

## **AUTHOR'S PREFACE**

### **ON THE REASONS FOR THESE ESSAYS**

Although my professional labors have primarily been in New Testament textual criticism and exegesis, hermeneutics has been my life-long passion. By hermeneutics I refer to the questions of the application of biblical texts—theologically and practically—to the life of the church and the individual. Since all hermeneutics is done within some frame of reference (see chapter 5), it is only fitting that I should herewith set forth the frame of reference and therefore the urgencies (even the casual reader will recognize that certain issues predominate) that both called forth these various essays in the first place and bring me now to gather them for publication in a single volume.

The twin focus in the title of this book indicates the context from within which these various essays emerged. As a New Testament scholar, born and raised in the Pentecostal tradition, I have spent nearly my whole adult life teaching and writing in the larger context of North American evangelicalism.

Although these two traditions have much in common, they also have some crucial points of differentiation. Therefore, even though I have lived through the years as a happy member of both traditions, at the same time it has been a situation not without tensions—in three directions.

First, there are the tensions that exist for me within my own historic tradition, the Assemblies of God (US). Here the tension—from my youth—has been between heart and head. My own experience of church and Spirit convinced me of the basic rightness of Pentecostalism's emphasis on the experienced, empowering work of the Spirit, including the ongoing manifestations of the various spiritual gifts. I am a member of this tradition first by birth and experience, and now by choice.

But as a New Testament scholar, even though convinced of the basic rightness of Pentecostalism's historic concerns, I realized our articulation of those concerns left much to be desired hermeneutically. We tended to argue on the basis of historical precedent what we disallowed to others on the same basis. Indeed, I think it is fair to say that this tradition has lacked both hermeneutical sophistication and consistency. On the one hand, we adopted a hermeneutical stance that seemed perfectly evident to us—and therefore should be to others; hence, one can find very little in the early literature of this movement that either articulates or defends its particular *kind of "restorationist" hermeneutics*. But the basic problem with all such restorationist hermeneutics, of course, is consistency. Based on all kinds of cultural and experiential factors, various "restorationists" pick and choose on the basis of their own sets of concerns.

So for me, one of the abiding hermeneutical issues has been to find ways to articulate the validity of Pentecostal experience, but to do so in a way that seems to me more consistently biblical. Thus, I am partly concerned in these essays to articulate a hermeneutics of the Pentecostal experience for Pentecostals themselves in terms that are more consonant with the biblical documents, but I hope to do this in ways that will also be more viable hermeneutically in the larger Christian community. These urgencies find their expression in the three essays in chapters 6–8 of the present volume. Chapter 6 was originally prepared for the 1972 annual meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies. This was my initial probe at trying to find a better way to deal with the question of historical precedent. In revised form, much of this material became part of chapter 6 in *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth* (with Douglas Stuart; Zondervan, 1982). Likewise, chapter 7 was prepared for the 1984 meeting of the SPS. The program com-

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mittee that year, of which I was a member, chose to solicit papers on various issues surrounding the Pentecostal understanding of the baptism in the Holy Spirit. Since I had already hinted at some things on the issue of separability and subsequence, I volunteered to read a paper on that issue. Since these papers in particular invited dialogue within the tradition, I have taken the opportunity of this publication to continue that dialogue—in the form of a postscript to chapter 6.

I should also add here, that although chapter 8 was not written within the context of Pentecostal concerns, I have included it here partly because the urgencies of the original essay were so clearly hermeneutical, but partly also because here is an area where I am convinced the present generation of Pentecostals has almost altogether abandoned its historic roots. Both by experience and by disposition the earliest Pentecostals were a lay movement, where there was little interest in “clergy” and all were called “brother” and “sister.” At the same time, there were a large number of women who had been “ordained” for ministry. But in three generations of the Assemblies of God, I have watched all of that change. When the Pentecostals joined the National Association of Evangelicals, an erosion took place in the area of church and ministry that is bidding fair to destroy the very thing that God the Holy Spirit created in the first place. Despite protests to the contrary, we are now de facto a denomination of clerics, second only to Roman Catholicism; and, unfortunately, we have become a denomination of white, male clerics. Although I have little hope that one voice can stem this overwhelming tide, I include this essay because it expresses the convictions not only of a New Testament scholar, but of a Pentecostal who bemoans the dissolution of the “restoration” on this very crucial theological issue. For some, this essay may seem to have a dimension of “clergy bashing” to it; if so, it probably gives expression to my own deeply populist roots, which I am convinced in this case are also the roots of the New Testament church.

Second, being a Pentecostal within the larger framework of North American evangelicalism has also brought tensions from this side as well. Whereas for the most part there has been a genuine, if not at times wondering, acceptance of “this strange oxymoron among us”—a Pentecostal New Testament scholar is considered by many a contradiction in terms—

there are others for whom such a person is something of an anathema. This has been especially true of many within the Dispensationalist and Reformed traditions. Since I find the hermeneutics of these traditions on the matters of Spirit and women in ministry to be particularly full of inconsistencies—not to mention resulting in some less than satisfactory exegesis—it will not take long for those reading these essays to recognize that I am wont to address these inconsistencies on a regular basis. Although these urgencies find their moments throughout, they are addressed more particularly in chapters 3, 4, and 5.

Finally, as a member of the teaching faculty at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary for twelve years (1974–1986), I found myself thrown into a set of controversies for which as a Pentecostal I had felt no special passion, namely, the issues of inerrancy and women in ministry. It did not take long, however, to recognize that in the minds of many these were related issues, i.e., for some inerrancy carried with it a kind of hermeneutics that disallowed women to minister—or at least to “hold office”—in the church. Since theologically and experientially I was an outsider to these controversies, yet since it became abundantly clear that they bid fair to tamper with my own Pentecostal tradition—negatively from my point of view—I found myself driven with great urgency to give expression to an evangelical hermeneutics that was both faithful to a deep conviction as to the revelatory character of God’s word and at the same time consistent with my own understanding of the gospel and life in the Spirit. It seems to me that evangelicalism has a particularly difficult task hermeneutically—to steer between the Scylla and Charybdis of fundamentalism and liberalism, which are not so much pejorative terms as terms descriptive of positions on either side relative to Scripture from which evangelicals are self-consciously distinct. The results of these concerns are found in chapters 1–5.

Since chapters 2–5 formed part of a series of lectures (noted below), a further word of explanation about chapter 1 might be useful. This essay arose out of an internal struggle at Gordon-Conwell over the appearance of Harold Lindsell’s *The Battle for the Bible* (Zondervan, 1976). Although Lindsell was chair of the Board of Trustees of Gordon-Conwell at the time, the faculty, to a person, took considerable exception to much

of that book, and so expressed itself in a long, book-discussion evening. A challenge to respond in writing resulted in a book of essays entitled *Inerrancy and Common Sense* (Baker, 1980), which latter item (common sense) is what most of us thought Lindsell's volume lacked. Hence the title of my essay, since I was convinced—and still am—that the battle was not over the Bible at all, but over a certain view of inerrancy whose ultimate issue was hermeneutics—what was allowable hermeneutically within the framework of this shibboleth. Much of this essay had already had an earlier history in a lecture on hermeneutics and the Epistles, which I adapted to speak especially to some of the hermeneutical issues raised by Lindsell's book. Much of that material appears in considerably expanded form as chapters 3 and 4 of *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*.

These essays have all had an earlier publication history. I hereby acknowledge appreciation to the following for permission to reproduce them in their present form: (a) Baker Book House for chapters 1 and 6, which first appeared respectively as chapter 7 in *Inerrancy and Common Sense* (eds. R. R. Nicole and J. R. Michaels, 1980), and as chapter 8 in *Perspectives on the New Pentecostalism* (ed. R. P. Spittler, 1976); (b) Cecil M. Robeck, editor of *Pneuma*, for chapter 7, which appeared in volume 7:2 (1985) 87–99; (c) Don Lewis, editor of *Crux*, for chapters 2–5, 8, which appeared respectively in volumes 26 (June 1990; September 1990; December 1990), volume 27 (March 1991), and volume 25 (December 1989).

As is usual for such materials, all of the essays also had a prior history as public lectures. The basic materials in chapters 2–4 were first given as the Day-Higginbotham Lectures at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in February, 1984, under the ambitious title, “On Finding an Evangelical Hermeneutics.” They then metamorphosed in various stages in lectures given at Southern California College (1985), Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary (1988), the Mennonite Brethren Biblical Seminary (1989), and the Canadian Theological Seminary (1990), with the essay in chapter 5 being added in the latter two instances. I hereby express gratitude for the splendid reception and hospitality at each of these institutions.

Although I have gone over all the essays and touched them up some for publication in this format, I have, nonetheless, kept their basically oral format. To have done otherwise

would have required a considerable—and for me, a difficult—rewriting; it would also have caused them to lose some of their flavor, which for good or ill is part of my own oral style. The reader will also need to pardon a certain amount of repetition between/among some of the essays. I have added a considerable number of updating footnotes that do not appear in the original publications; these are enclosed in square brackets [ ] to distinguish them from the original material. If these papers have any further usefulness to the church in their present form, I shall be grateful to the Lord, for whose sake these various strugglings have ultimately been carried on.

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