt to discern the 'signs of the times', it cannot therefore be associated with *fin de siècle* hysteria or 'pre-millennial tension'.

An emotional reading

Returning once again to Peter's preaching, one cannot help noticing that it was an emotive address leading to an emotional response. Luke says that Peter pleaded with the crowds and that he issued them a warning (Acts 2:40). Peter used emotive language as he addressed the crowd, and he was not slow to challenge his listeners with some hard truths. He stated somewhat confrontationally, 'This man was handed over to you by God's fixed purpose and foreknowledge, and you, with the assistance of lawless men, killed him by fastening him to a cross' (Acts 2:23). This emotive language led to a response that was more than merely intellectual. Luke says that when Peter ended his sermon, the crowds were 'cut to the heart' (2:37).

Charismatic interpretation and exposition of the Scriptures owes much to the writings of the great theologian of the heart, Jonathan Edwards. In his book, *The Religious Affections*, Edwards writes about the need for 'light' in the head and 'heat'

16 S. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality. A Passion for the Kingdom*, JPT Supp. 1, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield 1993. 'The passion for the kingdom is the ruling affection of Pentecostal spirituality', p 178.

17 Larry McQueen, *Joel and the Spirit. The Cry of a Prophetic Hermeneutic*, JPTS 8, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield 1995, pp 74ff.

18 M. Stibbe, *Times of Refreshing*, p 172.

in the heart. Light represents doctrinal understanding; heat represents what Steven Land has helpfully called 'a passion for the kingdom'. Edwards wrote:

> Where there is heat without light, there can be nothing divine or heavenly in that heart, so, where there is a kind of light without heat, a head stored with notions and speculations, with a cold and unaffected heart, there can be nothing divine in that light.[19]

All this has an important bearing on preaching the Word. Edwards is quick to remind his readers of the great privilege inherent within this task. He writes,

> The impressing of divine things on the hearts and affections of men is evidently one great end for which God has ordained that his word delivered in the Holy Scriptures should be explained, applied, and driven home in preaching.[20]

However, Edwards goes on to say that this cannot happen if preachers merely rely on good commentaries and fine books of divinity. Why? Because such learning does not result in peoples' 'affections' being impressed. What is required for that to happen is 'a particular and lively application of his word' in which the heart is quickened. In other words, heat is necessary as well as light, and the heat comes from the fire of God – the Holy Spirit.

The influence of these views on charismatic hermeneutics has been immense. Charismatic exegetes rightly advocate that the emotions must be involved in our reading of Scripture, and indeed our response to Scripture. Biblical interpretation is therefore not a matter of the mind alone. It is a matter of 'the mind in the heart'. Bob Baker puts this very well in an article on 'Pentecostal Bible Reading'. In language which itself is ironically emotive, he writes this about the use of emotions in biblical interpretation:

> New Testament scholarship in general has displayed at least one of the major symptoms of paranoid schizophrenia. It lacks emotion. In their attempt to arrive at a scientific objective understanding of the text, scholars have inadvertently distorted the meaning of the texts they seek to explain. To seek to understand the ideational, rational content of a text without also seeking to experience and reflect upon its emotive effect is to skew the text's message.[21]

Baker then goes on to state how Pentecostals are in an ideal situation to deconstruct the Enlightenment myth of passionless objectivity. Why? Because they have not fallen for its dichotomy of reason and emotion, and because – like Jonathan Edwards – they have evolved an 'affective spirituality' or 'a religion of the heart'.

Charismatic hermeneutics (like its pentecostal cousin) is therefore both intellectual and emotional. A good example of this in practice can be found in Larry McQueen's recent book, *Joel and the Spirit: The Cry of a Prophetic Hermeneutic*. McQueen's study analyses the major themes of the book of Joel and then looks at

19 R. Backhouse, ed., *Experiencing God. Selected Readings from the Classics of Jonathan Edwards*, Marshall Pickering, London 1995, p 154.

20 Backhouse, *Experiencing God*, p 160.

21 Robert O. Barker, 'Pentecostal Bible Reading: Toward a Model of Reading for the Formation of Christian Affections', *JPT* 7 '1995', pp 34f.

the way in which they are appropriated in both the NT and in Pentecostalism. One of the important themes that McQueen identifies is that of 'prophetic lamentation'. Joel 1:1-2, 17 consists of a 'call to lament', and this lamentation is the precondition for the saving work of God throughout the rest of Joel. In the final chapter of his book, McQueen tells us how this 'call to lament' affected him both intellectually and emotionally. He recognised, during his research, that God was calling him to re-evaluate his relationship with him. In his morning devotions with other pentecostal friends, he therefore started to rend his heart (Joel 2:13). As McQueen writes in the conclusion of his book:

> A prophetic hermeneutic is an interpretative event in which pathos and reason, Word and Spirit, are integrated... The reader-hearer cannot remain 'objective' in such a hermeneutic but is drawn into the process to become receptor and instrument of the Spirit's critique... A prophetic hermeneutic which emerges out of experienced pathos will of necessity be holistic in method and content.[22]

Here, then, we see a hermeneutic characterised by emotional intelligence. This is, in fact, one of the major distinctive characteristics of a charismatic approach to Scripture as well. It is also one of the reasons why some scholars regard this particular approach to the Bible as exhibiting an 'anti-intellectual tendency' (a charge that Lyons lays at my door). The truth is that pentecostal and charismatic scholars are not 'anti-intellectual'; we are anti-intellectualism. We will not allow our biblical hermeneutics to be dominated by that Enlightenment idolatry of reason that has so obviously influenced both liberal and evangelical approaches to the Bible. We believe that the best interpretation and exposition of Scripture is the product of light in the head and fire in the heart. It is the result of both a cognitive and an affective reading of Scripture.

A practical reading

A charismatic approach to Scripture is, finally, 'practical'. In other words, it is not an exercise conducted for its own sake. Rather, it is a discipline that results in 'praxis'. In Acts 2:37, when Peter concluded his sermon, the crowds expressed the need to appropriate what they had heard. They responded with the simple question, 'What shall we do?' The result of Peter's exposition was a deep desire for an active response. And what a response!

Peter's inspired address resulted in lives being transformed there and then. This emphasis on transformation is a key feature of pentecostal and charismatic hermeneutics as well. See, for example, Cheryl Bridges John's book, *Pentecostal Formation*. In her section on 'Pentecostal Approach to Group Bible Study', she outlines four things which every Bible study group should do. 'Sharing our Testimony', 'Searching the Scriptures', 'Yielding to the Spirit', and 'Responding to the Call'. Of the fourth task she writes:

> If we truly want to know God we must respond in loving obedience to the light he has shed upon our paths. The question is, 'Lord, what would you have us do in response to your Word?'[23]

22 McQueen, *Joel and the Spirit*, pp 111f.

23 C. B. Johns, *Pentecostal Formation*, JPTS 2, Sheffield Academic Press, Sheffield 1993, p 137.

This dimension of charismatic hermeneutics is of key importance in the evaluation of responsible and irresponsible interpretation. This is why I lay so much store on 'the test of consequence' in relation to prophetic exegesis of Scripture. We must always ask, 'What is the consequence or fruit of such interpretations?' Peter's *that is that* exposition of the Hebrew Bible led his listeners to a life-changing encounter with God. In short, it led to repentance. In charismatic interpretation and exposition, the key question will always be, 'What kind of ministry flows out of this?' If the interpretation and exposition of Scripture does not, at the very least, offer the possibility of a life-changing encounter with the Spirit of God, then the charismatic will be profoundly disappointed. Just as Paul preached the message of the cross with demonstrations of the Spirit's power (I Cor. 2:1-5), so contemporary charismatics will interpret and expound the word in the hope that signs and wonders will accompany and accredit the message.[24]

Conclusion

Here, then, are seven characteristics of a charismatic way of reading Scripture. Though these characteristics are probably more prescriptive than descriptive, they do represent some of the core values behind charismatic hermeneutics as a whole, and behind my own approach to biblical interpretation in particular.

The most important characteristic of a charismatic hermeneutic lies in the unveiling of that enriching 'at-one-ment' between the fixed meaning of a biblical text and its contemporary, spiritual significance for a community of faith. In highlighting the need to expose such analogies, I must stress that I am at no point wanting to elevate significance over meaning, let alone to disconnect the one from the other. However inadequate my reading of Ezekiel 47 is deemed, I must emphasise that I am not denigrating conventional grammatico-historical criticism of the Bible. As this article clearly demonstrates, I am committed to the third kind of charismatic hermeneutic outlined at the beginning of this article:

> The adoption of a mediating hermeneutic which tries to be both objective (using the historical critical programme of the Evangelicals) and subjective (using a charismatic form of 'reader response').[25]

---

24 While the conservative evangelical expositor will conclude by saying 'go and do thou likewise', the charismatic evangelical expositor will expect the listeners to be encountering the life-transforming *dunamis* of God before, during and after the exposition. The nature of the praxis is therefore very different in charismatic hermeneutics.

25 Further work needs to be done on the way in which these two relate to each other in charismatic hermeneutics. How exactly do the two approaches of grammatico-historical criticism and prophetic reader-response relate to each other? Does the Holy Spirit inspire both procedures? If so, how? Having delivered this paper recently at London Bible College, one of the post-graduate students there suggested two possible models: the 'human legs model' (i.e. historical criticism and prophetic listening as two distinctive, yet inter-dependent methods) and the 'egg model' (i.e. the prophetic existing within the historical-critical paradigm like the yoke within the albumen). These remarks lead me to suspect that charismatic theology will encourage scholars to look afresh at the divine-human relationship in both the incarnate Word and the written Word of God.

At the same time, I want to underline the fact that the NT authors often approached the OT in a charismatic *this is that* manner, and that conventional hermeneutics (based as they are on Enlightenment philosophical principles) are incomplete without this dimension. Indeed, I would agree with the following very balanced assessment of Dr John McKay:

> The bulk of current biblical interpretation, whether conservative or liberal, is the work of the natural mind searching for meaning in God's word using the common techniques of scholarship shared with other secular disciplines, such as history, literary criticism, or philosophy. This kind of investigation has immense value and it would be totally misguided to underrate it, but charismatics find themselves frustrated in the face of it, since it bypasses and fails to recognise the dimension they might call the spiritual (*pneumatikon*) or the charismatic, or the prophetic.[26]

Richard Longenecker's classic work, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, contains a great deal of evidence that Jesus and his immediate disciples used a *pesher, this is that* approach to their Bible. Having made this important point, Longenecker ends his book by merely asserting (rather than arguing) that this was valid in the case of the apostles but not so for us today.[27] It is precisely this kind of hermeneutical cessationism which I want to call into question. Of course there are dangers in what I am proposing – particularly the dangers of gnosticism (spiritual interpretations which lose their moorings in history), of experientialism (allowing experience to dictate exegesis in a naive way), and of subjectivism (individualistic, absurd and unaccountable interpretations). My perceptive critics (particularly those at Sheffield University) have made me even more aware of these dangers than I was before, and for that I am extremely grateful.[28] Thus, while some may deem my exegesis of Ezekiel 47 weak in practice, I hope that many will see that the hermeneutical principles that lie behind it are strong.

The Revd Dr Mark Stibbe is vicar of St Andrew's, Chorleywood.

26 McKay, 'When the Veil', p 25.

27 R. Longenecker, *Biblical Exegesis in the Apostolic Period*, Eerdmans, Grand Rapids MI 1994, p 218: 'I suggest we cannot reproduce their [i.e. Jesus' and the NT writers'] *pesher* exegesis.' Longenecker asserts that the use of *pesher* exegesis in the NT, like the use of charismatic gifts, is descriptive but not normative. No justification is made for these stark value judgements. They are merely asserted as if self-evidently true. However, I have been informed at the time of the writing of this article that Longenecker published a fuller justification for this position in an article published in the Tyndale Bulletin.

28 Having said that, it is extraordinary, to my mind, that I could be an honorary lecturer at the same department as my critics and that not one of them ever asked for a discussion or submitted a manuscript for my perusal and comment. Had they done so that would a) have been 'The Mark of the Spirit' (to quote the title of one of their books) and b) it would have saved them making a number of errors.