

**A critical analysis of the Pentecostal hermeneutics used  
by Elim local church leadership teams in relation to the  
topic of women in ministry.**

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The candidate confirms that the work submitted is his own and that appropriate credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others.

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**Abstract**

In this thesis, I address the question of how lay leaders of the Elim Pentecostal Church (Elim) practise their hermeneutics. Building upon prescriptive academic writings regarding Pentecostal hermeneutics, I use qualitative empirical research to explore how the role of Scripture, Spirit and Community are navigated by Elim Pentecostals. This enables me to provide a description of what people say about their hermeneutical approach, whilst examining their actual practice.

In particular, I explore the hermeneutics of Elim lay leaders under tension, centring the discussion around the topic of women in ministry. Although women are officially allowed to minister in all levels of leadership within Elim, previous research has demonstrated that there are ongoing tensions at both local leadership level (Carter, 2016) and congregational level (Nunn, 2018). I chose this topic because it both provides a contentious topic in which hermeneutics can be examined, and it is an ongoing issue about which I am passionate.

In response to the question, I argue that Elim Pentecostals highly value the Bible, utilise the community as a hermeneutical partner (especially in dealing with contentious topics) and bring a certain level of fluidity, claimed to be inspired by the Holy Spirit, to their approach. Reflecting the verse “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Corinthians 3:17), I show how that freedom allows a relatively fluid response. Not only is the triad of Scripture, Spirit and Community used in non-static ways, but the fluidity allows for an incorporation of some interpretive differences, enhancing unity amongst the community of believers. Furthermore, the role of experience and relationships inform the hermeneutical process, as ways forward are found through the incorporation of a Pentecostal pragmatism, within the boundaries of the triad.

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**Abbreviations**

AoG – Assemblies of God (UK)

AG – Assemblies of God (USA)

FGs – Focus groups

NLT – The National Leadership Team of Elim

PFG – Pilot focus group

Biblical passages will be quoted from the English Standard Version (ESV) (2002), or indicated otherwise.



## **CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION**

In this thesis, I address the question of how lay leaders of the Elim Pentecostal Church (Elim) practise their hermeneutics, related, in particular, to the question of women in ministry (I use this term throughout to refer to ordained ministry). Various academic writings propose that Pentecostal hermeneutics involves an intersecting triad of Scripture, Spirit and Community as the locus of the hermeneutics. This somewhat idealised picture has been drawn from studies of Pentecostal history (Archer, 2004a), biblical exegesis (Thomas, 1994), and a consideration of “theological hermeneutics” (Yong, 2002). Building on this work I explore how Elim Pentecostal lay leaders navigate this triad in their hermeneutics. Fundamentally, I will demonstrate that they approach the topic of women in ministry with a hermeneutic that: takes Scripture as God’s word; allows for a real, experiential and fluid leading of the Holy Spirit; is open to the testimonies from within the Church, and generally relates these three aspects in a way that seeks to find a way forward (pragmatically).

I will now explain the scope of the thesis starting with an explanation of Elim and the specific areas of research that are undertaken. I then assess the broader theological sphere this relates to and the various communities I am addressing. Finally, I briefly introduce the focus of the thesis: how the topic of women in ministry can be approached with Pentecostal hermeneutics.

### **1.1. Elim Focussed**

Elim is a UK founded Pentecostal movement which started in 1915 and has grown beyond the UK borders since then.<sup>1</sup> Elim is a Classical Pentecostal movement; according to Anderson, the central theological idea of classical Pentecostalism is: “baptism with (or in) the Holy Spirit” (2014, p.7). In the UK, Elim relates to the Assemblies of God UK (AoG) most closely, along with the Apostolic Church UK. Elim in the UK comprises of more than 550 congregations (Elim, 2019a). Working under one constitution (except Northern Ireland which has its own additional constitution), the governance of the movement is through an annual Conference (Elim, 2018a, pp.4–7), which consists of every Elim minister, along with up to one Lay Representative from each Elim church. For the rest of the year, the National Leadership Team (NLT) exercise the “authorities rights and duties and discretions” given it by Conference to administer the “affairs of the Alliance” (Elim, 2018a, p.8). However, each

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<sup>1</sup> Much information regarding Elim is available on their website (Elim, 2019e).

local church also has a level of autonomy, determined by its Local Constitution (Elim, 2018a, pp.26–27).

In theory, each local Elim church makes local decisions through its “Church Session”. Local ecclesiological “oversight” (Elim, 2018a, p.25) lies with the Church Session, which is comprised of all Pastors, Elders and Deacons. The Church Session makes decisions regarding the vision, business and operation of local church life, including the appointment of Pastors (Elim, 2018a, p.25). When a senior Pastor is being appointed, the National Leadership Team appoints in conjunction with the local Church Session. However, like any social construct, Church Sessions can often be influenced by social relations. For instance, voices from the wider congregation, or the immediate family, can be major influencers. In one focus group, whilst describing their all-male Session, John said: “every one of the elders are married, we obviously could have great influence from our wives” (John, FG2). As well as these external influences, there will likely be internal social influences, where one Session member may not want to upset another by disagreeing with them. Such aspects, as they are revealed, will be discussed in chapters 6-8.

For the purpose of my study, I focussed on the views and practices of Elim lay leaders, therefore Elders and Deacons, rather than Pastors. Lay leaders in Elim differ from Pastors in a few ways. Most significantly, Pastors are ordained and required to have theological training. However, with Elim’s belief in the “priesthood of all believers” (Elim, 2018a, p.2), lay leaders play a crucial role in the local church. Also, lay leaders are less likely to be meaningfully connected with Elim as a movement; they are not required to attend any Regional or National events, and could therefore become quite local-minded.

In my previous research (2016) I had looked at the experience of Elim’s women ministers. Each of these had explained how at some point in their ministry journey they had faced an obstacle from a lay leader in their church, regarding their gender, often citing hermeneutics as an issue. This posed the questions: “Why are women facing obstacles regarding ministry from the local Church Session?”, and “What are the hermeneutics being employed by Church sessions?”. Regarding studies on Pentecostalism, Grey states: “It is crucial therefore that the vehicle for this “voice” of Pentecostalism engages its grassroots constituency that

it may be reflective of the community for which it claims to speak” (2011, p.32). I therefore restricted my study to Elim lay leaders.<sup>2</sup>

The current official position within Elim, as agreed by the national Conference (Carter, 2016, p.50), is that women can be ordained and minister at any and every level of leadership, including the National Leadership Team (see chapter 2 for more discussion on the four voices, including the *espoused* voice (Cameron et al., 2010, p.54)). Yet, as I have just mentioned I have seen how there are tensions experienced by women in ministry at the local level because of their gender (2016). An internal report on women and ethnic groups previously advised that:

The whole area of theology of women in ministry needs to be addressed in a public open forum. Unless we have a clear ‘theological’ based approach openly supported by the NLT and regional teams change of any sort is unlikely. (Hudson et al., 2008)

This report was produced ten years after women had been approved for ordination. Yet, their recommendation shows that ongoing discussions need to be made in a more public forum.<sup>3</sup> Whilst this has yet to happen, there remains a difference between the *espoused* and *operant* voice (Cameron et al., 2010, p.54). The discrepancy between national and local practice poses important questions about their relationship, as well as that of culture. The attempts of movement-wide culture formation, for example through regional and national meetings, publications and websites, may or may not influence the culture of a local church. Although my methods are not designed to directly analyse such cultural communications, some reference to them is made in the surveys and focus groups.

The relationship between Elim as a national movement and Elim at the local grassroots level offers great opportunity of research into a number of areas.<sup>4</sup> Bryman highlights the importance of the ontology of a social entity, particularly in relation to its organization and culture (2012, p.32). In particular a constructionist ontological position takes the view that the “organization and culture” can be fashioned and revised by “social actors” (2012, p.33). In this thesis the social actors (myself and the research participants) have the potential of revising and fashioning the culture and organisation of Elim as a wider movement.

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<sup>2</sup> Since my initial research, Nunn has completed similar work at the congregational level (2018).

<sup>3</sup> I make the observation elsewhere that this was a major difference between the way that Elim debated the topic of women in ministry (in relative privacy) and the way that the Swedish Pentecostal Movement debated the topic (in the public sphere) (Carter, 2016, p.75).

<sup>4</sup> Further research could examine such areas as governance (particularly in the operation of Church Sessions), ecclesiology (varied views on how to run a service), mission (local and international), etc.

### **1.2. Beyond Elim**

Historically, as I mentioned above, Elim is considered a Classical Pentecostal movement, or part of the “first wave” of Pentecostalism (Stephenson, 2011, p.491) which relates specifically to the early 1900’s with a common trace to Azusa Street in the USA.<sup>5</sup> Following the first wave, scholars discuss the second wave and third wave. The second wave refers to the charismatic movement of the 1960’s, whilst the third wave refers to a broader group of “neocharismatics” who accept and embrace charismata whilst not tracing their roots to the first or second wave (Stephenson, 2011, p.493).

With my research focussing on Elim, my thesis is most relevant to Pentecostal theology that is rooted in Classical Pentecostalism. However, the practice of Elim Pentecostals in their hermeneutics informs theology across the spectrum, not just Classical Pentecostalism, or even broader Pentecostalisms. It will become clear that although the research focus is of a limited scope, the impact is far wider; in chapter 2, I go into more detail regarding my disciplinary positioning and comparable studies. Being an Elim minister (see reflexivity section in chapter 2), my initial concern has been to research and inform the Elim movement. The thesis still has this localised impact as I present how Elim Pentecostal hermeneutics can provide ways in which the topic of women in ministry can be ‘better’ addressed. I use the word “better” to imply that both Elim (the *espoused* position) and I have a perception of women released into ministry, that is not currently accepted at all local church levels (Carter, 2016; Nunn, 2018). As such, this thesis has become a positive intervention in what I believe remains an issue of importance within Elim. Beyond Elim, there are many other Pentecostal movements still struggling with this topic,<sup>6</sup> and beyond them, many other denominations are wrestling with similar questions; this work will hopefully be of use in those parts of the Church too. As Keener says: “Pentecostals and charismatics can continue to play a distinctive role in renewing the rest of the church” (2016, p.288).

### **1.3. Thesis Focus**

This thesis is not attempting to give an account of Pentecostal hermeneutics in general. Rather, in response to a specific issue/question (that of women in ministry), the thesis

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<sup>5</sup> Although not all Classical Pentecostal movements claim the connection to Azusa street, for instance the Mukti revival in India (Anderson, 2013, p.31), and Canadian and Scandinavian beginnings (Blumhofer, 2006, p.61).

<sup>6</sup> For instance, from conversations with European Pentecostals I have learnt that German Pentecostal women were only ordained from 2007; and that in Italy women are not ordained in the Assemblies of God. Furthermore, in the UK, women are not ordained in the Apostolic Church.

explores how Elim lay leaders bring, or think they bring, resolution to such an issue. In relation to the topic of women in ministry, various Scriptural texts are included as discussion points. The hermeneutical practices, both in response to the issue, and in response to the Scriptural texts, are examined. This analysis provides a picture of Pentecostal hermeneutics particularly regarding contentious issues, as practised and described, within Elim.

Whilst I focus largely on the claimed practices and analysed practices of Elim lay leaders' hermeneutics, the impetus for this research remains at the heart of the thesis, and that concerns my desire to see women released into the ministry for which God has called and equipped them. Rather than simply taking the route of addressing specific biblical texts, which has been done by so many others in so many contexts, I decided to take a step back and consider the biblical hermeneutics of texts and the general hermeneutics of the topic, as practised by Elim lay leaders. Therefore, the study on Pentecostal hermeneutics becomes the process through which the question of women in ministry can be addressed. I suggest that there is a crisis in the way that Pentecostals approach their biblical hermeneutics. A crisis that is compounded through the various non-Pentecostal (in particular, Evangelical) influences that are easily accessible and perhaps prevalent in the local church. By examining practised Pentecostal hermeneutics in the light of academic theoretical Pentecostal hermeneutics, I am able to provide a fuller picture of ways in which such Pentecostal hermeneutics can find a way forward regarding contentious topics (namely, women in ministry).

#### **1.4. Overview of the chapters**

In this section I give a brief overview of each chapter and groupings of chapters. In chapter 2, I explain the key philosophical concepts of epistemology and methodology that inform this thesis. In particular, I introduce some specific ideas that recur throughout, including pragmatism and Pentecostal methodology. Framing these concepts from broad academic writings, I explain how they relate to my approach and my findings. In particular I introduce five suggestions by James K.A. Smith<sup>7</sup> (2010) regarding a distinct Pentecostal worldview; these are then referred to and considered in the light of my empirical findings. I also then

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<sup>7</sup> (For key dialogue partners to this thesis an introduction will be included) James K. A. Smith is professor of philosophy at Calvin College (USA), where he holds the Gary and Henrietta Byker Chair in Applied Reformed Theology and Worldview. He is a self-confessing small-*p* pentecostal and charismatic (2010, xvii), by which he identifies himself with the renewal and charismatic traditions rather than the classical Pentecostal tradition.

discuss the disciplinary positioning of this study, explaining how a UK Pentecostal-based empirical work can impact beyond both the UK and Pentecostalism.

In chapter 3, I give a detailed account of the methods that I use for my empirical research. Here, I explain the ways in which surveys and focus groups are appropriate methods in response to my methodological choices. I also provide a testimony in which I bring an example of my experience from preparing for the focus groups, where my method and methodology (in particular Pentecostal methodology) demonstrably combine.

In chapters 4 and 5, I introduce in detail the claims of Pentecostal scholars concerning Pentecostal hermeneutics, specifically exploring the “triad” of Scripture, Spirit and Community. I focus on each of these three areas, presenting key claims and discussions from other scholars that relate to my subsequent findings. Under the chapter exploring Scripture, for instance, I discuss various biblical historical-critical and historical-grammatical approaches. Key Pentecostal concepts, such as “encounter” and “experience” are also discussed in relation to hermeneutics, in which I present academic support for these affective approaches. In later chapters I demonstrate the extent in which these approaches are adopted and used by my participants.

The following three chapters, 6 to 8, provide an analysis of my empirical research, which I generally align with the triad of Scripture, Spirit and Community. Chapter 6 emphasises the way in which my respondents and participants practise (and say they practise) biblical hermeneutics. I examine the use of historical-grammatical approaches, Scriptural contexts, and pre-commitments. The analysis reinforces the importance of the Bible for Elim Pentecostals, whilst also introducing the wider aspects of Pentecostal hermeneutics examined in the following chapters.

Chapter 7 focusses on the way that the Holy Spirit is considered and referenced in Pentecostal hermeneutics. The fluidity of the Holy Spirit appears to encourage a pragmatic freedom in some of my participants as they approach the topic of women in ministry. Yet the process of consensus on this topic is not universal, therefore, I discuss the way in which the Spirit is included as contentious topics are considered.

My final analysis chapter, chapter 8, considers the way in which Community is referred to in the discussion and presentation of Pentecostal hermeneutics in my empirical research. Both the place of the individual and the place of the community (local and wider) are discussed and considered in the light of the previous analysis chapters, and the introductory chapters of 4 and 5. In particular, I show how experience within the community remains a perceived authority in the hermeneutical process of Elim lay leaders. Furthermore, relational aspects are revealed as important in the process of Pentecostal hermeneutics.

Finally, I conclude in chapter 9, with a summary of the findings and a proposal for Pentecostal hermeneutics. Here I bring together such key concepts as pragmatism, freedom and relationality; suggesting that Pentecostal hermeneutics does and should incorporate them. I end with suggestions for ways forward for the academy, for Elim, and for the topic of women in ministry.

## **CHAPTER 2. METHODOLOGY AND MORE**

Part of the genius and uniqueness of pentecostal experience is precisely that one does not see the Spirit's care and activity as exceptions or interruptions of the "normal" ordering of the universe. A feature of the strange and fantastic world of pentecostal spirituality is a sense that the miraculous is normal, that the surprises of the Spirit are normal. (Smith, 2010, p.98)

The question of how research is undertaken, according to Sprague, should invoke three elements for examination: "epistemology, methodology, and method" (2005, p.5). In this chapter, I will be taking the first two elements and exploring the ways in which they inform my methodology; in chapter 3, I will be discussing the method.

### **2.1. Epistemology**

Epistemology is the broad philosophical question of how/what/why we know something/anything (Hathcoat and Nicholas, 2014, p.301). This research question is located within the sphere of Elim Church Session members, assessing how they interpret their Bible and make a decision regarding the question of women in ministry. Epistemologically I need to account for how I know what they think, or perhaps more pertinently what they do and what they say they do, and the reasons given for those actions. I now explain a few ways in which I am able to do this.

A central aspect of my epistemology, which I acknowledge reflexively, is based upon a worldview in which the Christian God exists. Similar to how John Swinton suggests Christians should honestly confess that prayer underlies their research (2012, pp.79–84), Pentecostals recognise God at work in their lives and research,<sup>8</sup> even if this is not always voiced. My Christian faith, including prayer, forms my epistemology and as I later explain, influences my methodology. There are various differences between Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism, some of which are disputed, and some will be discussed in this thesis. However, regarding epistemology, Marius Nel distinguishes Evangelical epistemology from Pentecostal epistemology by saying that the main divergence is "in the way in which they know, experience and receive revelation from God" (Nel, 2017c, pp.2–3). He argues that Pentecostals are primarily experiential and relational in their knowing of God, whilst Evangelicals remove such experiential approaches on the "basic presuppositions of a

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<sup>8</sup> A good account of academic Pentecostal testimonies is recorded in *Pentecostals in the academy: testimonies of call* (Fettke and Waddell, 2012).



scientific worldview” (Nel, 2017c, p.2). Although this simplified example is a caricature, it does help reinforce how epistemology often does function for Pentecostals: through experience and relationship.

Johns and Johns have previously also suggested that there is a specific Pentecostal epistemology, one that is based upon knowing God through encounter (1992). Epistemology, from a Pentecostal perspective, is relational and experiential, and necessarily linked with God. They argue that it is important for Pentecostals to utilise methods that do not negate this basic epistemology (1992, p.110). This in part encouraged my use of focus groups (see chapter 3). Pentecostal epistemology is filtered through ongoing relationships, both with God, and the meaning He gives to existence; and with other people, and the construction of knowledge that comes from that. Smith suggests that “a pentecostal epistemology is always already a kind of aesthetic, an epistemic grammar that privileges aesthesis (experience) before noesis (intellection)” (2010, pp.80–81). My research will demonstrate that the epistemological practise of Elim Pentecostal lay leaders does give considerable space for experiential knowledge, whilst not avoiding intellectual knowledge.

My approach to this research is not simply to know or to discover what is either ‘out there’<sup>9</sup> or ‘constructed in the process of the research’,<sup>10</sup> rather it is also to make known. Sprague encourages the researcher to *ask passionately* the questions that will “help make a difference, help with a problem, enhance justice” (2005, p.199); to *analyze critically* by engaging in broad and critical discourse; and finally, to *answer empoweringly* by reporting the research in “ways that will engage others”. I approach this research with this epistemological desire: to know and let known.

### 2.1.1. Pragmatism

As I will later show in the analysis of my findings, some of the responses, that are made in expressing the interpretive decisions regarding women in ministry, could be described as pragmatic. In this section I want to explore the relationship between pragmatism and Pentecostalism as expressed by scholars.

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<sup>9</sup> For instance: “Realism...holds that facts are out there just waiting to be revealed” (Hunter et al., 2013, p.48).

<sup>10</sup> As for instance argued by Sprague: “all knowledge is constructed in a specific matrix of physical location, history, culture, and interests, and that these matrices change in configuration from one location to another” (2005, p.40).

Smith, in his attempt to present a Pentecostal contribution to the wider field of Christian philosophy suggests that “a pentecostal epistemology will find resonance with a long history of pragmatism” (2010, p.67). He proposes this in the light of the Pentecostal experience of knowledge, making the case that Pentecostal epistemology leans towards “‘knowing’ before and beyond propositions” (2010, p.68). Pentecostal experience would appear to have an element of awareness that is influenced by the working of the Holy Spirit, to which Smith looks towards pragmatism for an account.

Holm (1994) looks at the similarities between pragmatism and Pentecostalism, making the point that William James (a key thinker in the philosophy of pragmatism) was writing at the same time that the Pentecostal revival was occurring in America (in the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century). More than that, Holm makes the point that James also wrote a book on religious experiences which included testimonies of Holy Spirit encounters,<sup>11</sup> linked with the Scriptural account of the Apostles on the Day of Pentecost.

Holm recognises some historical negative connotations of pragmatism, in particular, how it “relativizes any objective quest for truth” (1994, p.5). He connects this relativism with common Pentecostal experience, saying:

Indeed it has been said with justification on many occasions, Pentecostalism is better ‘felt than told’ or it is better ‘caught than taught.’ There has always been a tendency either consciously or unconsciously to put experience in the drivers [sic] seat while rationalism sits in the back giving directions.  
(1994, p.5)

Yet neither he, nor my respondents, would wish to express Pentecostalism as irrational. Rather, the emphasis is on an experience-informed rationality. In this vein, Warrington suggests that Pentecostals “are prepared to accept the dangers of pragmatism rather than miss the opportunity of observing and experiencing a new work of the Spirit” (2008, p.23). This reinforces Smith’s view of radical openness (2010, p.12) and introduces, as I demonstrate particularly in chapter 6-8, a flexibility in Pentecostal hermeneutical approaches. Such approaches enable the Bible to be viewed, both as God’s Word and as applied to hearers today through the Holy Spirit. Likewise, Holm makes it clear he does not advocate an “unbridled pragmatism”, but rather wants “the interpretative community [to] exercise an adjudicating role” (1994, p.11), which I particularly discuss in chapter 8.

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<sup>11</sup> “The Varieties of Religious Experience”.

Within the context of ‘signs’ during revivals, both Poloma and Gaede examine the use of pragmatism. Firstly, Poloma views pragmatism with a negative connotation, implying that there is either “free flow of charisma” or a “pragmatism and expediency in order to meet institutional needs” (1997, p.265). Whilst Gaede, who sets up a dichotomy between “experiential activity of God” and “structure”, finds that a “hermeneutical principle of pragmatism...resolved a perceived conflict between the authority of the written Word and the sovereign acts of God in revival” (1989, p.92). In part the definition of pragmatism determines its use in these cases. What I intend to do is find a use that makes sense within the Elim context, and within the context of my findings. I will start this by looking at the work of Elim theologian Frestadius.

With a focus on Elim’s approaches to knowledge and decision making, Frestadius argues that Elim adopted a “*Pentecostal Biblical Pragmatism*”(italics in original) that is formed out of three areas: “(1) (pre-)Pentecostal tradition, (2) the Bible and (3) experience” (2018, p.158). Similar to my findings regarding the way in which the authority of the Bible is regarded **and** the real role of experience, Frestadius claims:

The pragmatic rationality, already evident in Elim’s justification for the divine inspiration of the Bible, meant that ‘experience’ played an important role both as a source of knowledge and particularly in providing justification for theological beliefs. (2018, p.164)

He explains the role of experience for Elim Pentecostals by claiming that “knowledge of God and the world is gained primarily through the senses.” But, Elim’s practice was less concerned with “primarily on *what produces the belief* [rather than] on *what the belief produces*” (italics in original) (2018, p.169). This he particularly relates to the way in which Elim Pentecostals’ focus on story telling (including testimonies), claiming that such accounts “are the best way of communicating personal ‘experiences’ and the effects of those ‘experiences’” (2018, p.185).

Frestadius’s arguments explore the historical Elim, particularly in relation to key events in the mid-twentieth century (which he identifies as epistemological crises). His claims of a Bible-centric and experience-related approach, although derived from a specific historical moment, are not limited to that moment. This approach appears entirely valid and current with my own findings (as I demonstrate in detail in chapters 6-8). Frestadius explains the relation between the Bible and experience in his “proposal of Elim’s *signs-based pragmatism*” (italics in original), by saying that:

it maintains an empirical and pragmatic element by embracing a 'semi-experimental' approach to Pentecostal 'signs,' but does so by simultaneously appreciating the 'I-Thou' dynamic inherent within the Full Gospel. This means that the 'signs' are not self-explanatory but need to be 'spiritually discerned' (1 Cor. 2:14). (2018, p.337)

Similar to Holm (above) who argued for the requirement of the community of faith to provide a testing ground, so too we find that there cannot be an 'anything goes' approach to experience. The relationship between experience and Scripture remain somewhat balanced.

Pentecostal pragmatism combines the rather simplistic pragmatic approach of "do what works", with, as Holm and Smith argue, the guiding sense of the Holy Spirit. I argue, for instance, that the sense of the Spirit's leading in bringing a directive outcome to a decision, mitigates on the criticism that this is *merely* pragmatism; whilst the emphasis on pragmatism helps define the Spirit-human interaction as one of manifestation and action. The use of 'pragmatism' in this thesis is generally within the realm of this explanation of Pentecostal pragmatism, and therefore is concerned both with the involvement and leading of the Spirit and the development of outcomes. I will be specifically referring to the process in which a Church Session finds a way forward with regards to women in ministry, that, appears to them, to be within the will of God. As such, my use of pragmatism is most similar to that expressed by Frestadius. This is an approach that holds the authority of the Bible as God's word, whilst also giving space to experience, and as I will argue, to relationship. Whilst the authority of the Bible remains the same, there will be a *pragmatic flexibility* depending on the way in which a topic is raised (relationship), discussed (the community), and moved (the Spirit). These aspects will be analysed in chapters 6-8.

## **2.2. Methodology**

In this section I will be exploring a number of methodological approaches. Some of these are central to the approach I have taken across the whole study (for instance Pentecostal Methodology), others are pertinent to aspects of the research (e.g. Practical theology with reference to the qualitative research).

If epistemology is the theory of knowledge, and method (see chapter 3) is the "technique for gathering and analysing information" (Sprague, 2005, p.5), then methodology is where the two interact. Although there can be conflation between epistemology and methodology, methodology (in the sense proposed) considers if the methods are

compatible with the epistemology. As Sprague says “Researchers’ choices of *how* to use these methods constitute their methodology” (italics in original) (2005, p.5).

My epistemology seeks to know what influences Church Session member’s decisions regarding women in ministry (particularly based upon their hermeneutic), whilst holding the view that such knowledge (both of the Church Session and of my understanding of their decision process) comes from relationships and various social constructs. Therefore, my methodology informed my choice of methods, in order to be able to allow for such social voices to be heard.

The aim to discover how a single Church Session comes to a decision about women in ministry is different to the aim to discover how Church Sessions come to such a decision. The first could be discovered with a deeper ethnographic approach, where ‘immersion’ into that single Church Session would begin to reveal some of the relationships, power-plays, lines of authority and general processes of decision making. As valuable as that would be as a research study, this particular study seeks to gain a wider picture from Elim as a movement. Initially I aimed to gain a broader (and subsequently thinner) understanding of the general thoughts and processes of Church Sessions through surveys. Following on from that big picture, I aimed to produce a thicker description of Church Session decision making approaches through focus groups. As the over-arching methodology I will start by explaining Pentecostal methodology, I will then discuss the methodological roles that “ordinary” and then “practical” theology have with regards to this study.

### 2.2.1. Pentecostal Methodology

I trace my path and journey to starting this research to specific moments and promptings of the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, I would claim that the research journey itself has been guided by the Holy Spirit. These claims form the basis of what I term *Pentecostal methodology*. In chapter 3 I give an example of the Spirit’s leading as part of the research process, as claimed by one of my participants in a Focus group. In recent interviews with some Pentecostal academics, from which I anticipate writing a separate paper, each confirmed that they felt that God had led them to and guided them through their various research undertakings. Yet, what is perhaps striking is the way in which this was *not* explicitly stated in their publications. My argument for, and analysis of, a Pentecostal methodology is, in part, an attempt to bring this approach into the open academic forum. The academic space can be conceived as a secular space, and yet I argue that no space, for Pentecostals (for

instance) is secular. The relational and experiential nature of Pentecostal epistemology is such that any academic space is also a space in which God interacts and operates. This section is an attempt of acknowledging this otherwise implicit Pentecostal position.

Not all Pentecostals accept that there is a 'Pentecostal methodology', Martin for instance, would rather offer various options that accommodate the Holy Spirit (2009, p.34). His rather mixed message seems to imply both that there is and is not a Pentecostal methodology; his preference is for a Pentecostal hermeneutic rather than a Pentecostal methodology, but I believe he says this because he restricts the idea to biblical interpretation. Pentecostal methodology is often viewed in terms of the methodology in which a Pentecostal approaches biblical hermeneutics.<sup>12</sup> I am using it, however, to refer to the methodology of the whole area of research, including but not limited to biblical hermeneutics. This is affirmed by Amos Yong who distinguishes between a hermeneutics of faith and a "hermeneutics of reality as a whole" (2002, p.7).<sup>13</sup> He suggests that the triadic of Spirit, Scripture and community,<sup>14</sup> should be used not just in "theological interpretation, but also to locate the sources of theological inquiry". For example, as Andrew Lord explains the "heart of pentecostal methodology is a belief that it is Spirit-driven" (2010, p.33). I therefore aim to be open to the Spirit in every area of the research.

Six months into my research journey I attended the Elim Leaders' Summit of 2017. Elim minister Malcolm Duncan was one of the main speakers, and his message was delivered with the customary passion of a man who has engaged with church and society at the highest levels. During his talk he proposed "five suggestions around what it might mean for us to be men and women that are Pentecostal in the twenty first century" (2017, sec. 1:34). These five he gave as '*proclamation*', '*presence*', '*prophetic*', '*prayer*' and '*pain*'. Neither he nor I would argue that these are unique to Pentecostals, however they are relevant, perhaps distinct.

He exhorted that Pentecostals are "deeply rooted in the preaching of the gospel" (2017, sec. 1:35). *Proclamation*, whether it is described as preaching, narrative, orality or testimony, are central aspects of Pentecostalism. But, according to Duncan, it must be

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<sup>12</sup> For instance see (Clark, 2001, p.75).

<sup>13</sup> Similar to Archer who says Pentecostalism has "a distinct theological view of reality" (2007, p.302).

<sup>14</sup> Archer (Archer, 2009) and Thomas (1994) also utilise this triad, I examine this in more detail in the chapter on Pentecostal hermeneutics.

more than preaching, Elim Pentecostals must engage with the culture and the issues faced as being part of that culture. So he encouraged the listeners to be “the Spirit’s vehicle for transformation in every context that they find themselves” (2017, sec. 1:39). Regarding ‘*presence*’, Duncan focused on transformation within and beyond church gatherings. He pleaded with Pentecostals to be *prophetically* “a voice for the voiceless” and to “stand in the public square and...declare the mind and the will of God” (2017, sec. 1:40). With an emphasis on *prayer* he reminded the listeners that “without the Holy Spirit we can do nothing” (2017, sec. 1:41). Finally, through personal testimony he challenged us “to develop a stronger theology of *pain* and of suffering” (2017, sec. 1:46). I mention all this, not least because it is a current message within Elim that piqued my interest as I evaluated a Pentecostal methodology, but also for the impassioned nature of his words and delivery. For me, the topic of women in ministry, that relates to wider cultural issues, has become a passionate one. I want to add my voice (*proclamation*) to the call that desires women to be empowered into the roles for which God has called and equipped them. Not only do I believe that God has led me into this area of research (including through *prayer*), but I present a theology of God’s *presence* when describing a Pentecostal methodology. Furthermore, this thesis demonstrates ways (*prophetically?*) in which genuine concerns (*pain*) regarding the topic of women in ministry can be addressed in line with God’s Word, Spirit and bride.

In order to help develop and express a Pentecostal methodology, I draw upon the work of James K.A. Smith, in which he suggests five distinct aspects that pentecostals have. He chooses to place an emphasis on the “*practices* of pentecostal spirituality” (italics in original) rather than define pentecostal dogma and doctrine (2010, p.11). It is from within these practices that he proposes five distinctives that help frame the Pentecostal “worldview”. He argues that his approach, to define these aspects from practice, is not ‘*theological*’, but focuses on the embodied practices and lived nature of Pentecostalism. I question Smith’s distinction here, and rather would accept a description of practices as theological (see section on practical theology below). His argument is that he is not making doctrinal or dogmatic statements, but, in my mind that is a restrictive view of theology. I would hold that a description of Pentecostal practice, especially as a spiritual and embodied practice, is theological, even if it is not a statement of doctrine. He also suggests that the five distinct aspects of Pentecostal practice are not exhaustive, rather, he

encourages debate, discussion and revision of them. I will therefore bear that in mind as I locate my methodology loosely within his suggestions.

The five aspects that Smith suggests that are implicit in pentecostal practice (and globally so) are: a “position of **radical openness to God**”, an **“enchanted” theology of creation and culture**”, a **“nondualistic affirmation of embodiment and materiality**”, an **“affective, narrative epistemology”** and finally an **“eschatological orientation to mission and justice”** (bold in original) (2010, p.12). I will refer to these throughout as they relate to my discussion. I will firstly look at how Smith articulates three of these distinctives. These three occur most frequently in my research, with only occasional reference to the other two.

#### **2.2.1.1. Radical openness to God**

Smith takes the ‘Pentecostal passage’ of Acts 2 and explains how Peter’s response to the outpouring of the Holy Spirit demonstrates not only an openness to God, but also to “God doing something *differently or new*” (2010, p.35) (italics in original). The situation as described in Acts 2 (speaking in tongues) presents at least two differing interpretations of the events, one that looked to wine and drunkenness, the other that looked to God and the Holy Spirit. Within Scripture there is no record of something like this having happened before, there was no precedent from which Peter could relate, yet Peter with “hermeneutical boldness, asserts: “This is from God!”” (2010, p.33).

Pentecostals today still have an expectation that God will do something, and that may well be new, different, and exciting. Pentecostal practice involves an openness to God through prophetic words, and a receptivity to God through healings (for instance). These are key elements that help define and demarcate Pentecostals. Although, as Smith also points out, these should be elements of what defines normal Christian experience (2010, p.32); however they have come to be associated with Pentecostals (and the broader Charismatics and Neo-pentecostals), rather than with cessationist Evangelicals (for instance), who would by definition not accept such ongoing manifestations.

This radical openness is not so much a doctrine, but an experience, a practice, a pre-theoretical worldview. As such, in approaching this research, I too have a radical openness to God. Not only was my reason for doing this research initially stimulated by circumstances and encounters that I can now see God’s hand in; but in the actual process



of the research I sought to remain open to the direction in which God led me. For instance, the respondents who chose to answer my survey, and the participants lined up for the focus groups, were, I believe, themselves guided by God to bring something of God's revelation to this study. I am open to the fact that God may want to lead me and this research down a path that I have not expected. I am open to seeing God's hand in the most unlikely of places. An open and flexible approach impacts my methodology, which fundamentally is not just going where the research takes me, but is going where God leads.

I acknowledge the expectation of the Holy Spirit in guiding myself and my participants, I value the place of prayer. Like Thomas who prays that his academic contribution will improve understanding (2010, xiii), so too I pray that my contribution will be of value. For some, these rather confessional approaches may seem out of place in the academy. However, there are avenues available that consider the place of post-secularism within the academy, for instance Radical Orthodoxy (as summarised by Smith (2004)) or, in the American context where the "secular revolution" of the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century is being challenged by a new "*post-secular revolution*" (Schmalzbauer and Mahoney, 2012, p.216).<sup>15</sup> For Pentecostals (including academics), a radical openness to God, I argue, should lead to a freedom and an expectation to be holistically transparent.

#### **2.2.1.2. Nondualistic affirmation of embodiment and materiality**

Another distinctive that is demonstrated in Pentecostal practice, Smith argues for a holistic affirmation of body and soul, rather than a dualism of matter and soul (2010, p.42). The key practice that Pentecostals adopt that leads Smith to this claim, is the prayer for bodily healing. Pentecostals believe not just in spiritual healing (restoration or wholeness) through Christ, but here and now physical healing too. This practice indicates that the body (including materiality like sexuality and the arts) is not evil, but part of God's good creation. Smith also makes connections with Roman Catholic social teaching and liberation theology, as well as explaining why this holistic approach can lead to a prosperity gospel.

A Pentecostal worldview that accepts the holistic nature of a person encourages a methodology that embraces the inherent value of women and men as embodied people. Living and *being* in the world should be, in the minds of Pentecostals, a good thing. Often

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<sup>15</sup> Outside of the academy there have been attempts at dealing with the so called sacred-secular divide for Christians, especially by the Elim minister and academic Neil Hudson (2012).

this is viewed as either an integral part of mission ('in the world but not of it' – a paraphrase of John 17:14-15) therefore a good thing; or, it can be viewed negatively, taking a particular reading of James 4:4 "Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God?". Aspects of embodiment are discussed in the analysis of the focus groups (see chapters 6-8).

### **2.2.1.3. Affective, narrative epistemology**

As a further Pentecostal distinctive, Smith's also contrasts "rationalistic evangelical theology" which he describes as "primarily intellectual" with Pentecostal practice which he sees as incorporating emotions and narratives (2010, p.43). Experience and knowledge, whether emotional or not, is transmitted through testimonies as a central part of Pentecostal practice. Kenneth Archer argues that Pentecostals can too easily adopt "modernistic epistemological modes that are inherently hostile to Pentecostal practices of story-telling and testimony" (2007, p.306). Narrative, especially testimony, and experiences of God, particularly within the shared context of the community of faith, are regularly identified as key components of Pentecostal practice.<sup>16</sup>

Smith makes the clarification that this is not simply a packaging of propositional truths into narrative format for "the simple" (2010, p.44); but rather Pentecostals are narrative people. As such, the use of testimonies in Pentecostal practice is often mentioned.<sup>17</sup> Smith makes reference to a third of worship services being given to testimonies in early Pentecostal practice (2010, pp.50–51). My own experience within Elim would range from no testimonies given in a service (frequently), to a few minutes of testimonies (occasionally). However, Sunday services are not the only place where testimonies can be offered (mid-week meetings may be more convenient). I am partly to blame for that lack of testimony, having Pastored some of those churches. It may well be that other churches still use testimonies more frequently. There is no doubt however, that testimonies are still relevant and powerful in current Pentecostal practice, even if not always given 'air-time'.

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<sup>16</sup> For instance Suurmond identifies five components: oral liturgy, narrative theology and testimonies, congregational participation in the gifts of the Spirit, intuitive communication (e.g. dreams and visions), and a united experience of body and spirit (1994, pp.22–25).

<sup>17</sup> Steven Land suggests that testimony, along with prayer and healing are areas that should be incorporated in efforts of ecumenical unity (1992, p.44), a point Hollenweger later makes substituting healing for "worship, music" (1999, p.152). Noel dedicates a subsection to the centrality of testimony (2010, pp.114–119), see also Nel (2017c).

Testimonies are not simply a practice of Pentecostals in a worship setting, but form the Pentecostal worldview of Pentecostal academics too. My own use of testimonies in this thesis is derived from my belief in the power of such stories, and their affirmation by other scholars. Yong explains the importance of orality for Pentecostals, especially ‘testimony’, and uses such to introduce non-Pentecostals to that genre, whilst also using them to introduce the “problematic of each chapter” (2000, p.28). Describing the use of memoir, testimony, story and narrative, Smith points to both Amos Yong (2000) and Frank Macchia (2006) who “embraced the centrality of testimony in their pentecostal theorizing” (2010, xxiii).<sup>18</sup> Smith explains that narratives and testimonies are “integral to the sensibility that characterizes a pentecostal philosophy” (2010, xxiv). It is a natural step to take this same characteristic and apply it to pentecostal *theology*. Smith prefers the term “worldview” to ‘theology’ here (2010, p.27). But I am happy to draw upon another of his works, where, explaining the approach of Radical Orthodoxy, he places a form of confessional *theology* as a header category (called “Theology<sup>1</sup>”) through which all our “theoretical reflection on our being in the world” (including philosophy) can be located (2004, p.177). Either way, testimony is an inherent aspect of Pentecostal practice, including Pentecostal academics, and certain testimonies will be included in this thesis.

Having outlined Smith’s aspects of a pentecostal worldview and connected that to my own attempt at explaining the broad Pentecostal methodology that surrounds this thesis, I will now explain my own position regarding this research, before moving on to other methodological approaches that have influenced the research.

### 2.2.2. Reflexivity and positionality

I am a Pentecostal (and an Elim minister). This means that I approach the whole topic of research with a mind-set and assumptions that would be different from someone who was not a Pentecostal, or even, not a Christian. In accordance with the Pentecostal methodology, I expect God to speak to me through the Bible, and I expect Him to speak to me through His Holy Spirit. But even with that *radical openness* (Smith, 2010, p.33), I already hold a view regarding women in ministry and what the Bible has to say about it. Despite these *confessions* this study will be *critically analysed* (Sprague, 2005, p.199). This research does not require the reader to hold my views or position, but as will be evident my views and position do frame the research.

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<sup>18</sup> For further examples of the place of testimony, one whole book is devoted to privileging the testimony of academic Pentecostals (Fettke and Waddell, 2012).

It was from within my local church (at that time) that the question of women in ministry first grabbed my attention. Within that community there were diverse opinions with variously developed reasons. The strength of opinion, particularly opposing women in ministry from a vocal few was notable. During this time my own position became clearer, particularly through discussion, reading and prayer; I was especially bothered by both the status quo (“don’t rock the boat, we’re fine as we are” view) and the outward opposition I witnessed. This led me to become a passionate advocate of ministry and ordination equality, preaching and teaching on the topic within my local church. The various strongly held views raised a number of questions that led to my MA by Research. That in turn exposed a regular antipathy towards women in ministry from within Elim local Church Sessions, which in part gave rise to this current study (2016). There was within me a genuine sense from God, that I was to continue my research, and with prayer and consultation I stepped away from leading a church to devote myself full-time to this study.

I approach this study as an ordained Elim minister, who remains involved with Elim churches (in preaching and teaching), has responsibility for setting and marking the studies of Ministers in Training and is involved in teaching abroad for Elim Missions (in conjunction with “*Word and Spirit*” an initiative of Elim minister Dr Keith Warrington). Although currently not leading a church,<sup>19</sup> I remain connected with local Elim church congregations in weekly attendance, continue to attend regular ministerial meetings and annual Conferences. I have also been an active part of ministers invited by the General Superintendent (GS) for ‘roundtable’ discussions on the topic of women in ministry within Elim. Also, this specific study has been sanctioned and encouraged by Elim’s GS, but is neither provided for, nor directed by Elim’s leadership, it remains an independent piece of research. Although independent, there is an expectation (mine and hopefully the GS’s) that this research will be of benefit to Elim as a movement. To that extent the research borders on Theological Action Research (which I look at in a section below), which can be broadly defined as:

A research approach that works *with* a community on a common topic of interest, that is, engaging the community in finding answers and applying those answers to the point of concern. (italics in original) (Hunter et al., 2013, p.17)

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<sup>19</sup> For six months during the conclusion of this thesis I was part-time leading one Elim church.

All of this helps me locate myself within the life of Elim, connecting grassroots, local leaders and national leaders; such connections help me continue to frame the research questions in line with a Pentecostal methodology that is open to the Pentecostal community.

My insider position and level of involvement with Elim (historic or present) is advantageous on a number of levels. Cartledge describes the need for insiders in research, particularly for their ability to understand the nuances of context (2016, pp.255–257). I am well versed in the way that Elim operates structurally (whether in communication or in governance), however this study will take me beyond the normal avenues of Regional Leaders and rather, directly, to the local church leadership teams. I am also reasonably well versed in the culture of Elim. I have a good understanding of how local churches work (having been a minister in six different Elim churches) and recognise that there is no standard pattern of a local church Session. The process which Elim took to ordain women has been documented by me previously (2016), so I am aware of the broad cultural challenges that were posed and remain today. However, my involvement in Elim may cause me to be somewhat blinkered to the larger questions concerning gender and theology (although I have attempted to mitigate this through my literature review). It may also be argued that my Elim links could endanger an objective outsider opinion; yet the very epistemology I adopt encourages involvement (with an emphasis on encounter and is relational). On top of that I value acknowledging subjectivity as I engage with each aspect of this research, a view endorsed by Knott (2010, p.262).

One's social location, according to Donna Haraway, for instance in terms of race, class, gender and nationality, can influence the shaping of one's observations (Sprague, 2005, p.43). As a white middleclass southern-background middle-aged man I am aware that I bring to the research certain aspects that cannot be changed, but which I need to remain reflexive over throughout the ongoing research. I did not anticipate any of these to be a particular hindrance to the research, but I acknowledge up front that they *could* make a difference. Although Elim was predominantly working class in its early days,<sup>20</sup> it has become far more mixed, if not middleclass in recent decades. Up until 2018 Elim's National Leadership Team were all male and white, there is now some ethnicity reflected. Although all NLT members are still male, their class backgrounds differ. Likewise, some churches are

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<sup>20</sup> Similar to the North American Pentecostal movement, which Yong describes as "centred among the lower social strata" (2002, p.282).

majority white British, whilst others are largely black and minority ethnic. Elim churches, from my own experience, are fairly representative of the communities in which they serve (from white northern mining towns, to estates served by a “Chav Church” (Ignite Church Elim, 2017)). I doubt respondents to the survey will be affected by who I am, nor do I expect the focus groups to be impacted. However, I will remain open to my distinction, attempting to be responsive to my social location, particularly by being critical in my research in hearing and analysing the various voices of the respondents.

A possible limitation is my gender, I may be a ‘feminist’ and to use a new term ‘he for she’,<sup>21</sup> but I am an outsider when considering the group ‘women in ministry’ (Knott, 2010, p.262). If I were dealing solely with women ministers, then this could be argued to be a limitation (although I did not find it so in my previous research). However, I did not anticipate this being a hindrance to the current study, because I engage primarily in a study group of mixed genders. The broader question of a man involved in feminist research has been addressed elsewhere (for instance (Digby, 2013)). Digby says:

This presumed oppositionality between men and feminism is rooted in the gender binary that is typical of patriarchal cultures, according to which every (or almost every) human being is rigorously confined within one of two mutually exclusive categories, man or woman. (2013, p.2)

Although my views may be at odds with some feminists, my belief, that within Christianity patriarchy is a result of the fall which redemption (and Pentecostal inclusivity) should resolve, aligns meaningfully within a broad view of feminism. Misunderstandings of feminism, and the characterisation of extreme expressions will not aid my research if I use the term feminism/t. Although the very process of undertaking this research has further enhanced my feminist views, there is no need for me to use the term in either the surveys or focus groups. Reflexively however, I am aware of my own commitments and ‘prejudices’, and will attempt to keep such ‘filters’ in the forefront of my mind throughout the study.

Finally, I am also aware that my position as an Elim minister may influence responses either to the surveys or in the focus groups (I will further explain my approach to reflexivity within the focus groups section in chapter 3). On the whole my position should prove beneficial,

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<sup>21</sup> ‘He for she’ is becoming a more recognised popular term but also an organisation. “Created by UN Women, the United Nations entity for gender equality and the empowerment of women, the HeForShe solidarity movement for gender equality provides a systematic approach and targeted platform on which men and boys can engage and become change agents towards the achievement of gender equality” (UN Women, 2016).

and I anticipated that the introductory letter of support from the GS along with my own credential as a post-graduate researcher and Elim minister would enhance the credibility and response rate from the surveys. It was possible however, that a respondent could feel pressured to write what they thought was the correct Elim approach, rather than their own practice or opinion. It would perhaps have been easier if they were responding to an outside agency. In order to mitigate this, and in line with due ethical process, confidentiality and anonymity were explained to the participants. Although I needed to keep track of who the respondents were (at least in terms of position and church) in order to ensure a broad response, the actual responses were anonymised.

I situated this more personal and reflexive section deliberately close to the section on Pentecostal methodology due to the experiential and narrative style that the methodology encourages. I will now look at two other theological and methodological approaches that are pertinent to my research.

### 2.2.3. Ordinary theology

Analysing the views of Church Session members will open up a sphere of theology that Jeff Astley calls “ordinary theology”. This is the theology of an average church member, one who has no formal theological training. Astley defines this as “*the theology and theologizing of Christians who have received little or no theological education of a scholarly, academic or systematic kind*” (italics in original) (2002, p.56), he also calls it “*the church’s front line*” (italics in original) (2002, p.162). Cartledge describes it as an opportunity to utilise “qualitative research methods...to listen to the reflections of ordinary believers regarding their beliefs, experiences, and practices” (2016, p.254).

The Church Session will, to a large extent, lack theological academic training (although some lay leaders may, and most Pastors will have such training); Astley’s (and Cartledge’s) definition is pertinent to this majority. This position raises interesting questions that will be considered concerning the sources of *authority* that will be revealed (see chapters 6-8). These sources of authority will reveal the *normative* views of the lay leaders (see my explanation of ‘the four voices’ later).

Engaging with *ordinary theology* and discovering the grassroots hermeneutic that this exposes, will not only reveal the process of theology that Church Sessions adopt, but also allow for an analysis of their theology. One criticism that Astley is careful to address is that

ordinary theology is not analytical enough and has been described as “mere sociology” in its descriptive emphasis (2002, p.108). Astley acknowledges that empirical research and description do form an important aspect of ordinary theology, but that it also encourages “critical theological judgments”. This ties in particularly well with Sprague’s call to *critically analyse* (2005, p.199). Ordinary theology provides a meaningful framework that engages with grassroots hermeneutics and analysis, that this research question demands.

Cartledge talks about the need for Pentecostals to research beyond the seminary and the church, he adds the criticism that Pentecostals “rarely seem to engage with rigorous empirical study and therefore fail to explore and map the actual theological praxis of Pentecostals themselves, that is, the theology embedded in their beliefs, value, and practices” (2010, p.282). I hope that I can rectify this to some degree in the current study.

Cartledge also offers a useful link between “practical” and “ordinary” theology:

“practical theology is being used to “rescript” Pentecostal theology, so that the ordinary theology of believers is illuminated by the social sciences and rescripted by means of systematic theological categories.” (2010, pp.278–279)

In other words, the empirical research of this study that engages with the ordinary theology of Church Session members and analyses those findings in the light of their “praxis in a confessionally oriented manner” (Cartledge, 2010, p.269), is a key aspect of practical theology.

#### 2.2.4. Practical theology

There is a criticism that what is said doctrinally about a church and what actually occurs in a local church is disconnected (Ward, 2012, p.4). This thesis shows, in part, the level of disconnect between the official position of Elim regarding women in ministry and the practices of local churches. It is through methodologies endorsed by Practical theology that such findings are able to be critiqued and explored theologically.

Practical theology is one of many theological sub-disciplines that makes use of some social-scientific methods and findings. For instance, Paul Fiddes uses a wide interpretation of ethnography to link theology and social science, amongst the examples he gives qualitative methods of investigation like “surveys” and “analysis of....discourses of groups”, which are pertinent to this study (2012, p.14). Ward comments on the use of such methods in theology:



The turn to qualitative methods of enquiry by theologians....has been generated out of the renewed significance of the church in contemporary theology....Paying attention to the local and lived is a way to explore the contours and the contradictions that the move toward church in contemporary theology has opened up. (Ward, 2018, p.164)

Using qualitative methods (see chapter 3), my research attempts to bring the lived experience of Elim lay leaders in discussion with more theoretical theology.

“Theological action research” (TAR) takes a more “insider” stance than is normal for ethnography. This stance allows for a “transformative” aspect to the research rather than merely “descriptive” (2012, p.15), similar to McGrath’s view that theology should seek “application” (2012, p.107). TAR is practised and proclaimed by Cameron, Bhatti, Duce, Sweeney and Watkins (2010). In broad terms, *action research* includes a partnership, a process, a conversation and a way of knowing. Generally *action research* is a collaboration between outsiders and insiders to address a specific issue, aiming to provide a solution (2010, p.36). For example, as part of their ARCS project (Action Research: Church and Society) a team of theologians (as researchers) and local churches work together to answer questions about the state of the local church and possible ways forward. This approach engages with local congregations at grassroots level. Although different to this current study where participation and collaboration are not so explicit, there are similarities. An early conversation with Elim’s General Superintendent encouraged my PhD journey, and was endorsed with a letter of support. I also hope that change or transformation will come as a result of this study, these two areas share the approach of *action research*.

Michael Lawler sees practical theology as “the *theological* reflection arising out of and in response to the Church’s actual situation” (italics in original) (2005, p.262). Although I do not observe (ethnographically) the practice of Church Sessions with regard to their function in assigning ministers, my research does engage with descriptions of their practice (their “actual situation”), through an empirical approach using surveys and focus groups (Cameron and Duce, 2013, xxix) (see chapter 3 for more discussion of my methods). Lawler says that “sociology has an important part to play in manifesting and interpreting what the Church *actually* believes and *ought* to believe in both faith and *praxis*” (italics in the original) (2005, p.264). The *actual*, *ought* and “actual situation” are similar to the ‘four voices’, a tool developed by Cameron et al. (2010) as practitioners of practical theology. The methodology of the ‘four voices’ was developed to help give a “proper” account of church practice in theology (Watkins et al., 2012, p.176).

### 2.2.4.1. Four Voices

The ‘four voices’ helped Cameron et al. to understand the dynamic breadth of theology, where revelation and experience interact. The four voices are termed as *normative*, *formal*, *operant* and *espoused* theology. Although they explain that these voices are not discrete, and echoes of one or more will be heard in others, they are distinct enough to make individual sense. Aspects of each of these should be evident within the *ordinary* theology of a Church Session. I will briefly explain each voice and how these fit methodologically with my study.

The *normative* voice of theology “is concerned with what the practicing group names as its theological authority” (2010, p.54). Within a Church Session such authority may be the view of the Pastor or some other individual, the historical position that the local church has held, the view of Elim Conference, the view of a Regional Leader, and (of course) the Bible. Historically Pentecostals have viewed the Bible as a prime authority, with Elim holding the Bible to be “the supreme and final authority in all matters of faith and conduct” (Elim, 2016b). Yet different biblical hermeneutics do lead to different views (as later demonstrated). This study will help to bring some clarity regarding the different areas of authority and their relative importance, including the interconnection between such areas of authority.

The *operant* voice of theology is described as “the faith-carrying words and actions of believers” (2010, p.14), “the theology embedded within *the actual practices of a group*” (italics in original) (2010, p.54), and “what people of faith actually do” (Cameron and Duce, 2013, xxx). Whatever else may be said or referred to, the actions of a Church Session in responding to the thought of a woman minister demonstrates their theology (even if only by consensus). It is the intention of this study to find out what informs such actions, whether aspects of normative, espoused or formal voices and to what extent this is held by individuals over and above the group.

The *espoused* voice of theology is described as “the theology embedded within a *group’s articulation of its beliefs*” (italics in original) (2010, p.54), or “what people say about what they do” (Cameron and Duce, 2013, xxx). Each local Elim church may say something different, because they each do something different. Elim currently does not have a centrally espoused (in this example a written piece) position-paper on women in ministry,

rather it simply refers to the decision of the Conference (and governing body) in ordaining women and allowing them to minister at all levels of leadership within Elim. Local Church Sessions likewise do not generally produce such a document, with only one of the churches that engaged with the e-survey indicating that they did have a written document regarding their views on women in ministry (Respondent 22, e-survey). Often rather, they rely on the operant voice (what they do) to express their position, rather than formulating an espoused message (verbal or written). The danger is that their operant voice, may not actually express what they really think. For instance, a local church may agree with women in ministry, but not have a woman minister, nor for some reason have women preachers (for example, where there were no gifted women preachers in the church). If that church does not articulate their acceptance of women teachers/leaders/ministers, then the outsider (and even insider) may assume that the articulation (or lack of) (in this example – no women teaching from the platform) is an indication of a theology opposed to women in ministry. Where an espoused voice of theology is quiet, a local church may have to work harder at articulation through the operant voice.

The *formal* voice of theology is “the theology of the academy” (2010, p.55). As we will see, this is the quietest of the four voices within Elim, and that academic writings are deemed too inaccessible in style and publication to be readily heard. Church Sessions are not generally academically trained (theologically), but this does not entirely stop the influence of such a voice. Populist writings on specific topics that are recommended by friends and influencers would be more commonly heard, and some of these draw upon the formal voice. Also, depending on the training of the Pastor (whether through Regents or another theological College), the formal voice may be heard more readily. These four voices are helpful in guiding my choices of methods for empirical research and providing a framework for the findings as I seek to *analyse critically*.

In this thesis it will become clear that I am engaging with both Ordinary and Practical theology. Firstly, by engaging with Elim lay leaders I am allowing the voice to be heard, of those who represent *ordinary* church attendees. This opportunity to engage with a grassroots hermeneutic, gives value to the thoughts and practices of ordinary believers. Secondly, my approach explores the explanations of lay leaders’ practised theology. Of the four voices, the *operant* voice will be heard loudest in my analysis chapters (6-8). Both these methodologies inform and inspire this thesis in its qualitative grassroots approach. I

will now explain how Pentecostal theology relates to other theologies especially Evangelical, before giving a brief overview of comparable studies.

### **2.3. Pentecostal and Evangelical theology**

This study sits within the broader scope of Christian theology, engaging with Biblical theology, Practical theology, Pentecostal theology and to a lesser extent Gender studies. As I explained in the previous chapter, my primary focus is with the Elim Foursquare Gospel Alliance (Elim for short). Elim is a UK born Pentecostal movement, which started in 1915, and continues to grow in the UK and beyond (Cartwright, 2014, pp.120, 135). I have chosen to contain the study within Elim for a number of reasons. Firstly, I am an Elim minister and care about this movement (see section on reflexivity); secondly, Elim is distinct from, whilst similar to, other Pentecostal movements; thirdly, Elim is a meaningful social construct that enables a research project to ask questions of Elim as a whole whilst also engaging with individual Elim members from within that whole. Elim comes under one constitution<sup>22</sup> and each Elim church is governed by the decisions of Conference, including its decision regarding women in ministry.

Conversation partners are primarily taken from other Pentecostal traditions, including the Assemblies of God UK (AoG), various Pentecostal scholars from America, where significantly more publications on relevant topics have been produced, and some specific comparative studies within Pentecostalism in Australia and America (as described later). Pentecostalism, sitting within the Christian tradition, also benefits from ecumenical dialogue. Westphal describes having an openness to an ecumenical spirit as a spiritual discipline that provides insight into different facets of God's truth, and protects from relativism (2016, p.29). Local inter-church dialogue occurs to different degrees, whilst academically various attempts have been made, and are ongoing. For instance American theologian and Presbyterian minister L. William Oliverio identifies and develops four typologies of hermeneutics one of which is the "ecumenical-Pentecostal hermeneutic" (2015). He describes the continuity and discontinuity of the ecumenical-Pentecostal hermeneutic approach with early Pentecostalism. Continuity because early Pentecostals, such as William Seymour, were interested in unity rather than "ecclesial boundaries" (2015, p.254); discontinuity because of the "doctrinal boundaries" that were erected. Oliverio, quoting Douglas Jacobsen, describes this phenomenon as: "champions of truth locked in

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<sup>22</sup> Northern Ireland has its own constitution; I will not be including those churches in this study.

battle with other theologians (some pentecostal, some non-pentecostal) who were spreading erroneous views among the faithful” (2015, p.254). Pentecostal scholars have been (and are) in dialogue with many Christian streams (and vice versa). Although I do not offer an exhaustive list of such streams, there have been dialogue with, for example, Evangelicalism,<sup>23</sup> Charismatics and Roman Catholics; to which I turn in a moment. Hollenweger discusses a number of such dialogues in his paper *Feedback: Pentecostals in dialogue* (1996), including making reference to dialogue between “black and white Pentecostals, between black and Hispanic Pentecostals, and between men and women” (1996, p.108).

As I mentioned earlier, there are differing views regarding the similarity between Pentecostalism and Evangelicalism.<sup>24</sup> There are a variety of opinions as to how distinct Pentecostals are from Evangelicals, one view, taken by Atkinson, sees Pentecostals as a part of wider Evangelicalism (2003, p.49). Whereas Smith argues for a distinction due to Evangelical theology being “rooted in a textualism which precludes...Pentecostal experience” (1997, p.70). Particularly on the topic of hermeneutics, many Pentecostals see and seek a distinction – as chapter 4 will elucidate.

Pentecostalism and evangelicalism has had a mixed history, with hostility and wariness being mostly overcome through, in the USA at least, the inclusion of Pentecostals in the National Association of Evangelicals (Hollenweger, 1997, p.192). According to Hollenweger though, this union has not helped Pentecostals maintain their distinctiveness, especially regarding pacifism, women in ministry, and views regarding the inerrancy of Scripture (1997, p.194). These last two are of particular interest to this current study and will be explored in detail later. Within Evangelicalism, Anthony Thiselton is a good example of an evangelical who engages with Pentecostal thought, devoting two chapters to this in his book: *A shorter guide to the Holy Spirit* (2016). Whereas Gordon Fee is a Pentecostal Minister who is also described as an evangelical scholar (Menziez, 2005), and has written widely across the two streams. Within Elim, William Atkinson is an example of a scholar who has engaged and debated with evangelical views as they differ from Pentecostal ones (in particular, regarding the baptism in the Spirit) (2011), and Warrington quickly acknowledges the Evangelical influence on Pentecostalism (2008, p.2).

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<sup>23</sup> I am well aware that the Evangelical world is broad, from liberal to fundamental, where appropriate these distinctions will be made.

<sup>24</sup> For further reading, I suggest (Cross, 2002; Cartledge, 2013, pp.135–140; Nel, 2017a).

It remains to be demonstrated if Pentecostal grassroots biblical theology is distinct from (as many argue their hermeneutics are) or primarily derived from Evangelical biblical theology. Gordon Fee (as a Pentecostal minister and an Evangelical scholar) provides a good example of the utilisation of Evangelical biblical theology within Pentecostalism. Yet Bradley Noel claims that Fee takes exception to two key Pentecostal doctrines “the baptism of the Holy Spirit as a subsequent act following conversion; and the declaration that the evidence of such baptism is speaking in tongues” (1998, p.83). But despite this Fee “claims to be Pentecostal in every regard”. Fee’s non Classical-Pentecostal views are of note considering that (Stuart and) Fee’s work (2014), which advocates the “Evangelical hermeneutic of authorial intent” (Grey, 2011, p.39) is a “key textbook” used in the training provided by Elim’s Regents Theological College (RTC). It appears therefore that there is much crossover (similarity or derivation) between Evangelicalism and Pentecostalism in the area of biblical theology. For instance it is often claimed that “Pentecostalism’s roots lie in the Protestant evangelical tradition” (Robbins, 2004, p.119), with references to Holiness groups, Methodism and Baptist movements, that are both indicative of and formative to Pentecostal theology.<sup>25</sup> Whatever the actual journey Pentecostalism may have taken, I will be analysing the views from the grassroots today, whilst also considering those of the academy.

An important moment in the acceptance of Pentecostal practice by a number of ‘mainstream’ churches was the Charismatic movement. This movement influenced theology and ecumenical unity. Karkkainen claims that “ecumenical contacts have pushed Pentecostals to think through theological issues from the vantage point of their Charismatic experience” (1998, p.83). This provides its own challenges, Elim theologian Frestadius claims that the Charismatic renewal gave rise to an epistemological crisis for Pentecostals and that Elim had to re-evaluate what it “was really about, what it believed, and how it practised those beliefs” (2016, p.67), which gives credence to Karkkainen’s claim. Whether the theological ramifications challenged Pentecostals or Charismatics the most, the opportunity for unity was present. Yet, the broad influence of the Charismatic movement,

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<sup>25</sup> Retired RTC lecturer Matthew Clark prefers to look to the Anabaptists (rather than evangelicalism or the reformation) as the influential roots for Pentecostalism, discussing the link between them and “primitivism” (interestingly this primitivism is also the direction that Poirier takes with his view on Pentecostal hermeneutics (2007)). Whilst making much of Pentecostal antecedents (from New Testament times onwards), Clark does think that there has not been enough study on the link between Pentecostalism and the Anabaptist antecedents, stating that “there is a paucity of pentecostal research into Anabaptism” (1997 p. 16).

crossing ecumenical boundaries offering unity, has not really lived up to such potential. Hollenweger saw the potential for unity in the 1970's but also saw fragmentation and division developing twenty years later (1997, pp.362–366). However there still remains dialogue between Charismatics and Pentecostals. For instance, Clark Pinnock engaged with Pentecostals from the perspective of a Baptist 'touched' by the Charismatic renewal (Cross, 1998, p.3). Reviews of his book *Flame of Love: A Theology of the Holy Spirit* (1996) appeared in the 13<sup>th</sup> issue of the 1998 *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* by Terry Cross and Frank Macchia. The editors created space for Pinnock to respond to those reviews within that special edition. Further examples of dialogue can be found, for instance, with Amos Yong, who specifically engages with the contributions of both Pentecostals and Charismatics with regard to "Christian theology of religions" (2000).

The scope of the Charismatic renewal reached Roman Catholics, which produced a noticeable opportunity for the Pentecostal/Charismatic Catholics to engage with other Pentecostal and Charismatics. Creemers notes that this was possible because of the "theological groundwork" of the Second Vatican Council (2009, p.322). He explains that in 1972 a Pentecostal – Roman Catholic dialogue commenced, and notes that this was "the only substantial bilateral dialogue between a historic church and a 'young' spiritual movement". He goes on to reflect on the thirty-five years of dialogue, concluding that the bond of the Holy Spirit has provided the necessary unity to keep the dialogue fruitful.<sup>26</sup> Hollenweger as usual also provides useful insights into this dialogue (1997, p.372), especially with his article *Roman Catholics and Pentecostals in Dialogue* (1999), where he critiques the responses from some Pentecostals and the World Council of Churches to this dialogue. At a grassroots level he notes joint prayer meetings that were genuinely engaging for both Catholics and Pentecostals, but he also notes a shift towards denominationalism as time progressed (by the 1980's) (1997, p.162). Karkkainen also engages thoughtfully in analysing the dialogue (2001) and presents challenges and opportunities to both sides.

### 2.3.1. Comparable studies

As an empirical study exploring Elim Pentecostal practice regarding lay leaders' hermeneutics in particular relation to the topic of women in ministry, this thesis is unique, not just in the UK but globally. However, it bears aspects of similarity towards a variety of studies that have looked at either Pentecostal hermeneutics or women in ministry.

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<sup>26</sup> He goes into much more detail in a recent book *Theological Dialogue with Classical Pentecostals: Challenges and Opportunities* (Creemers, 2015).

As an example of Pentecostal hermeneutical grassroots practice, Jacqueline Grey studied the reading habits of Pentecostals in Australia.<sup>27</sup> She notes that too often the “voice of the community has been silenced in the determination to prescribe a Pentecostal hermeneutic by the scholars of the community” (2011, p.61). Grey attempts to present a “*description*” of what is being practised rather than a “*prescription*” of what the scholar thinks should be happening. The empirical approaches employed in her study (surveys and focus groups) have the potential of *describing* and exposing the ‘abnormative’ (my term), the practice(s) contrary to the official position. It is only through such an empirical study that she was able to hear the “voice of the community”; likewise, the intention of my study to hear the “voice(s)” is relying upon qualitative empirical research. Finally, Grey’s study is of note because it is descriptive of Western, non-American Pentecostals, and will add an important perspective for consideration.

An example of a study on ‘women in ministry’ that utilises social-scientific research methods is provide by Lehman (1980), in which he analyses the views of the laity in the American Baptist church, by contacting a national sample through a telephone survey. This study was quantitative in its assessment of lay opinions regarding ‘clergywomen’. He determined to explore the views of the laity because he claims that the most frequent approach is to study “women entering the ministry themselves” (1980, p.321). My Masters’ thesis (2016) similarly focused on women ministers (within Elim), and I agreed with Lehman that a look at the laity would be an appropriate next step. For this study however, I am focussing on the lay leaders, because within Elim, unlike the Baptists who are congregationally governed, it is the lay leaders who comprise the local church governance (along with the Minister(s)). A look at the views of the laity within Elim, regarding women in ministry, has recently been made by Nunn (2018).

As a comparative sociological study Lehman’s findings and approach have some relevance to this current study. There are clear differences, he studied the Baptists in America, this study is with Elim in the UK; he utilised a quantitative approach with telephone interviews, this study is qualitative with self-completing surveys and focus groups. But the general

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<sup>27</sup> Jacqueline Grey is currently the President (2017) of the *Society for Pentecostal Studies*, is an Associate Professor of Biblical Studies at Alphacrucis College, Australia. She is also an ordained Pentecostal minister within the Australian Christian Churches (formerly Assemblies of God Australia).



sociological questions behind his study provide a helpful framework in considering the questions for my survey.

Within Australia, a study by Reiher has proved useful in preparing my qualitative research (2003). His study, again primarily quantitative, comes closest to asking similar questions of the same kinds of people as my study. He sent out over 2000 questionnaires to 170 AoG churches in the Australian state of Victoria. The respondents were “leaders, lay leaders, and potential future leaders”, which is a slightly broader criterion than mine (lay leaders alone). His goal was to find out if the churches “really believe(d) in women’s participation in church leadership”. His findings and conclusions helped shape the questions for my survey and focus groups.

Within the UK, amongst black Pentecostals, Marcia Clarke carried out an empirical study aimed at women’s lived experiences of Pentecostal spirituality (2016). Also within the UK, Kay carried out some research with Pentecostal Pastors regarding their views of women in ministry (1998). Langford gives a brief sketch of women in UK Pentecostalism, historically and currently (2017). Cookson makes brief comments on the role of women in Elim in her thesis (2008). I have also published two articles giving detailed historical journeys that the topic of women in ministry within Elim has taken through the twentieth century (2018a; 2018b). Such studies help to give detail to the broader picture in which this study is positioned, whilst on occasion providing a helpful comparison for analysis.

#### **2.4. Conclusion**

This chapter has introduced some of the key philosophical and theological foundations upon which this study is based. Both the epistemology and methodology have been specifically framed to explain a Pentecostal perspective on research and life. In particular I introduce the concept of a Pentecostal methodology, in which I draw upon Smith’s five aspects of a Pentecostal worldview. With an affirmation of openness and the place of experience, I discuss how I came to consider this research project, and equally how my position as a Pentecostal minister bears upon the research.

Other key theological approaches have been briefly introduced (in particular Ordinary theology and Practical theology), and throughout the thesis will be drawn upon in various places. Similarly, comparable studies and the broader spectrum of disciplinary positioning

were considered, and help frame this research within global academic work. The next chapter examines the choice of methods, and how that relates to the methodology.

### **CHAPTER 3. SETTINGS AND METHODS FOR THE EMPIRICAL RESEARCH**

In this chapter I explain the methods used for my empirical research, examining the rationale for, and practicalities of, their use. I then write about my experience in preparing and running the focus groups (FGs), incorporating reflexivity and highlighting aspects of my Pentecostal methodology in the process.

#### **3.1. Methods**

My aim is to understand how Church Session members consider the topic and interpret the texts regarding women in ministry. In order to achieve this, I had to determine which methods were best (or most practical) for such an endeavour. With central questions like “how?” and “why?” which reflect Ordinary Theology, I chose methods that are qualitative in nature. Most academic writings on Pentecostal hermeneutics focus on the theoretical and prescriptive approach, except notably Grey’s decision to take a descriptive approach (2011). Whilst I follow Grey’s example to provide a qualitative account of the “how?” and “why?” of practised Pentecostal hermeneutics, my methods are different, because she uses established Bible study groups within local churches.

Cartledge explicitly draws upon the triad of Spirit-text-community as used by others<sup>28</sup> to explain Pentecostal theological method (2011, pp.64–65). He argues that the Pentecostal method of doing theology draws upon these three sources. In accord with this triad, my choice to engage with community through the Church Session provides a good opportunity to examine their role as community together, whilst also hearing about the wider community of the local church. The Holy Spirit will be considered in the light of both the practicalities of the research (as part of my Pentecostal methodology) and in the responses of the participants. Finally, the Scripture is given a particular focus, as four verses are introduced into the research. These were chosen to reflect a possible tension in the study, with 1 Corinthians 14:34-35 and 1 Timothy 2:12 suggesting a restriction on women, and Acts 2:17-18 and Galatians 3:28 suggesting an equality.

Given the limited resources (of time and personnel) and the geographical locations of Elim churches across Great Britain I decided upon a two-tier strategy. The first, a broad survey, to scope the views of many Church Session members (limited to lay elders and deacons). The second, focus groups, to engage the questions in an interactive environment where

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<sup>28</sup> In this case he draws upon Archer (2004a) and Thomas (1994).

various (and differing) opinions could be discussed. Jennifer Mason explains that the conventional model of using a survey is “to provide a broad picture of a phenomenon” and then suggests adding “a qualitative study to cover a more limited area of the same ground but in more detail” (1994, pp.90–91). I view both aspects, the electronic survey (e-survey) and the focus groups (FGs), as qualitative in nature. The e-survey will help develop the direction taken in the FGs, allowing the inclusion of “participants in research” (Nietz, 2011, p.60). I now discuss these methods in more detail.

### 3.1.1. Electronic survey (e-survey)

This study is methodologically both deductive and inductive (Bryman, 2012, pp.24–26).

Deductive in that the research question builds upon the findings of my previous research (2016) and wants to explore how far the experiences of women ministers within Elim are similar to views held by members of local Church Sessions. As such, the e-survey questions that were open to Church Sessions were formed from a primarily deductive approach. However, the collation and analysis of the e-survey responses also provided an inductive element. For it is here that new ideas and thoughts were generated. From these findings, key questions were formed for further exploration within FGs (see below). The analysis of both of these empirical areas of research provide (inductively) to the discussion that follows in chapters 6 - 8.

Navarro-Rivera and Kosmin talk about the importance of knowing the distribution of the population of interest (2011, p.399). Elim arranges its churches into ten regions<sup>29</sup>, removing Ireland left me with nine regions containing 548 churches,<sup>30</sup> I then limited these to Elim Foursquare Gospel Alliance (EFGA) churches, excluding Elim Church Incorporated (ECI) churches,<sup>31</sup> which gave me a final total of 455 churches. I also had to decide what sample size would be appropriate. In discussion with the head of one of Elim’s national departments I was advised that when emails requiring a response were sent to Pastors, the general response rate in his experience was 23-25%. I, however, wanted to contact Church Session members. Elim does not have a full list of Church Session members centrally, so I would rely upon contacting the Pastor who would provide the relevant contact details. With 455 churches and an estimate of about 3 members per Church Session, assuming the

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<sup>29</sup> Scotland, Wales & South West Midlands, Southern, North Midlands & North West, Metropolitan East, North East, Midlands, London City, Ireland, and Metropolitan West (Elim, 2016c).

<sup>30</sup> EFGA and ECI (not including Church of Pentecost UK churches) in Great Britain.

<sup>31</sup> ECI churches are affiliated to Elim, and therefore less connected than EFGA churches.

above response rate, I could expect 313-341 responses. Sample sizes for questionnaires are normally discussed in reference to quantitative surveys, and would suggest for instance that an “optimal sample size is about 750–1,000 respondents” because this provides the smallest margin of error (Navarro-Rivera and Kosmin, 2011, p.399). However in qualitative research, although “*how many examples*” (emphasis in original) are still important (Mason, 1994, p.104), it is the saturation of responses that is central to qualitative research (Bryman, 2012, pp.425–427). If response levels were high, I could be faced with a large amount of data to process. I therefore decided that I would sample a random proportion (25%) from each region (using the website [www.random.org](http://www.random.org) which offers a true random number generator), and if the responses were low, I could increase the distribution. On a simplified level I wanted to ensure that every location (Elim region) would have the opportunity to respond to the survey.

For ease of distribution and review I decided to use electronic self-completion questionnaires as the first tier of my research (see Appendix 1 for the e-survey). There are some clear benefits for choosing to use an e-survey. The cost of a postal survey is prohibitive, whereas an email is quick and free. Also, because I wanted to analyse the findings on a computer, an e-survey offers a potential reduction in the amount of inputting. Furthermore, the infeasibility of doing alternative face to face surveys, considering the wide location of those I wanted to target, meant that an e-survey was more advantageous, reaching the breadth of the country. Face to face interviews, as Bryman indicates, can bias the responses where an interviewer is present (2012, p.233). By being ‘remote’ I wanted to allow the Elders and Deacons to provide responses that were not biased by my presence. On top of this, the respondents could choose when to complete the survey, taking time to formulate their thoughts.

There are however, some disadvantages to using an e-survey. For instance, there is no possibility of further explanation or interaction to explain a question, therefore, the questions had to be formulated in a self-explanatory way, requiring more reading on behalf of the respondent. The possibility of misunderstanding, although disadvantageous, led to a more rigorous and precise question setting. Also, with an e-survey I could not guarantee who was answering the questions; I simply had to trust the respondent’s integrity. Furthermore, although a minor possibility, some Church Session members may be unable to access the internet (Navarro-Rivera and Kosmin, 2011, p.406). There were a couple of

options available to mitigate this limitation, firstly, I could simply factor that in as part of the expected response rate; secondly, I could encourage the Pastor to facilitate the use of an internet connected PC. Although I did contact Pastors to encourage a response, I am not aware of their need to give access to an internet connected PC.

As I said above, primarily I wanted to engage with qualitative answers to the “how?” and “why?” questions, asking *passionately*<sup>32</sup> the questions that will “help make a difference, help with a problem, enhance justice” (Sprague, 2005, p.199). Therefore, the design of the e-survey required use of open-ended questions. Some questions focussed on the process of decision making, others, for instance, focussed on helping me gauge their hermeneutical approach to specific and relevant biblical texts (as mentioned above). There were a small number of closed questions, for instance gender, age, location, role, etc. designed to help me ensure a wide demographic response. The length, clarity and variety of questions were designed to give me a good response rate **and** adequate research data (Navarro-Rivera and Kosmin, 2011, pp.408–409). In an attempt to aid this process, a pilot of the e-survey was run with hand-picked Church Sessions. I picked them according to my relationship with the Pastor to facilitate a quick response, the responses were not later incorporated into this thesis. This pilot helped to iron out any glitches, misunderstandings or gaps in both the process and the survey (Bryman, 2012, p.263).

I anticipated that the survey responses would suggest areas of analytical coding that would be duplicated in the FGs. The design of the FGs meant that other areas of relevance were also offered for analysis. With both the coding and data collection I expected that there would be a natural point of theoretical saturation, where no new concepts were regularly provided for this study (Bryman, 2012, p.568). Although analysis commenced at an early stage, with an eagerness to consider the first e-survey response, it was only at the point of theoretical saturation (during both the e-survey and after the FGs) that a full analysis became possible, utilising the coding of the data. The themes that arose from this coding are discussed and *analyzed critically* (Sprague, 2005) in chapters 6 to 8.

The process of coding the e-survey data was three-fold (Excel, NVivo and the Spirit). Having downloaded all the data into Excel, I also imported it into NVivo. In particular, I was hoping

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<sup>32</sup> In this instance, the ‘passion’ will be assumed in my desire to complete the research, rather than explicit in the questions themselves.

to use NVivo to help provide an overview of the analysis of open-ended questions. A number of repeated words were highlighted in the use of NVivo, these provided the initial basis for subsequent themes. The level of e-survey responses (the final number of respondents after a few rounds of chasing was 38), allowed me to spend more time with the whole data in one spreadsheet in Excel. With NVivo's suggested words, and with the time I spent reading the data both in rows (understanding the responses of individuals) and columns (gaining an oversight with regard to specific questions), I was able to define different levels of coding. This coding fed directly into my preparation for the FGs, along with aiding the future analysis of all the data. Methodologically, the time spent with the data was also an opportunity to allow the Spirit to guide me towards key themes, enabling an ongoing and practical application of Pentecostal methodology (as introduced in Chapter 2).

### 3.1.2. Focus groups (FG)

Having completed my first tier of empirical research through e-surveys, the responses helped refine the direction of the second tier: focus groups (FGs) (See Appendix 3 for an example of the questions raised in the FGs). FG participants were largely self-selected, either from completing a subsequent survey after the e-survey (see Appendix 2), or from hearing about the FGs from other sources. I discuss one such participant's inclusion in more detail in section 3.2.4. The participants were mixed in terms of the route to the FGs, their ages, regions, roles (deacons and elders were present), ethnicity; and particularly helpfully, in the range of views and responses presented.

Where e-surveys reflected an individual-to-text account, I decided to use FGs for the **interaction** that they provided, the **communal environment** they created (relating to the "Community" part of the triad (Archer, 2004a)), and the ability to capture some **relational and experiential** aspects (referencing Smith's "affective" aspect of a Pentecostal worldview (2010, p.43)). I will now briefly explore these three areas.

*Firstly*, the FGs provided a place for interaction. Participants from various churches, who, on the whole, did not already know each other, were given an opportunity to engage with each other and with the research questions. The setting of the FGs allowed for an opportunity to clarify and develop responses, both as I engaged with the participants and as they engaged with each other. However, like all FGs, the findings are still limited

somewhat by what the participants said. I attempt to present a critical examination during the later analysis (see chapters 6-8), holding some hermeneutic of suspicion.

The findings of the e-survey exposed diverse opinions, these could then be explored in more depth and even debated in the FGs. Some of the responses in the e-survey were less positive towards women than in the FGs. It is possible that the faceless approach of the e-survey allowed for a more negative voice to be aired; whilst, in a FG environment, when face to face with women, negative opinions were more tempered, as I will demonstrate.

Cartledge argues that ordinary theology is particularly relevant for Pentecostal settings, where “experiences...impart knowledge” (2017, p.16), echoing Smith’s terms “affective epistemology” (2010, p.43). FGs provide a space for interaction, emphasising the ““voices” of the people” (Astley, 2002, p.99). Participants arrived with a certain set of views, and were challenged by each other, through the sharing of views and testimonies (“narrative epistemology” (Smith, 2010, p.43)). Focus groups allow for narratives to emerge, for Pentecostals, such narratives as testimonies are common place. Cartledge refers to the oral roots of Pentecostalism and explains that “testimony is a means of social knowledge” (2017, p.17). Focus groups provide an opportunity for discussion and testimony, and therefore for knowledge sharing and creation (in chapter 4 I refer to Cross’ view regarding postmodernism and knowledge production (2002, p.59)); Astley describes this as “theology as a process” (2002, p.60).

Cartledge was particularly interested in witnessing the interactive dialogue that would happen when the group encountered different viewpoints (2017, p.24). However, there was the risk that groups “veer towards consensus” (Barbour and Schostak, 2005, p.43), where the social setting could hinder an expression of individual “real views”. As moderator I aimed to sense ‘group think’, and gave provocative statements, testing the strength of their opinions. In the analysis of the FGs I will give dissenting voices space, as Onwuegbuzie et al. say : “only presenting and interpreting the emergent themes provides no information about the degree of consensus and dissent, resulting in dissenters effectively being censored or marginalized and preventing the delineation of the voice of negative cases or outliers” (2009, p.5).



*Secondly*, closely linked with interaction, at least in this setting, is that of community.

Cartledge talks about the benefit of FGs when doing empirical theology amongst

Pentecostals in the UK, saying:

many people only really begin to reflect in a social context, so my focus group approach allowed a conversation to develop between the different contributors. (2016, p.260)

Cartledge is suggesting that only within a social context (perhaps like a mid-week Bible Study, House-group, or in this case a FG) will thoughts be really developed; it is in such settings that another person's standpoint can be heard. FGs provide a conversation that is not only individual but is social and subject to the group. Views that are voiced can be interacted with, encouraged and challenged. Cartledge says: "different viewpoints are brought into dialogue before the researcher's very eyes and the way in which ordinary theology is negotiated at a group level can be observed" (2017, p.24). Some people in the e-survey commented that they had not really given the topic much thought. Where there had been little previous reflection, they were perhaps either relying on a view handed down from the pulpit (or similar), or simply had an unformed opinion. The interaction within the FGs provided some challenge to unformed opinions, allowing the participants to reflect on a variety of views.

As the researcher, I did not simply use the FGs as a data gathering tool, but was actively engaged with the participants and their responses, having to think about the responses and guiding the discussion (Barbour and Schostak, 2005, p.45). The strength of the FGs lay in the group dynamics. Communal interaction is central to Pentecostalism, and even in a created FG, the 'community' of this group provided an interesting dynamic as the various topics were explored.

Jacqueline Grey focuses her research at the grassroots level of Pentecostals in Australia. She was particularly keen to engage with "grassroots readers to elucidate their practices and values in the articulation of the meaning(s) of texts" (2011, p.63). Her approach is to critique that practice of reading and studying the Bible (in her case Isaiah) in a group setting. Rather than a manufactured group (such as a FG) these groups are described as "guided group discussion" (2011, p.198) and formed from bible study groups that were already in existence prior to the research. The familiarity of the individuals to each other created a comfortable setting, which is also reflected in my experience of my pilot focus group (PFG), where each participant was a member of the same church. Their comfort with

each other, and with the setting (their own church building) aided the immediate flow of discussion.

My FG 'community' however, lacked the personal history and shared journey that a local church Session would have (except the PFG in which they were all from the same church). This has both benefits and disadvantages. Within an established Church Session, the individuals will have prayed together and made decisions together over a period of time, and will be aware of each other's personality types and theological hobby horses. Although this can lead to a smoother group dynamic, it can also lead to an avoidance of a particular topic, for fear of falling out. Participants in the FGs may have felt less at ease with each other at first, and needed a little prompting, but it is conceivable that some views were offered *because* the participants didn't know each other's opinions already.

I was particularly interested to see how the FGs as a community would talk about and attempt to find agreement (whether consensus or compromise). As I explain in chapter 5, theories on Pentecostal hermeneutics place the community of faith as central to the process. The group interaction and group consensus/compromise forming was a major factor in choosing FGs rather than group interviews. Group interviews provide a one to many approach (one researcher, many participants), whilst FGs provide a many to many approach (participants to participants). Consensus, as a topic, was raised in some FGs, and is analysed in chapter 8.

*Thirdly*, as I mentioned earlier (chapter 2), both a Pentecostal epistemology and a Pentecostal methodology should encourage the relational and experiential (see Smith (2010, p.43)). FGs, through interaction and community do just that. With a diversity of participants, the FGs becomes an avenue in which a commonality (Elim lay leaders) was potentially made relationally stronger. The participants were each a part of Elim and together reflected being part of the wider community of Elim. They were also each a part of a local Church Session. Such commonalities appeared to put them at ease, enhancing relationality and promoting the shared experience as part of the 'community of faith'. FGs were chosen as a method partly because of their ability to locate voices in a group setting and to enable the witness of live interaction between participants (Bryman, 2012, p.501). It was this desire for interconnections and interactions that made FGs a reasonable choice, allowing *voices in relationship* to be heard.

Finally, it is worth noting that there are three obvious differences between a Church Session and FGs. Firstly, my presence facilitating the discussion; secondly, participants were mostly from different Church Sessions; thirdly, the FGs contained only lay leaders (except myself). I was also mindful that being an Elim minister could cause some of the discussion to be inauthentic, with the lay leaders wanting to provide answers they thought I would want to hear. I intentionally introduced myself, the research topic and focus group conventions in a way that allowed for diverse and authentic opinions. Overall these differences were not hindrances to the research. With that in mind I will now explain my experiences with the focus groups.

### **3.2. The focus groups (FGs)**

Although I had once participated in a FG, and, of course, I have read about the theory of using FGs, I decided that it would be helpful to have a pilot focus group (PFG). Not only would this allow me to test the practicalities (e.g. recording the discussions), questions, and topics I had prepared, but I would also be able to analyse the methodological framework in a 'live' environment. The PFG proved a useful experience, in which I learnt practical lessons, and was able to refine my questions and moderation of the group. The discussions were so appropriate to my overall study, matching and enhancing the data from the e-survey, that, having gained consent from the participants, I have included the findings in this thesis. I will now look at the lessons learnt from the PFG and FGs.

#### **3.2.1. Practical**

I planned to hold the FGs during the Elim Leadership Summit (ELS) of 2018 in Harrogate, at which a number of lay leaders would be in the same locality for a few days. Although there are traditionally far more Elim ministers than lay leaders represented, I anticipated that this venue and timing would still provide the best possible chance for bringing together a diversity of lay leaders. I arranged a room within the Summit venue which helped geographical centrality and also provided a location that was neutral, yet familiar, for all participants. By hosting the FGs during the Summit there was the added benefit of increased credibility, with Church Session members being reminded that this research is sanctioned by Elim. With a busy schedule, I offered a selection of times across the days to which the participants could sign up. Participants were then contacted with the logistical details prior to the Summit, along with an information sheet and consent form.

On the basis of research presented by Bryman discussing the best size of a FG (2012, pp.507–508), I decided to aim for six people per group, aware that one or two no-shows would not be detrimental. Larger groups, according to Bryman, tend to be harder to moderate, whilst fewer people will still participate effectively. The smaller size would also make transcription easier, identifying the different voices more readily. Even with a group of three or four, which Krueger terms “mini-focus groups” (1994, p.17), I expected the testimonies, narratives and discussions to be fruitful.

In an hour-long group discussion, the variety of voices brought a complexity to the process. In moderating I aimed to keep the voices as separate as possible, and was helped by the notation from assistant moderators (see below). I also chose to limit the number of participants and held only a few FGs. I expected, even then, to have a rich source of data from which my research could develop. In the end there were three FGs (FG1, FG2 and FG3). I will briefly list some details of the participants here, all ages are approximate, all names have been changed. FG1 consisted of all white English participants: Felicity (60-70), Graham (40-50), Harry (50-60) and Imogen (50-60). FG2 were all white and consisted of one English, one Scottish and one Welsh participant: John (30-40), Ken (50-60) and Larry (50-60). Finally, FG3 consisted of one Black African, one Black British, one white Scottish and three white English participants: Mark (50-60), Nathalie (50-60), Oliver (50-60), Pauline (50-60), Robert (60-70) and Steve (50-60).

Because the FGs were comprised of lay leaders from random Elim churches, from the PFG I found that starting with a question that invited each participant to offer their thoughts enabled each voice to be heard and the participants to settle into the group. Although some participants spoke more than others, I did not have a sense that there was a problem of dominance, nor that voices were not being heard. I also ended with a question that specifically asked each participant to offer their final thoughts, this was a good way to hear each voice one last time; it also allowed the group to know that we were finishing.

Cameron et al. have produced a useful example of a schedule they used in facilitating a FG (2010, p.176). The ‘before’, ‘during’ and ‘afterwards’ reminders helped ensure the process was as smooth and effective as possible. For instance, the ‘before stage’ involved me setting the room up in a suitable manner, with chairs arranged so that everyone could see

everyone else, and having a table in a central location for the audio capture. This enabled me to place the recording devices at the centre, one microphone was linked by a long cable to a laptop, and two phones were recording in airplane mode. I tested the recording as we set up and was happy that they were working. The ‘belt and braces’ approach was useful in case one device failed to work.

The ‘during’ stage was the most challenging. As the moderator of the group, I explained the convention of the group, how individuals should value one another, and that they should not speak over each other. Apart from common courtesy, this aided the recording of the session. I explained the ethical agreement, anonymity, and the confidentiality of the recording and transcription. I then opened in prayer. This was a conscious choice to remind the participants, and myself, that as Pentecostals everything we do is in the presence and power of God (as explained in the section on Pentecostal methodology). Relationally we were submitting ourselves to God, individually and as a ‘community’.

The moderation was aimed, on the whole, as non-intrusive, non-prescriptive, offering open-ended discussion starters, pointers and questions; as Cameron and Duce say, “Focus groups are about listening” (2013, p.109). The listening was particularly aimed at the researcher (me), however I also encouraged participants to interact from a place of listening to one another, wanting them to engage with each other rather than engaging with me. This required an explanation at the beginning of the group, and careful question posing. The moderation also had to be strong enough to ensure that dominant voices did not control the discussion. In each group I was able to hear the views of each participant.

The ‘afterwards’ stage, as suggested by Cameron et al., gave me a moment to thank the participants (and assistant moderators – see below). I then ensured that the recordings were saved for future backing up to the university secure server, so that I could then transcribe and later critically analyse.

### 3.2.2. Shaping the questions

As I explained earlier, FGs were chosen in part to allow interactive discussion. As such I did not want to ask too many direct questions, rather I had some questions to start the process of participant involvement, and then an interactive ‘Bible study style’ section, concluding with a few further direct questions.

The questions and group study were derived from the approach and results of my e-survey. For instance, in the e-survey, participants were given four passages of Scripture (listed above) and I asked, "Considering the issue of women in ordained ministry, what does this verse mean to you?" For the FGs, I had the passages of Scripture printed out on separate pieces of paper with a reasonable amount of surrounding verses to help give the context. The specific verses for discussion were emboldened. This gave each participant the same text in the same translation, and allowed for a quick reading to enable an open discussion. In most FGs there was enough time to look at two of the four passages. I therefore chose one passage that could be considered 'inclusive' and followed that up with one passage that could be considered 'restrictive'. I found that this approach helped the participants to cover a broad array of topics that had been raised in the e-survey. Across the FGs all four passages were discussed and considered.

### 3.2.3. The embodied process of and in the focus groups

In chapter 2, I introduced the concept that my Pentecostal methodology includes, as Smith calls it, the "affective" and "narrative" (2010, p.12), in which emotions and testimonies find a place of importance. I also mentioned another of Smith's distinctive Pentecostal aspects, which includes, the "affirmation of embodiment" (2010, p.42). Whilst the output of a FG may simply be a transcript of what is said, the way something is said, or the reaction of others, or the body language used, also provides key data. I learnt from the PFG how challenging it was to recall such data.

During the process of transcribing the PFG, I discovered the challenge of recording embodied (non-verbal) cues. The audio recordings provided me with the sounds, the pauses, the laughter, the intonation, but not the body language. In the transcription process I included some of the audio cues like laughter, but was not as careful to record every vocal aspect. There are practical challenges of transcribing such things, although some tools are available, for instance those used within the scope of Conversation analysis (Lehtinen, 2009a; Lehtinen, 2009b). The main challenge was to capture any physical cues such as body language. Normally such aspects are captured and reviewed through video recording, for instance as discussed and shown by Simona and Bianca (2015). However, I felt that there were two main reasons not to use a video camera. Firstly, there were too many practical issues in trying to record the faces of a group sat in a circle. Secondly, I did not want people to feel under further scrutiny. My main intention was to allow for a place of open and free discussion where opposing views could be considered. I deemed the presence of a video camera as too imposing.

In order to capture some of the body language, I decided to get the help of an assistant moderator (Krueger and Casey, 2009, p.89) who, as suggested by Onwuegbuzie et al., could use a matrix to make suitable notations (2009, p.10). As well as this, they suggest drawing a seating plan and noting down various demographics (age and gender). In the quest for recording such normally neglected data they suggest including:

the proxemic (i.e., use of interpersonal space to communicate attitudes),  
 chronemic (i.e., use of pacing of speech and length of silence in  
 conversation), paralinguistic (i.e., all variations in volume, pitch, and quality  
 of voice), and kinesic (i.e., body movements or postures). (2009, p.10)

The assistant moderators in the FGs, both students of Regents Theological College, were able to provide a rich source of additional data that informed the analysis. Beyond the help that the assistant moderators provided me, their involvement also seemed to be of value to them. When I spoke with one at the end of the day, she explained how the groups had interested her, not just in the process of monitoring non-verbal communication, but in the spoken content itself. This gave me an opportunity to go into more detail regarding my own positive view of women in ministry.

#### 3.2.4. A testimony - Reflections on running the focus groups

As an example of the importance of narrative (and especially testimony) to a Pentecostal methodology, I have included a short section here that explores my experience of holding and hosting the FGs. I identify the role of the Spirit in specific *Kairos*<sup>33</sup> moments, as well as in the challenge to the 'norm's' that participants arrived with. This has become an exploration of Pentecostal methodology in exploring the role of the Spirit in the research process itself.

On the day of the FGs, I contacted potential participants and sent text reminders, yet even then, not everyone who had said they would attend did attend. Possibly this was due to the room location, which was in an unusual place; I sent further texts to my participants giving directions. I checked the room in advance and put a sign on the door, before joining the opening meeting of ELS.

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<sup>33</sup> A Greek term often used in some Christian vernacular as a moment, a time, set up by God for a specific purpose. I use this here in the sense of an important moment in which the person, either then or later, realises that God was at work in or through them.

I found a close friend and sat on his row, he said he needed to leave the meeting early, which I also did. I explained that my FG was happening straight after this opening meeting, and he introduced me to one of his leadership team with him, who then agreed to leave with me and participate in the first FG. What some call serendipity, Pentecostals would call the will of God or the leading of the Spirit. Some Christians prefer to use the term God-incidence rather than co-incidence.

The Summit, with the theme “One movement, One mission”, started with a powerful visual display incorporating the flags of the many nations represented in the meeting, highlighting the number of global partners that had been brought over especially. The visuals rolled, the percussions were beaten, the sound escalated, and the Summit commenced. After rousing worship and an inspirational message, I set off with Felicity (a pseudonym) to prepare for the first FG. As she was later to testify in that group, she felt the whole thing had been “God ordained” (FG1). I reflect on moments like these and see the hand of God at work. Felicity was facing some challenges as a new deacon, yet was being encouraged by her Pastor in this role. The FG gave her an opportunity to give voice to her struggles. As she shared some of her experiences, at least two of the other three participants affirmed her with nods and “mmm’s”. She explained that although there had been nothing directly said against her, she was aware that there were “some rumblings in the jungle”. Her description elicited some laughter and helped provide a sense of the safe environment that this group was. Her standpoint was expressed, her voice was heard, her struggles were aired, and even though not all the participants would agree with women in ministry (Graham did not), the sense of love and grace was evident. The Summit theme of “One” may have already helped the participants to express a unity that goes beyond **this**<sup>34</sup> theological difference, and holding on rather, to the oneness in Christ, the oneness as brothers and sisters, and the oneness in Elim.

I am reminded of the verse that says, “Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom” (2 Corinthians 3:17). At that moment in the FGs there was freedom. Firstly, freedom to express personal struggles and challenges, through testimony. And secondly, freedom to be united whilst holding a difference of theological thought on the issue of women in ministry. These two senses of freedom were coupled with the unity

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<sup>34</sup> There would be an expectation that some theological difference should be accepted, whilst others should be resolved or distanced from, partly this is defined by what Elim holds as their “non-negotiable” Foundational Truths (Elim, 2018b).



of being “One” – Elim leaders. Such unity and freedom reminded me of a role of the Holy Spirit. Pentecostals believe that the Spirit of God is given to people without prejudice, whether they be slave or free, Jew or Gentile, male or female (Galatians 3:28). The Spirit, in diversity, brings unity. Taking this further with a Pentecostal emphasis, although not all FG participants or Pentecostals would arrive at this conclusion, this freedom, the Father’s gift of the Spirit, **can** then be interpreted to view all people as equipped and called by God. Such equipping and calling across diverse peoples encourages a freedom for the *called* and *gifted* to lead and minister in whatever capacity that calling has, including roles of governance. The freedom of the FGs and the freedom in the opening Summit worship session encouraged the possibility of thinking in a Spirit-empowered, egalitarian way.

The FGs were not simply about collecting data, but were also about helping people share and hear stories, discuss views, consider approaches, and be encouraged to fulfil whatever calling God has for them, and not to be limited by gender. The process of the FGs as a part of a person’s experience amongst wider life experiences, illustrates the embodied position that Pentecostals practice. Lived experiences were shared and heard in the FGs, providing moments in the participants’ journey as Christians. Those moments may have been cathartic in the act of sharing, or educating, in the act of listening. Non-verbal communication was monitored because of the expectation that the Pentecostal belief is a practised and embodied one.

I had been hoping for a mixture of views to be expressed in the FGs and was not disappointed. I am well aware that despite a Conference decision to allow women to minister at all levels, this is not the practice in all Elim churches (Carter, 2016). I wanted to expose deacons and elders to a mixture of experiences, allowing them to hear other standpoints. There are times when the local church position becomes the norm, yet each Elim local church has its own norm, and bringing those norms into the same discussion proved interesting. Within the environment of the FGs, norms could be presented, defended and reviewed. I sensed again that the FGs were presenting *Kairos* moments.

When testimonies were shared and heard, it gave the listeners an insight into some real struggles that some women have had in church. Some participants were able to affirm, encourage and empathise with those experiences. Others were left reflecting on their own lack of such experience, for instance where John explained that their leadership had always

been male and “it doesn’t necessarily seem to be an issue for the church going forward” (FG2). As the moderator of the group, when John said this, I did not want to say what I was thinking right then, choosing not to influence or restrict the various views that people had. However, a day or two later I happened to pass John in-between a meeting and he asked me how the FGs had gone. This presented me with an opportunity, not as a moderator, but as a fellow leader, to gently challenge his view. My own view on the importance of an egalitarian approach towards the role of women is such that I have an inner compulsion (probably Spirit led) to question and provoke other people’s views. This compulsion, along with my Pentecostal methodology, gave me permission to talk to John freely. I decided to say that never having a woman on their leadership team is an issue for their church going forward; I explained that it was quite likely that the women who attend the church are unfulfilled in their calling because they do not feel released by the leadership (in their all-male capacity). This brief conversation reminded me that my purpose as a Pentecostal researcher of the Pentecostal community, is not simply to collect data, but as an impassioned follower of God, to engage with His people so that they may be released to serve in their full capacity and calling. And even whilst assuming a mostly ‘FG moderator’ hat, there were times during ELS when, in an appropriate and post data-gathering time, I was able to bring a word of encouragement or teaching towards individuals, like John.

There were also times when I too was encouraged by others in my current task. One female participant talked to me at the Summit the following year and thanked me for the FG. She explained how it had become a catalyst for her to hear an affirming word from God to continue to be put forward as an elder in her local church. The choice to do a PhD full-time challenged my previously more comfortable position within Elim. It could have been possible that during my three years research, my Elim credential would lapse because I was not on the leadership of an Elim church. In one small way this was reflected in my inability to vote during the Representative Session. Yet, even then, at ELS 2018 a proposal was brought to allow all Elim ministers the right to vote in the Representative Session. I felt affirmed as the vote was passed, and I could once again vote in that Session. On a personal level I took this affirmation from Conference, as another affirmation from God. The Spirit is not just interested in the research but in the researcher.

I was also encouraged by individual women ministers who were aware of my past and current research. They thanked me for taking up their cause, for giving them a voice, for

being a man who cares for the position of women. Even small words of encouragement helped me to see the larger purpose of my work and encouraged me to present a voice from their standpoint. I also met independently with two Elim female ministers who have an equal passion to address the inequalities that women face both in the local church and in the wider movement. Those conversations were timely, as we three are now considering how our separate research interests could intersect in providing a resource and teaching opportunity for the Elim movement.

On this occasion I came to ELS with more of a FG mindset than as a worshipper/receiver, for this was my one great opportunity to gather data. But God's plan was big enough to help me with the FGs and to encourage me as well. Data was gathered as views and testimonies were shared. The process of the FGs themselves provided a space for God to do a work in individuals, whether that was to give them a chance to share their story, or to allow views to be presented, and in some cases challenged. Outside of the FG room God was still working, in and through me, in and through others, so that His will, for freedom, will be achieved and accomplished in this part of His Church, the Elim movement.

### **3.3. Conclusion**

In this chapter I have detailed the rationale for, and use of, two qualitative methods for my empirical research, examining how the e-survey complemented the FGs. I discussed a number of practical issues that were learnt from running the FGs. I have also started to show how the relational, communal and experiential setting of the FGs fits well into the Pentecostal affective and narrative worldview. In a development of Pentecostal methodology, I present a testimony that gives a narrative surrounding the FGs. Examples from this continue to advocate for an openness towards God in the research process as well as the research itself.

I will now give an account of Pentecostal hermeneutics from academic writings (primarily *prescriptive*) before I turn to the substantive chapters of analysis. In both, I arrange the chapters loosely around the triad, focussing in order on: Scripture, then the Spirit, then the Community.

## **CHAPTER 4. PENTECOSTAL HERMENEUTICS – OVERVIEW AND SCRIPTURE**

The Spirit enables us to read the Bible with some new clarity that could not be possible without his aid (McKay, 1994, p.21).

### **4.1. Introduction**

In this chapter I introduce the concept of Pentecostal hermeneutics and its development in the academic literature in the last few decades. I then focus on one of the key aspects used to define Pentecostal hermeneutics: Scripture. A number of areas, in reference to Scripture, are frequently referred to in the development of a distinct Pentecostal hermeneutic. These I explore in some detail, including Fundamentalism, Evangelicalism and the view of Scriptural inspiration; the application of historical-critical and historical-grammatical approaches; and finally, the possibilities and challenges presented by adopting a postmodern approach. Current Pentecostal literature demonstrates that there are various differing hermeneutical approaches being used (Holmes, 2013, p.273), this chapter will explore much of that discussion.

Firstly, I will give an explanation of the way in which I am using the term hermeneutics. Hermeneutics in a broad conception, seeks to explain how we interpret texts, including translation and commentary (Ervin, 1981, p.13). The scope of these “texts” can range, for instance, from an actual text to an encounter with nature (Yong, 2011, p.4), or the examination of a sermon (Cartledge, 2016, p.260), or can be applied to any expression or feature read as “text” (Sheppard, 1994 p. 125). Within this thesis I am concerned with Pentecostal theology, and will incorporate both a theological hermeneutics and a biblical hermeneutics. Let me now explain how these are defined.

Yong argues that biblical theology demands a hermeneutic (Yong, 2002, p.27), not vice-versa. Biblical hermeneutics concentrates on the “rules and methods for interpreting Christian Scripture” (Yong, 2002, p.3). This is predominantly evident in large sections of this thesis as I examine the ways in which specific biblical verses are understood and acted upon. Yong goes on to argue for a broader “theological hermeneutics”, which is not limited to a recourse to Scriptural texts (2002, p.3). Drawing upon Yong’s work in this area, Oliverio (2015) discusses four types of Pentecostal hermeneutic that would come under this category: 1. The classical Pentecostal hermeneutic, 2. The Evangelical-Pentecostal hermeneutic, 3. The Contextual-Pentecostal hermeneutic, and 4. The Ecumenical-Pentecostal hermeneutic. Each of these offer a historical account of how hermeneutics, for

Pentecostals, have developed, and can be considered as broad terms. For instance, hermeneutics can “begin with the practices of the church” (Stiver, 2003 p. 182) and include “the world or nature, special religious experiences, general human experience, the human self, rationality and tradition” (Oliverio, 2015, p.319).

As an example of theological hermeneutics within my research, I consider the way in which a topic, namely ‘women in ministry’ is considered by Church Sessions. Whilst this includes biblical hermeneutics, I demonstrate how this also includes the role of the Holy Spirit and the Community in the interpretive process, and should therefore be considered as theological hermeneutics. This is similar to the way that Cartledge uses the term hermeneutics in his empirical approach to “ordinary” theology (2017). Cartledge, using empirical research, places hermeneutics within the context of lived church experience. He describes how congregants may discuss a sermon over refreshments at the end of a service, and how there is a “hermeneutical process going on here of narration and construction” involving both the Spirit and the community (2016, p.260). I do not generally distinguish which hermeneutics (biblical or theological) I am referring to, but trust that the context will aid the reader.

Having established some general parameters of hermeneutics I now look at some of the literature that discusses the more specific area of Pentecostal hermeneutics. In the introduction to his Reader on Pentecostal hermeneutics (2013c, vii), Martin explains that the aim of the book is to give an overview of the development of Pentecostal hermeneutics by drawing upon previously published articles (by a variety of authors) that have significantly contributed to the discussion. Not only does he want to provide a general chronological development of Pentecostal hermeneutics, but also to showcase theory alongside some practical application utilising specific biblical texts (these criteria determined his choice of inclusion). It is worth noting however, as Atkinson explains, that “it would be wrong to assume...that there is just one hermeneutic approach common to all Pentecostals, or that Pentecostals typically use hermeneutics which are unique to them” (2003, p.49). Martin’s approach, being based on Cleveland School publications, reflects a narrow picture of Pentecostal hermeneutics. Since Martin’s Reader there have been further publications<sup>35</sup> demonstrating that this topic is still open (with articles that attempt

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<sup>35</sup> For instance (Grey, 2011; Waddell, 2013; Oliverio, 2015; Purdy, 2015; Nel, 2015; Archer, 2015; Estrada III, 2015; Archer and Oliverio, 2016; Stronstad, 2016a; Stronstad, 2016b; Thiselton, 2016; Nel, 2016; Nel, 2017a; Nel, 2017b).

to further enhance a Pentecostal hermeneutic) and debated (with articles that critique the general themes taken in Martin's Reader).

According to Archer,<sup>36</sup> Pentecostal hermeneutics is "first and foremost a participatory and relational theological hermeneutic—a way of interpreting life and ultimate reality" (2015, p.327). This distinctive hermeneutic began to be academically developed, according to Thomas (2009), in response to Evangelical trends, in particular the "inerrancy" of Scripture, an issue I return to later. In his exploration of this topic Thomas does not aim to give an exhaustive development, but chooses to focus on "approaches that appear to be most constructive" (2009, p.289), beginning by tracing the development from Gerald T. Sheppard in the late 1970's (1978a; 1978b). He summarises the works of other "significant figures" up until Lee Roy Martin's monograph (2008). Five years later, Martin himself collates a number of articles on the subject (in his Reader), most of which had previously appeared in the *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* (and therefore reflect the views of the "Cleveland School" – see footnote 36).

Both Thomas' article, and Martin's book are helpful in presenting an overall picture of often cited works on the topic of Pentecostal hermeneutics from the perspective of Pentecostals,<sup>37</sup> although this topic has not been limited to the attention of Pentecostals.<sup>38</sup> In 2008, Martin said that in the last decade "over forty articles and books on the topic [of Pentecostal hermeneutics] have been published" (2013a, p.209). Five years later, in his Reader on Pentecostal hermeneutics, the bibliography of works specific to this subject contains some 133 publications, even with so many, it is not exhaustive. This growth demonstrates a growing interest in the topic. Moreover, it indicates a general rise of Pentecostals in the 'academy',<sup>39</sup> partly aided by their comfort in expressing their own personal faith (Waddell, 2013, p.171).

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<sup>36</sup> Kenneth Archer is Professor of Theology and Pentecostal studies at Southeastern University, Lakeland, Florida and is often grouped with other academics like Christopher Thomas, Lee Roy Martin and Rickie Moore in what is termed the "Cleveland School" for charismatic-Pentecostal hermeneutics (Oliverio, 2016, p.8; Poirier, 2017a, p.8). According to Yong the Cleveland School "seeks inspiration from the first generation of modern Pentecostal spirituality" (2016, p.190n3). The Cleveland School has a printing press CPT and issues the *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* (JPT).

<sup>37</sup> Other publications have added or overlapped in tracing Pentecostal hermeneutics, for instance Karkkainen *Pentecostal hermeneutics in the making: On the way from Fundamentalism to Postmodernism* (1998).

<sup>38</sup> For instance, Anthony Thiselton (Emeritus Professor of Christian Theology, and Church of England Priest), gives this topic some attention in *A shorter guide to the Holy Spirit* (2016).

<sup>39</sup> The anti-intellectual position of Pentecostals is interestingly discussed by Nel (who is a Pentecostal and has a chair for "Ecumenism" in North-West University, South Africa), although this relates

In the methodology section of chapter 2, I introduced the concept of a Pentecostal methodology. A key concept behind this is an expectation that God will be involved with the reader/hearer. For Pentecostal hermeneutics this allows an emphasis on experience, encounter and relationship. The idea of ‘encounter’ (or ‘experience’) is common in Pentecostal theology, Warrington’s *Pentecostal Theology* is subtitled “A Theology of Encounter” (2008). In that, Warrington explains how Pentecostalism started with encounters (e.g. at Azusa street), how Pentecostals still value encounters with God as transformative (2008, p.26), how Pentecostals don’t simply “affirm a list of biblical beliefs, they have encountered them experientially” (2008, p.22), and how the “experiential encounter of the Spirit of God” is “fundamental to Pentecostalism” (2008, p.20). The Holy Spirit’s role in Pentecostal hermeneutics is discussed in the next chapter. The word ‘encounter’ does much to encapsulate the Pentecostal experience, distinctly identified by the Baptism in the Spirit. Pentecostals would also identify with the word ‘relationship’, in both the human and divine direction; it is encounter that makes the Pentecostal perception of this faith-relationship distinct. Such encounters range from a (sometimes well defined) Baptism in the Spirit, to an expectation of God’s regular action through His Spirit (similar to Smith’s *Radical Openness* (2010, p.35)), including a manifestation of gifts (*charismata*).

Marius Nel describes the importance of experience in Pentecostal theology, saying “Pentecostal theology is experience-certified theology, a theology that through faith and obedience becomes a Bible-based ‘experience-reality’” (2017c); as such he marries up the importance of the Bible alongside the role of experience. McKay (1994) describes how his theology became a two-way encounter, not only the reader/hearer<sup>40</sup> exploring the Scripture (with the Spirit), but also the reader/hearer being explored and challenged by the Scripture and Spirit. This sense of the text reading us is explored by Casey Cole (2017) within the context of the “texts of terror”<sup>41</sup> to help define a Pentecostal orthopathy (rather than simply orthodoxy, or orthopraxis). She describes the orthopathic hermeneutic as one that challenges us “to be fashioned and formed by the heart of God revealed in Christ” (2017, p.274), it engages with our feelings and “tests the feelings” (*italics in original*) (2017, p.272), affirming Smith’s aspect of *affection* (2010, p.43).

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specifically to South Africa, it is still pertinent as a broad picture (2016). Whilst Yong accounts for the various waves of Pentecostal scholarship, from Pentecostal historians, to Pentecostal Biblical Scholarship, to Pentecostal Theologians (2007).

<sup>40</sup> The term ‘hearer’ is utilised deliberately by Martin (2013a, p.226), as well as Ellington (1996, p.24).

<sup>41</sup> Referring to the title and work of Tribble (1984).

Now that I have given some background and scope to hermeneutics generally, and Pentecostal hermeneutics specifically, I will focus my discussion on the often conceived triad of 'Scripture, Spirit and Community'. I will be using these as centres from which other themes will be explored; and later on, I will demonstrate how they relate to Pentecostal practice. This triad is frequently developed and alluded to by many authors on this topic, and according to Archer is has "become the primary rubric for discussing a critical and constructive pentecostal hermeneutic" (2015, p.327). I will let Ellington's quote form these areas:

Pentecostalism arises out of experiences of the presence and action of God in the everyday life of the Christian, in constant dialogue with the **biblical** story, interpreted within the **community** of faith and through the guidance of the **Holy Spirit**. (1996, p.26) (my emphasis).

This triad is explicitly used by Yong (2002) and Archer (2004a) in their exploration of Pentecostal hermeneutics and utilised by many other since. The rest of this chapter will be devoted to the first of this triad, whilst the other two aspects will be explored in the next chapter.

#### **4.2. The Scripture**

The inspired text of Scripture functions normatively within the community of faith, the church, as the Holy Spirit mediates between the horizon of the text and the horizon of the community. (Cartledge, 2013, p.134)

Pentecostals have a high view of Scripture, not just loving the Word,<sup>42</sup> but also understanding and teaching it.<sup>43</sup> Pentecostals expect to deepen their relationship with God, through encounters in the Scriptural text (Warrington, 2008, p.188), reading Scripture with a *radical openness* (Smith, 2010, p.12). Pentecostalism has traditionally been a pioneering mission-orientated movement, although in modern times there has been a tension between pioneering and settling. Within Elim in the last decade there has been a re-focus on church planting in order to awaken those aspects of Elim's DNA.<sup>44</sup> Purdy highlights the importance of Scripture for Pentecostal hermeneuts, especially as it encourages their mission focus, he says:

For Pentecostals, hermeneutics is anchored to Scripture and serves the purpose of interpreting the text....The role of hermeneutics is to enable the

<sup>42</sup> (Hollenweger, 1997, v; L.R. Martin, 2013c, viii).

<sup>43</sup> cf. Hollenweger's mildly disparaging comments in the dedication of his book, in which he says "To my friends and teachers in the Pentecostal Movement who taught me to love the Bible and to my teachers and friends in the Presbyterian Church who taught me to understand it" (1997).

<sup>44</sup> This was particularly aimed as a part of considering Elim's centenary and was termed The Big Centenary Ask (TBCA), "DNA" as a term is used within Elim parlance.



interpreter to offer a legitimate and understandable meaning of a biblical text to the faith community, and enable them to fulfil their mandated mission. (2015, p.77)

As much as I agree with Purdy that mission and hermeneutics are intrinsically linked; however, it is necessary to discuss the various views about how one can come to a point of suggesting there is a 'legitimate' understanding of the biblical text. I will consider some of the debates concerning inerrancy, biblical and historical criticism and postmodernism following a mention of early Pentecostalism.

Archer looks at the way that early Pentecostals approached the Bible, and suggests that they used the 'Bible Reading Method'. This was a primary tool used by the Holiness movement (Wesleyan and Keswickian),<sup>45</sup> which then inspired those who became Pentecostals (2001, p.42). Archer refers back to Charles Parham's Bible school in Topeka at which this Bible Reading Method was used to discover verses that were pertinent to the Baptism in the Spirit. Like Purdy's quote above, Parham's intention was to enable the students, as Archer explains, to "prepare evangelists for the end-time harvest" (2001, p.46). Similar to the proof-text system, the Bible Reading Method is both inductive, in that key words and verses were compiled from Scripture, and deductive, in that inferences and conclusions were drawn from those compiled verses (2001, p.45). This approach became the standard approach used by early Pentecostals, including Parham and Seymour, as they argued for their distinct doctrines (especially speaking in tongues as evidence of the Baptism of the Spirit) (2001, pp.46–49). This focus on Scripture to explain Scripture appears to have been a fundamental aspect to early Pentecostal hermeneutics, although in the next chapter it will be argued that this is not the only approach that Pentecostals use. An emphasis on Scripture has raised significant discussion and debate regarding inerrancy, to which I now turn.

#### 4.2.1. Inerrancy

It was the issue of Scriptural "inerrancy" that inspired Sheppard to start to explore a Pentecostal approach to hermeneutics, and continues to be an issue of discussion, even within Elim.<sup>46</sup> Sheppard was responding to an ongoing debate concerning whether the

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<sup>45</sup> These 19<sup>th</sup> Century European Protestant movements are frequently referenced as pre-cursors to the Pentecostal movement (although some limit this to the Western and African-American revivalist locus of Azusa Street; contrasting what may have been separate loci in India, China and Latin America for instance (B. Martin, 2013a, p.117)) as well as Fundamentalism.

<sup>46</sup> In 2018 a committee was established to consider and suggest reviews to Elim's Foundational truths, which include a statement on the Bible, as I refer to in more detail later.

explicit affirmation of the inerrancy of Scripture was a plumb-line for being fully Evangelical. He viewed the early Pentecostals as finding a ground in which they could combine their religious experience with a literal interpretation of the text. He explored the tradition of the Assemblies of God USA (a Pentecostal denomination), determining that they “had consistently identified with the more moderate Evangelical tradition, rather than fundamentalism” (Thomas, 2009, p.289).<sup>47</sup> Fundamentalists are particularly linked to the early 20<sup>th</sup> Century debates with Modernists, and generally state the “inerrancy of Scripture” as a basic doctrine (Archer, 2009, pp.55–56); doctrine is their central focus, even when that is to the detriment of the relational aspects of faith (Grey, 2011, p.50). The relationship between Pentecostals, Evangelicals and Fundamentalists provided/s an interesting dialogue as each seeks to express their views (in this example) regarding the place of Scripture. Some argue that inerrancy debates should not become the main battlefield for Pentecostals (Ellington, 1996, p.37), whilst others are concerned that if the inerrancy of Scripture is simply ignored, then Pentecostals run the risk of being isolated from historical tradition and becoming simply an experiential religion (Clark, 1997, p.199).

In general terms Scriptural inerrancy was promoted by Evangelicals in response to Liberal scholarship (Kay, 2004, p.71) and the rise of Scientific Naturalism. Although not new, with St. Augustine being used as an example by some (Geisler, 1999, pp.12–13), inerrancy can mean a word-for-word accuracy of the Bible, as opposed infallibility which “implies that there are no mistakes in Scripture” (Kay, 2004, p.74). Such distinctions will be explored in my analysis of the role of Scripture from my empirical research (chapter 6).

Hollenweger makes the point that early Pentecostals did not have a “doctrine of inspiration”, and that “Jonathan Paul, the leader and founder of German Pentecostalism, called the doctrine of “inerrancy” an “unchristian doctrine”” (2000, p.10). This therefore questions Ellington’s contention that the inspiration of the Bible is axiomatic to Pentecostal hermeneutics (Lewis and Poirier, 2006, p.19). As Kay explains, Pentecostals only produced position papers on inerrancy in order to “facilitate collaboration and fellowship” with the National Association of Evangelicals (1993, p.41). Noel argues however, that by accepting inerrancy the problem really was in the “acceptance of the Modernistic hermeneutical baggage that accompanied it” (2010, p.226). Similar views have endorsed the acceptance

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<sup>47</sup> Although Karkkainen traces the broader Pentecostal journey from a starting point that included Fundamentalism (1998).

of parts of postmodernism (which I later discuss). Ellington says how in the US, such Evangelicalism is “preoccupied with articulating their faith within the framework of modern rationalism” (1996, p.19). This is a rather broad claim that is not evidenced in all the literature, yet on the whole Evangelicalism seems connected with a ‘modern’ approach and defends itself against postmodernism.<sup>48</sup> But examples of Evangelicals embracing postmodernism (and vice versa) can also be found.<sup>49</sup> This rationalism however, cannot account for Pentecostal experience, as Ellington says: “By excluding the supernatural and focusing instead exclusively on the rational, much modern scholarship has become impoverished in the way that it understands God to be present” (1996, p.36). This once again affirms the Pentecostal emphasis on encounter, relationship and embodiment.

Grey draws a distinction between simply accepting the Evangelical terms and the loaded tenets behind it, noting that the “Evangelical camp provided the Pentecostal community with the vocabulary to express their high view of Scripture, but in a way not necessarily reflective of their reading practice” (2011, p.50). For her, Fundamentalist terms have been adopted rather than developed by the Pentecostals. Pentecostal readers normally value the authority of God behind the text, rather than the text itself. Karkkainen (1998, p.82) agrees that:

Pentecostals have never grounded their understanding of the authority of Scripture on a bedrock of a doctrine of inerrancy or any other doctrine but, rather, on “their experiences of encountering a living God, directly and personally.

His thoughts continue to echo the experiential and relational concepts raised in the section on Pentecostal methodology in chapter 2. Karkkainen claims that the acceptance of inerrancy was “motivated by the desire to receive acceptance from the larger Evangelical Church” (1998, p.80). Oliverio however, argues that Pentecostals turned from a Classical Pentecostal hermeneutic to an Evangelical-Pentecostal hermeneutic much earlier than an alliance was formed with Evangelicals (2015, p.317). In chapters 6-8 I will analyse the up-to-date Pentecostal hermeneutics of Elim lay leaders, as they interact with the Bible. Historic positions do not necessarily reflect the current position, for instance, Atkinson argues that “many Pentecostals would see as a strength...an adherence to the doctrine of the verbal inerrancy of Scripture” (2003, p.52). “Inerrancy” may have become a doctrine amongst

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<sup>48</sup> For example McQuilkin and Mullen’s: *The impact of postmodern thinking on Evangelical hermeneutics* (1997).

<sup>49</sup> For instance *The next reformation: Why Evangelicals must embrace Postmodernity* (Raschke, 2004).

many Pentecostals, but the necessary acceptance of the modernist assumptions that underlie it still need to be considered. These polar views on Scriptural inspiration/inerrancy, even within the ranks of Pentecostals, demonstrate a spectrum of opinion. Yet, Atkinson discusses the likeliness of such a spectrum not just amongst Pentecostals, but also in “the whole evangelical world” (2003, p.52).

Matthias Becker (2004) focuses on *inspiration* whilst addressing the tenet of “verbal inerrancy”, a phrase adopted by early Pentecostal groups, including Elim (Frestadius, 2018, p.161). Becker distinguishes between an inerrancy in the text as we have it, and an inerrancy in the Holy Spirit who inspires the text to us today. He wants to acknowledge difficulties with the text and what he identifies as ‘contradictions’, whilst at the same time not wanting to undermine the inspiration of the Bible. He places more emphasis on “reason” and “historical context and the rules and laws of linguistics” (2004, p.46), than would perhaps make some Pentecostals comfortable. Inspiration, for Becker, appears to rely upon the role of the Holy Spirit in speaking to the authors, whilst allowing for their own culture and personality to frame the text. Following this comes the inspiration of the reader, allowing for scribal mistakes in the transmission of the text.<sup>50</sup> He admits here the possibility of the readers’ illumination not being inerrant, and therefore requiring a foundation of “reason and common sense” (2004, p.47). He acknowledges that this view could as easily be adopted by Evangelicals, so adds: “What is, however, specifically Pentecostal is the belief that the interpreter is inspired by God and therefore able to connect with the divine life which is conserved by the biblical text” (2004, p.47). Whilst the expectation of encounter will sit well with Pentecostals, I doubt many modern Pentecostals (whose statements of faith we will shortly consider) would wish to agree with what sounds, in Becker’s theory, as opening the doorway to an errant Bible.

William Kay studied the difference between “inerrant” and “infallible” within the historic positions of Pentecostal movements in the UK<sup>51</sup> and then, through empirical research of Ministers, considered the difference that adherents to these terms have (2004). Although he finds it hard to give a clear distinction between the meanings of the terms, he does distinguish:

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<sup>50</sup> In an early edition of Elim’s publication *The Evangel*, Principal Percy Parker arguing for biblical inerrancy quoted the caveat: “when freed from all errors and mistakes of Translators, Copyists, and Printers” (1928, p.26).

<sup>51</sup> He studied Elim, the Assemblies of God UK (AoG), the Apostolic and the Church of God.

inerrancy, which must presume word-for-word accuracy, and infallibility, which implies that there are no mistakes in Scripture but without actually focusing upon the individual words themselves. (2004, p.74)

The terms 'inerrant' and 'infallible' can be hard to define normatively, although some have attempted to give a general definition. For instance, Atkinson proposes that inerrancy can be understood to mean that the Bible is "without "errors" of any type" (2003, p.52), whereas infallibility, according to Feinberg, refers to the Bible's trustworthiness, especially in respect to fulfilling its purpose regarding salvation (1983, p.25), rather than in areas outside of faith, e.g. science (Warrington, 2008, p.184). Another useful piece of empirical research, whose approach informs my survey (see more discussion on this in chapters 6) is carried out by Jelen et al. who distinguish between 'infallible', 'inerrant' and 'literal' on a scale of rising stringency (1990). Kay does suggest that one could argue that those who self-identify as "infallibalist" are more liberal, yet this is only in relation to those who identify as "inerrant". One aspect of particular note to the current thesis is Kay's finding that the "inerrantist group [has] a worldview that is strong in its belief in male authority" (2004, p.80). By using Jelen et al.'s suggested questions regarding views on biblical literalism I will be able to demonstrate if Kay's finding is the same with Elim Church Sessions (see chapter 6).

Pentecostal movements in the UK present their positions regarding the Bible through their "Foundational truths". For instance, Elim's view on the Bible states:

We believe the Bible, as originally given, to be without error, the fully inspired and infallible Word of God and the supreme and final authority in all matters of faith and conduct. (2016b)

This current statement, pointing towards a *radical openness* (Smith, 2010, p.12), was formulated in 1992 by a specific 'Fundamentals Committee' set up by Elim in response to "particular controversy on cardinal issues" (1992, p.2). It is interesting to note that Elim has used the word "infallible" (the more liberal word, according to Kay) and infers "inerrancy" through the clause "without error", although this is limited to the Bible "as originally given". With both terms "without error" and "infallible", the committee references and is clearly influenced by the views espoused by the American Assemblies of God. Regarding the term "inerrant" the committee reports that:

Some evangelical scholars are of the opinion that the Bible is without error on matters relating to the nature and character of God, the Lord Jesus Christ, Salvation the nature and destiny of mankind but allow for the possibility of error on matters of historical fact, for instance. (1992, p.3)

Following this sentence, the committee makes it clear that they do not endorse such a limited view of “inerrancy”, because it “gives the impression that God communicated erroneous facts”. Therefore, within the scope of “originally given”, Elim holds that the Bible is both “without error” and “incapable of error” (a phrase used to explain their view of “infallible”, again borrowed from the American Assemblies of God). The explanation for “infallibility” is further explained in terms of “trustworthiness of the Bible”. A somewhat confusing definition is quoted from Bruce Milne which attempts to explain that although certain passages could be fallible, they are “infallible within the context of the whole of Scripture” (1992, p.3). Perhaps this can be best understood as “Although Scripture is infallible, one’s interpretation of it is not infallible in every detail” (McQuilkin and Mullen, 1997, p.69), although this would be a generous interpretation of Milne.

Similar, although skirting the “inerrant / without error” clause, the Assemblies of God UK (AoG) website states:

We believe that the Bible (i.e. the Old and New Testaments excluding the Apocrypha), is the inspired Word of God, the infallible, all sufficient rule for faith and practice. (2016)

The Apostolic church website however simply says:

The divine inspiration and authority of the Holy Scriptures. (Apostolic Church, 2016)

With some modern UK Pentecostal movements seemingly happy to accept what had been traditionally an Evangelical position regarding the Bible, we will later see the extent to which this hinders the progress of a Pentecostal hermeneutic.

In attempting to define the Pentecostal distinctive there are three main areas that have been used to help in contrast or approbation: ‘historical-critical’, ‘historical-grammatical’ and ‘postmodern’, to which I now turn.

#### 4.2.2. Historical-critical and historical-grammatical approaches

In order to facilitate a thorough understanding of Pentecostal hermeneutics, I will briefly distinguish between the “historical-critical approach” and the “historical- grammatical approach” (also known as the grammatical/grammatico-historical/historico (and vice-versa) approach) because these can be confused (Harrington and Patten, 1994, p.112). These terms are commonly used by some Pentecostal academics whilst defining a Pentecostal hermeneutic and attempt to express aspects of biblical scholarship that are regularly used.

We will see that these are not distinctly Pentecostal, yet are used by many Pentecostals in support of the more experiential, relational and encounter-based Pentecostal aspects.

According to Pepler (2007, p.257), the first (historical-critical approach) is generally labelled as “liberal” and the second (historical-grammatical) as “conservative”. The first attempts to isolate the **sources behind the text** (using “Literary Criticism, Form Criticism, Redaction Criticism and Source Criticism”) and is connected with Modernism in its so-called objective approach. Whilst the second looks for a **single or literal meaning** (using “Historical-cultural Analysis, Contextual Analysis, Lexical-syntactical analysis, Theological Analysis, and Literary Analysis”). Autry explains that the historical-grammatical method is a combination of “language study and historical study (understood in the broad sense to include customs and worldviews of the biblical times)” (1993, p.34). Keener describes the goal of the historical-grammatical methodology as discovering the text’s “original meaning and intention”, and traces such an approach through Zwingli through to ancient critical works, highlighting the pre-modern aspect of this approach (2016, p.129).

The historical-critical approach was dominant from the mid 1800’s until the mid to late 1900’s (Barton, 1998, p.9). It has four distinct characteristics which could be summarised as: a concern with the origin of the text, the original meaning of the text,<sup>52</sup> what really happened objectively, and a “disinterested scholarship” (1998, p.12).<sup>53</sup> Thiselton indicates that “Pentecostal writers tend to see “the historical-critical method” as one single, generalized, thing” (2016, p.182). However, this is not necessarily apparent, with Cargal expressing varied thoughts by Pentecostal scholars on the use and extent of “critical-historical exegesis” (1993, p.174). A subsequent response to Cargal was made in the same Pentecostal journal by Menzies who argued for the historical-critical method (1994, p.118). However, I will demonstrate that there are specific aspects of this approach that are in contrast to a Pentecostal hermeneutic. For instance, the removal of “pious” aspects (e.g. individual spiritual experiences) from an approach to the biblical text (Barton, 1998, p.12)

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<sup>52</sup> Within the Reader collected by Martin, Archer highlights the author’s original intent and the historical context of the text (2013, p.133), and Waddell identifies “historical-critical” with source criticism (2013, p.173). This approach takes a contra-position to a “text-immanent” interpretation (1998 p. 9), which became more popular from the 1970’s, and focuses on the “intention of the text” rather than the authorial intention (Snyman, 1991, p.86). Snyman goes on to say that according to this approach, the text “can be explained in terms of itself and need not be complemented by consideration of its genesis” (1991, p.89).

<sup>53</sup> Other definitions and tenets have been suggested, e.g. see (Spawn, 2013, p.50).

would be contrary to the areas of encounter and experience that are key Pentecostal aspects (as introduced in the Pentecostal methodology section).

Although some Pentecostals are happy to utilise a historical-critical approach (L.R. Martin, 2013c, vi–vii), some perceive a weakness because of its link to objective rationalism. Grey argues strongly that the widespread acceptance of historical criticism by Pentecostals is paradoxical considering:

historical criticism...resists a fundamental element of that faith-value, the continuation of the supernatural activity of God from the apostolic community to the present. (2011, p.39)

In agreement, Martin declares that the historical-critical approach is “founded upon the modernist notion of rational objective criteria for truth” (2013c, vii–viii), which is substantiated by the four characteristics given above. As a point of interest, he also argues that the Evangelical approach is similarly founded upon such modernist rational objective criteria. Poirier however argues that similar arguments, made by Archer, “often descends into caricature and gross inaccuracy” (2017a, p.5).

Leaving modernity to one side for the moment, objectivity is a complex issue. Both subjectivity alone, and objectivity alone, raise disconcerting problems. As Johns and Johns discuss, Bultmann’s “new hermeneutic”<sup>54</sup> acknowledges subjectivity (with a “pre-understanding”<sup>55</sup>) “but fails to honor the objective nature as well as the unity of the text” (1992, p.128). Their solution is a hybrid, acknowledging the “objective authority of the text” as well as involving a “confession of pre-understanding”, which they identify as similar to “sharing our testimony” (a Pentecostal trait that relates to Smith’s *narrative epistemology* (2010, p.12)).

In his discussion of theological hermeneutics, Archer sees a progression from the “author’s mind” (or intent),<sup>56</sup> to literary criticism, to “advocacy/reader response criticism” (see later section); and similar to the hybrid just suggested, he says that “a critical pentecostal hermeneutic does not necessarily endorse any one method” (2015, pp.329–330). This

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<sup>54</sup> Bultmann’s approach was “based on existential interpretation and demythologizing” (So, 2009, p.89). He was influenced by the philosophy of Heidegger (Ankoviak, 1974, p.43), and his new hermeneutic was developed by others, including Fuchs and Ebeling (So, 2009, p.89).

<sup>55</sup> Which can also be described as a level of “presupposition” (Atkinson, 2003, p.50).

<sup>56</sup> This is a much-discussed area even within Pentecostal hermeneutics, however I have not gone into much detail here, although I do return to discuss it briefly in the next chapter. For further reading I recommend (Poirier, 2004; Poirier, 2005; Smith, 2006; Holmes, 2013; Poirier, 2016).



flexibility allows Pentecostals from varying backgrounds and cultures to apply different methods pragmatically, whilst acknowledging the primacy of the “biblical text in front of the reader”, rather than a critically deduced text (Archer, 2015, p.330). Purdy engages with Archer’s views, and states that he seeks to “expand Archer’s model beyond a Western context since twenty-first century Pentecostalism is largely non-Western” (2015, p.89). Speaking from an African context he goes on to say that it is necessary “to control creative interpretation but a *legitimate*, distinct Pentecostal hermeneutic must also engage methodology that recognizes the interpreter’s involvement in the creation of meaning” (italics in original) (2015, p.92). This balance between allowing individual interpretation and curbing excessive subjectivity recurs when I later look at postmodernism in the next section, as well as the role of the Spirit and the Community (in the next chapter).

It is possible for Pentecostals to accept some parts of the historical-grammatical approach more readily than the historical-critical, whilst also inserting aspects they feel better reflect the Pentecostal “ethos” (L.R. Martin, 2013a, p.212). Cartledge points out that historical-grammatical hermeneutics have historically been used by many Pentecostals, despite its connection with Evangelicalism. He explains that this has emphasised the “background of the words in the biblical text without necessarily considering the nature of how the Spirit is involved in the mediation of meaning” (2013, p.130). Kenneth Archer looks back at early Pentecostalism to affirm a hermeneutic that did not conform to the historical-critical method. He claims that early Pentecostals did not seek the authors’ original intent, nor view it as a “static deposit of truth”, which the rational objective truth of the historical-critical method did adopt. Rather, Pentecostals took the text at “face value”, with no concern for the historical-critical method, expecting the message of the text to inform their lives, along with supernatural manifestations in the “present era” (Archer, 1996, p.66). Poirier, in his critique of Archer, points out however, that Pentecostals do not simply accept and replicate all that happened in early Pentecostalism (e.g. their expectation that speaking in tongues was primarily a missionary tool ‘xenolalia’<sup>57</sup>). Therefore he asks *why* we should accept their hermeneutic, arguing that Archer does not address this *why* (2017a, p.7).

Purdy also connects early Pentecostalism with the “historical-grammatical method of biblical interpretation”, identifying that they were influenced by Fundamentalism (2015, p.56), he suggests a limited embrace of this method:

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<sup>57</sup> See also (Yong, 2002, p.284).

The Pentecostal hermeneut should use the historical-grammatical method in a limited manner along with literary critical methods such as narrative criticism, rhetorical criticism, etc. as part of their methodological toolbox. (2015, p.86)

As I explained in the section on methodology, Pentecostals in practice have an affective, narrative epistemology (Smith, 2010, p.43). This rules out an approach to the Bible that is limited to a historical-grammatical approach. Rather a Pentecostal approach would also include aspects of 'witness', 'story' and testimony'; this will become more evident in the analysis chapters of 6-8. Archer would agree with much of this, arguing for an emphasis on the narrative critical approach (whilst endorsing insights from modern literary criticism) because of the emphasis on 'story' for Pentecostals (2009, pp.226–227). With this approach, Archer argues that the coherence of the biblical story is maintained whilst the story itself can shape the reader.

Just as Pentecostals approach the Scripture expecting God to speak through it into their current situation (Ellington, 1996, p.21; Warrington, 2008, p.188), so with a sermon (another emphasis of Pentecostal orality) Pentecostals would expect God to speak to them through the message, as Karkkainen says:

The sermon reached for an immediate experience for the listeners and was not characterized by a hermeneutics that spent its time exegeting a text in historical critical manner. The preacher focused on the immediate meaning of a text. (1998, p.78)

This immanence and immediacy calls for a hermeneutic that is open to a present hearing, rather than a static meaning offered by the historical-critical method (Lewis and Poirier, 2006, p.5). Despite this openness, "most Pentecostal academics" (Cargal, 1993, p.174) will, as a first step, still find value in "linguistic, literary and historical analysis" (Ervin, 1981, p.18). To some extent therefore there appears to be a two/three-step approach, the first utilises a 'face value' approach (which appears to me to be equivalent to the 'plain sense' reading), the second using 'historical-grammatical' approaches, the third listening to the voice of the Spirit and an expectation of encounter. These steps are not necessarily in order, nor are they all used all the time.

As an example of a historical-grammatical approach, Powers offers a critique of the proof-texting that many use regarding women in ministry (generally using 1 Cor. 11:3-16 and 1 Tim 2:11-15), saying:

Treating the epistles as a collection of 'propositions to be believed' and 'imperatives to be obeyed' apart from the original historical and cultural

setting, does violence to the nature of the biblical text. In other words, the epistles are not exclusively didactic in contrast to other more historical and descriptive parts of Scripture. Like all Scripture, the epistles present the exegete with the intersection of the eternal word and historical particularity....It is important to respect this historical reality and the occasional nature of the epistles in interpretation. (2001, p.20)

Powers is primarily using historical-grammatical methods in her analysis of the place of epistles in the early church. As such she is then able to go on and defend women's role in leadership that is based, not on the plain sense of these verses, but on a holistic historical-critical grammatical approach. Likewise Melissa Archer, regarding the epistles, adds "The occasional nature of Paul's epistles—that they address specific situations within specific churches—warrants against pulling a section out of a particular letter and using it to interpret the rest of Paul's writings" (2017, p.46).

As much as the plain/literal sense (face value) of a text is regarded, this is not the end of Pentecostal hermeneutics, but there appears an expectation that the Holy Spirit can bring an individual 'here and now' message from the text to the person (McLean, 1984, p.36). This is termed, by some as a *rhema* word, one of two Geek words for 'word' (the other being *logos*), with *rhema* emphasising the spoken voice. Although, as I demonstrate later, there is safety in community regarding an 'anything goes' interpretation; it is still incumbent on the individual hearer to consider the *rhema* in the light of "explicit or implicit sense of Scripture", as Harrington and Patten explain. They go on to promote the strength of "textual analysis [in providing] controls on subjectivity", saying the text "cannot mean simply anything" (1994, p.113). References to the pre-modern or pre-critical era, in particular this style of hermeneutics employed by early Pentecostals, have still to account for interpreting difficult passages in today's culture. Purdy gives the example of trying to decide "if women should wear head coverings when attending church in the twenty-first century" (2015, p.83). This type of topical and textual tension will be examined as a key part of my research (see chapters 6-8).

In an attempt to form a Pentecostal hermeneutic from Scripture itself, Thomas uses the post-Pentecost interpretative forum of Acts 15, which he believes demonstrates an alternative approach to the historical-critical approach. Thomas says that the methodology utilised at the council of Jerusalem, is "far removed from the historical-critical or historical-grammatical approach" (1994, p.50). Rather, he sees the interpreters starting and moving from their own context to the text, and aided by the Spirit, within the security of the

community of faith, coming to a decision. This sense of bringing ourselves and our experiences openly to a community in which we find meaning from the biblical text as guided by the Spirit, is, for Thomas, central to a hermeneutic that Pentecostals should/do adopt. Purdy also argues that “meaning does not reside *exclusively* in the text” and believes that Acts 2 “points to a hermeneutic that involves interaction between, Spirit, Scripture, trained leader(s) and community in the interpretive process and creation of meaning” (Purdy, 2015, p.66). Poirier however, would seek to ensure that the community is not the only arbiter of meaning, “If truth is simply identified as the meaning attributed by a community, then how could a community’s understanding ever be wrong?” (Poirier, 2007, pp.183–184). Instead he would seek to explore the meaning attributed to the Scripture by the early church; I return to his thoughts in the next section.

The reference to the hermeneutical approach of the early Christians as revealed in Scripture, as seen by both Thomas and Purdy, appears to have become a strong foundation from which Pentecostal hermeneutics is being pursued. Of course, it is possible to ask what kind of hermeneutic Thomas uses to come to this conclusion! He does not indicate the role of the Spirit or community in his own interpretive work on Acts 15, but rather appears mostly to adopt a fairly ‘plain sense’ reading. Also, he is not “far removed” from a “historical-grammatical approach”, for he goes on to use a variant of ‘Textual Analysis’ by referring to both the Hebrew and the Septuagint versions of Amos 9:11-12. On the whole it is quite possible however, to argue that Thomas remains true to his own suggested hermeneutic. Let us assume that he has been inspired by the Holy Spirit in approaching and interpreting the text, that subsequent to that he has endorsed such an interpretation through the use of criticism(s) (which fits in with approaches already discussed – see Cargal above – but appears to be contrary to Thomas’ own suggestion), and submitted his findings to the community of faith that is peer-review.

Thomas goes on to illustrate his suggested hermeneutics by exploring the question of women in ministry, in which he first acknowledges a variety of interpretive options, which he says are based upon a “rationalistic” and “historical-critical” approach (1994, p.51), before utilising an approach based upon the paradigm of Acts 15. His approach, relying upon a community of believers, the experience of the Holy Spirit amongst those believers (revealed in testimony including past publications and a sense of what seems ‘good to us and the Holy Spirit’), and a consideration of Scriptural passages (viewing it as both

authoritative and dynamic). There are clearly some strengths in the approach posited by Thomas. It has biblical precedent, it is post-Pentecost, and it involves the Spirit, the Scripture and the community of faith. Whether or not this makes it uniquely Pentecostal is unclear, however it may be distinctly Pentecostal, which is more pertinent.<sup>58</sup> What he specifically lacks, and this thesis provides, is a *description* of current Pentecostal practice.

I suggest that the priority for Pentecostals is to encounter God through the text for their daily lives, believing that the text has an immanence because it is God-breathed (2 Timothy 3:16). If a Pentecostal priority is to be radically open to God (as Smith proposes (2010, p.12)), then the various approaches (whether historical or grammatical) are useful only in so far as they endorse or add to that encounter. Therefore the foundation stone, for a Pentecostal, becomes the spirit-breathed text, with some hermeneuts then finding further building blocks through approaches such as historical-grammatical ones. Purdy agrees as he sets out an acceptance of the “historical-grammatical” that sits outside of “modern presuppositions” and rather operates “from a Pentecostal worldview that allows for the supernatural” (2015, p.91). He later explains that “Historical-grammatical methodology can illuminate the cultural elements that operate in the world of the text and aid today’s Pentecostal interpreter in bringing the biblical witness to God’s revelation faithfully to their audience” (2015, p.150). This syncretism forms an understanding of the kind of Pentecostal pragmatism that I later discuss.

#### 4.2.3. Postmodern approach

Some Pentecostal scholars have looked towards postmodernism as providing a means by which the Pentecostal preference for narrative and experience (Smith, 2010, p.43) can be seen as valid. Martin for instance, and this is evidenced by the choice of publications he uses in the Reader, claims that modernism (because of its rational objective criteria for truth) is not suitable for a Pentecostal hermeneutic (2013b, viii). Some writers on Postmodernism seem to suggest a theological approach that is very similar to what is proposed as the Pentecostal hermeneutical triad, see (Vanhoozer, 2003). However, some Pentecostal scholars write against an adoption of postmodernism. I will now explore postmodernism as it has been utilised and debated by Pentecostals in their search for a distinctive hermeneutic.

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<sup>58</sup> Interestingly Karkkainen is not convinced in the need for a unique Pentecostal hermeneutic (1998, pp.96–97).

In order to facilitate a discussion of postmodernism I will attempt to categorise both modernism and postmodernism (and perhaps such terms as non-modern, hyper-modern, sub-modern and pre-modern). Modernity is frequently linked with the eighteenth century Enlightenment and the emphasis on rationality as the basis for epistemology (with a particular emphasis on Kant and Descartes) (Smith, 2004, p.95), or as Johns describes it “the *classical scientific worldview*” (italics in original) (1995, p.80).

James K. A. Smith (2004) draws upon the work of Radical Orthodoxy (RO),<sup>59</sup> tracing modernity further back to the thirteenth century. He explains their claims in relation to Duns Scotus and the ontological separation he endorsed which later facilitated the epistemological change in the Enlightenment (Ward and Milbank, 2008, p.157). As Smith explains, “behind the *politics* of modernity (liberal, secular) is an *epistemology* (autonomous reason), which is in turn undergirded by an *ontology* (univocity and the denial of participation)” (2004, pp.99–100). It is this ontology that is so important in understanding both the positions of modernity and postmodernity, and to which I briefly now turn.

According to the RO account, the flattening of the Creator’s being with the created being (univocity), of the transcendent with the immanent, creates a secularism that removes the need for God, and leads to an autonomous metaphysics. This autonomy is the basis of modernism, a modernism that privileges rationalism and not revelation. Modernism and secularism are therefore intrinsically linked. This influenced the way in which people approached the Bible, and led to modern Biblical criticism, as seen for instance with the de-mythologizing of Bultmann. RO does not see what is generally termed as postmodernism as a real shift from modernism, but rather describe it as “hyper-modern” due to the continuing ‘modern’ theme of the “autonomy of the self” (Smith, 2004, p.32).

It is not required here to accept the full account that RO gives, rather, the underlying issue of the autonomy of the self, along with the division between reason and revelation, along with the flattening of transcendence and immanence are issues of modernity that Pentecostals would not accept as part of their ‘worldview’.<sup>60</sup> Postmodernism, **where it is**

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<sup>59</sup> RO is a theological initiative represented by John Milbank, Catherine Pickstock and Graham Ward (1999).

<sup>60</sup> Johns describes a worldview as “that system of a priori assumptions with which an individual

**not a hyper-modernism** (a continuation of the modern theme of the autonomy of the self), may be a useful bandwagon for Pentecostals, so some claim (Cargal, 1993). We will now consider postmodernism in relation to biblical interpretation in more detail.

As Aichele et al. explain 'Postmodernism' is a broad and complex term to define (1995, p.8), but for the sake of this thesis I will generally take Lewis and Poirier's usage, that postmodernism – in the context of biblical interpretation - refers to "any approach opposed to the use or privileging of the historical method" (2006, p.6). This definition is not an 'end' to modernity, but rather "a different relation to modernism" (Aichele and Bible and Culture Collective, 1995, p.12). Modernism has come to be equated with scientific materialism as the source of knowledge, where empirical verification becomes the rule (Cross, 2002, pp.58–59). Postmodernism offers alternatives to the sources of knowledge, for instance through subjective experience and spirituality. As Cross explains, in postmodernism knowledge is something not simply out there to be discovered, but rather to be constructed (2002, p.59).

Although not a Pentecostal, I will also refer to the work of biblical Studies scholar Kočí, who helpfully attempts to define the equally broad term 'postmodern hermeneutics'; within which she finds a common principle, which she claims is 'the reader':

The reader becomes an indivisible part of the hermeneutical process because he or she has an immanent impact on the meaning of the text. In other words, the reader shapes the meaning of the text (Kočí, 2014, p.221).

What is distinct about a postmodern hermeneutic then, is this allowance of the input of the reader. Whilst this could fit within Lewis and Poirier's definition, they argue against the reader having such an impact on the meaning of the text (2006). Yet, for Martin, the two way appropriation of text and reader, appears to offer in favour of the "original Pentecostal ethos"; one that allowed for the Scripture being "dynamic and living" (2013a, p.209). As we will see, there needs to be a clarity concerning what elements of postmodernity can be utilised in developing a Pentecostal hermeneutic.

#### **4.2.3.1. Postmodernism: Reader-Response and Reception History**

Within postmodern hermeneutics there are a number of epistemologies and methods that can be adopted; for instance Aichele et al. discuss "epistemologies" such as

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interacts with and interprets his or her universe" (1995, p.75), and a "a complex integration of beliefs, values and affections" (1995, p.76).

“postconstructionalism, psychoanalytic criticism, and rhetorical criticism” and “methods” like “structuralist and reader-response criticism” (1995, p.4). In an attempt to limit this discussion, I will refer to Kočí who focusses on two interpretative approaches to Scripture: Reader-Response Criticism and Reception History (2014, p.219). Although similar in their postmodern application for the reader, they differ in their view of “the role of time....and tradition”. Regarding Reader-Response she explains:

David Clines, following Stanley Fish, claims that there is no persistence of meaning over time and that the text is determined to mean in a new context something completely different from what it means to us now. (2014, p.230)

An obvious criticism of this approach is its removal of objective meaning which can easily lead to an ‘anything goes’ approach. Clearly this quote enables totally new meanings, perhaps opposing ones, to come out of a text at different times. Kočí, who finds difficulties with this approach, claims that Reader-Response is not diachronic, it does not allow for tradition or time to develop meaning to the text, and so takes no account of history. This is not something that Pentecostals would want to endorse. However, its allowance for new interpretations is something which Pentecostals would be keen to adopt. The Pentecostal epistemology that endorses a radical openness towards God (Smith, 2010, p.35) does encourage an expectation that God will do something new and surprising. Yet, this is not to imply that Scripture is not a/the source of doctrinal orthodoxy. Similarly, Purdy warns that there is a danger with an “extreme reader-response hermeneutic” which could “ignore Pentecostalism’s high view of Scripture” (2015, p.125). As such, the Reader-Response approach has some merits as well as some pitfalls for Pentecostals to navigate. We will later see how the role of the Spirit and Community enhance the interpretive experience.

Reception History, on the other hand, is summarised by Kočí (again with reference to other scholars):

Anthony Thiselton, following Hans Robert Jauss, claims that there is indeed a continuity of meaning throughout time, to which new interpretations add new significance. (2014, p.230)

It is both synchronic, with the text having a static meaning (from the author and to the first readers), and diachronic, where the meaning has been appropriated through time and tradition (Kočí, 2014, p.220). Kočí however, claims Reception History does not account for contradictory traditions (2014, p.220) and therefore, as it stands, is unable to provide a satisfactory approach.



In an attempt to find a “middle path” she utilises the work of David Parris<sup>61</sup> in bringing the concept of a “paradigm shift” to biblical scholarship. This view endorses the role of tradition, especially that tradition is sometimes reacted against, and in order to do so tradition needs to be known. The questions that were asked in the past, are not necessarily the questions asked now, and once the “appropriate questions for the pertinent paradigm [are] used up, the epistemological crisis comes. The epistemological crisis results in the “paradigm shift”” (2014, p.229). This is similar to the claims made by Frestadius regarding Elim’s history, which I mentioned briefly in the chapter 2 (2018). And so Kočí claims, this paradigm shift provides a middle ground, allowing for new interpretations whilst maintaining the meaning of the text. Whether or not this middle ground is the right place to end up, it will become clear that there are diverse opinions amongst Pentecostal scholars that might well lead towards some place of compromise or middle ground. By endorsing tradition (and bringing forward a paradigm shift to deal with contradictory traditions) and allowing for new interpretations, it seems to me that Kočí provides a useful approach that may be used to account for a Pentecostal hermeneutic.

Therefore, having now made some sense of the interpretive options that postmodernism affords, as well as identifying some of the academic foundations appropriated, I will turn to consider the arguments for and against the use of postmodernism in Pentecostal hermeneutics.

#### **4.2.3.2. Arguments for adopting postmodernism into a Pentecostal hermeneutic**

In 1993 Pentecostal hermeneutics became a particularly hot topic<sup>62</sup> with the publication of a number of articles in both *Pneuma* (Cargal, 1993; Dempster, 1993; Israel et al., 1993; Stronstad, 1993; Byrd, 1993) and the *Journal of Pentecostal Theology (JPT)* (Johns and Johns, 1992; Moore, 1992). In *Pneuma*, Cargal in particular wrote in favour of the “**postmodern** philosophical paradigm” (my emphasis) (1993, p.165); whilst in *JPT*, although Johns and Johns did not express the term ‘postmodern’ in their 1993 article, there were clear allusions. Subsequently Jackie David Johns wrote explicitly in 1995 regarding the postmodern paradigm, she concluded that there were benefits and dangers from

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<sup>61</sup> Who apparently “borrowed the concept of “paradigm shifts” from a scientist Thomas Kuhn and appropriated it to biblical studies” (Kočí, 2014, p.228).

<sup>62</sup> Although earlier publications had been made, for instance (Sheppard, 1978a; Ervin, 1981; McLean, 1984). Later, in 2000 an issue of *The Church and Spirit Journal* was also devoted to Pentecostal hermeneutics.

Pentecostalism aligning itself with postmodernism. She identified that “Pentecostalism may indeed be a part of the stream that is ushering in the postmodern era”, but continued that a clear Pentecostal distinctiveness must be identified before buying “into the paradigms and models of the emerging worldview” (1995, p.96).

Cargal comes across as the author most in favour of adopting postmodernism, yet also states “I do not see the postmodern philosophical paradigm as an unmitigated benefit” (Cargal, 1993, p.187). Of those in favour of a postmodern approach, there tends to be a similar caution. Cargal identifies Pentecostalism as, in part, reclaiming a “sense of mysticism and the immanence of the transcendent which was diminished by rationalism” (1993, p.186). Where Rudolf Bultmann’s demythologising diminished the numinous; Cargal seeks to highlight it, similar to Smith’s “enchanted” theology of creation and culture (2010, p.40). By viewing rationalism as a part of modernity, Cargal sees benefits in postmodernism. This area of experience is also applied to the biblical text. Cargal finds benefits from postmodernism in helping Pentecostals “interpreting/appropriating the multiple meanings of the biblical texts” (1993, p.186). Drawing on Cargal, Dempster similarly argues that this would help Pentecostals to enter the postmodern age with its commitment to diversity and pluralism” (1993, p.134).

With a focus on the oral traditions of Pentecostalism (for instance in narratives and testimonies), Martin argues that postmodernism has a similar leaning towards orality. With the prevalence of electronic media the postmodern culture is entering a “post-literate stage” that whilst still literate, is “secondarily oral” and “more appreciative of narrative discourse and relational modes of knowing” (2013a, pp.220–221). Whilst I would argue that electronic media does not stimulate literacy, orality or deep relationships, it is possible to accept that it can encourage a narrative discourse, even if that discourse appears alien to the uninitiated (generally non-teenagers). Considering narrative and postmodernism, Karkkainen says that:

Postmodernism has rehabilitated the role of narratives...Narrative has always been an indispensable part of Pentecostalism. It is no longer necessary, nor right, to hold a sharp distinction between biblical narrative and theological instruction. (1998, p.94)

This could help Martin, for he describes the Pentecostal approach to the Bible as “hearing” rather than “reading”; where the hearer encounters the prophetic voice of God from the Bible. A hearing that transforms and challenges any preconceptions or worldview that is brought by the hearer (2013a, p.231). He sees this “hearing” as “a way to bring together in

a holistic fashion, the Pentecostal tradition of orality, the postmodern culture of post-literacy, and the oral dimensions of biblical narrative” (2013a, p.231). Smith would agree, arguing that the early Christians were a people of the “Word” rather than the “Book” (1997 p. 50); emphasising the *hearing* rather than *reading*. Likewise, Archer argues that the expectations of God speaking to us today (orality), brings the Pentecostal hermeneutic beyond the historical-critical method towards a “postmodern accent” (1996, p.80).

Moore finds postmodernism affording him the space to bring his own “faith confession into interaction with my technical work on the text” which he discovered became the most “critical step I had ever taken in studying biblical texts” (1992, p.16). He was able to find a balance in bringing a confessional approach to his critical approach to Scripture.<sup>63</sup> This confessional approach is not new, for instance, Waddell draws examples from “premodern biblical interpretation” including Tertullian (2013, p.182). Where postmodernism appears to allow for such a confession, the modern-critical method does not (requiring a rationalistic objective standpoint). Yet, as Waddell argues, even with an historical-critical approach one cannot come to a text purely objectively (2013, p.183). A number of authors sought to find this middle ground.

In support of adopting a postmodern approach, it has been argued that any hermeneutic that ignores the current paradigm of our culture will ultimately fail, and therefore we should be prepared to jump on the band wagon of postmodernism (the exact opposite argument is made later on by Menzies (1994)). Cargal argued that unless we accept this postmodern paradigm, Pentecostalism will “become nonsensical and irrelevant” (1993, p.187). This alone may not be a convincing argument, but experiencing God through the biblical texts, multiple interpretations, an emphasis on narrative (and orality), the opportunity to include a faith confession and perhaps holding on to some aspects of objectivity do seem attractive in the light of Pentecostal preference. How much all of these are truly postmodern could be debated, yet the idea is not to become postmodern, but to find a Pentecostal hermeneutic. I will now look at reservations/objections to a postmodern assimilation with Pentecostal hermeneutics.

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<sup>63</sup> Archer similarly mentions a ““confessional” historical critical method” (2015, p.326).

#### 4.2.3.3. Arguments against (fully) adopting postmodernism into a Pentecostal hermeneutic

Although there have been and continue to be voices calling for the adoption of a postmodern approach to Pentecostal hermeneutics,<sup>64</sup> there have equally been voices that find difficulties with such an approach. Menzies, for instance, argues against postmodernism whilst able to see how it may benefit. He acknowledges that postmodernism allows “Christians to speak about” their encounters, but in so doing, lose their authority, simply becoming “one voice in a cacophony of unintelligible sounds” (1994, p.117). His alternative is to see inclusion amongst “the broader Evangelical world as an exciting and positive event” (Menzies, 1994, p.119). He does not see Evangelicalism as simply restrictively tied to ‘modernism’ (a point also noted by Poirier (2017a, p.5)). There are two tensions that need to be considered. Firstly, if Pentecostalism can adopt any aspects of Evangelicalism without being fully committed to modernism and objectivity. And secondly, whether Pentecostalism can adopt any aspects of postmodernism without being fully committed to subjectivity.

In an attempt to avoid the seeming difficulties of both the modern and the postmodern, various arguments have been made in looking at a longer picture of hermeneutics prior to modernity. In his critique of the 1993 *Pneuma* publication and its postmodern emphasis, Sheppard argues that early Pentecostals were neither premodern nor modern, but in their diversity and social status “submodern” (1994, p.127). He goes on to say “we must rediscover how we share common cause with the past and ask how our own continuing interpretation of Scripture belongs to a much longer history of Christian biblical interpretation” (1994, p.129). Waddell uses the term “non-modern” (2013, p.185) as he agrees that Pentecostals, with their emphasis on narrative approaches to their spiritual experiences, have other concerns than those of modernity (the historical-critical approach). For him the relationship between postmodernism and Pentecostalism is ambiguous (2013, p.189). He quotes S.B. Fowl in defining criteria that fits this “non-modern” approach. These four criteria can be briefly described as:

- 1) An interest in pre-modern biblical interpretation;
- 2) Is shaped by the community of faith, not the academy;
- 3) That resists the fragmentation of theology into discrete disciplines; and

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<sup>64</sup> With a recent publication edited by Archer and Oliverio released in December (2016). In fairness to their position, they ensure that there are at least two critical “dissenting” voices in their book, those of Poirier and Menzies.

4) Will utilise pluralistic interpretative methods.

Rather than being clearly anti-postmodern, these criteria attempt to free Pentecostalism from simply adopting a current label. This allows the criteria to be defined by Pentecostal history and current experience, even if such may appear in many ways to be postmodern. This is similar to the approach endorsed by Lewis and Poirier<sup>65</sup> as they look back at the early church, especially how their “hermeneutic resided in the authority of the New Testament as referential and intentionalist” (2006, p.20). They claim that the New Testament and apostolic approaches urge a return to “a primitivist hermeneutic that looks back to the earliest apostolic witness as its criterion for theology, practice, and affections” (2006, p.20); reiterated by Poirier as landing “at the feet of the apostles” (2017a, p.17).

In an attempt to utilise postmodernism, some argue that care is required not to assimilate all its conclusions. Although Karkkainen sees some distinct similarities between Pentecostalism and postmodernism, for instance “plurality of meaning of any text, the plural meaning of the text itself, the role of affections in the reading”, he argues that these similarities “might exist only on the “surface level”” (1998, p.97). It is this issue of a surface agreement versus a fundamental agreement that proves awkward for some scholars, with Menzies pointing out that “the ahistorical stance and epistemological skepticism of postmodernism is extreme and inevitably leads to relativism” (1994, p.116). It may be possible either to take the benefits of postmodernism and then distance oneself, or to distance oneself initially and redefine an approach. Clearly referring to the relativist tendencies of postmodernism, Elim minister and theologian Atkinson writes, “While not swallowing whole all the conclusions of Postmodernism, a thorough and honest hermeneutic has to accept that there is no such thing as totally objective and impersonal exegesis” (2003, p.50).

Archer, as a significant voice in the debate for adopting aspects of postmodernism comes under particular scrutiny from Poirier (2017a). However, Archer can be seen to be seeking a middle-ground (although such a middle-ground is disputed by Poirier as I demonstrated above). Without fully endorsing all of postmodernity, Archer sees it as offering some help, he quotes John R. Franke and says:

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<sup>65</sup> Poirier is quite prolific in this critique of Pentecostals adopting postmodernism, and has written a number of articles taking various philosophical positions in his defence. See (2004; 2005; 2006; 2007; 2016; 2017a).

Postmodern thought is better understood, not primarily as a particular philosophical social agenda, but as a critique and rejection of central features of modernity and the attempt to engage in constructive discourse in the aftermath. (2015, p.322)

So, it is not so much what postmodernism affirms, but what it rejects that helps Archer defend its use. In fact, Archer notes this tendency by agreeing with Smith, explaining how he says that postmodernism does not necessarily agree with a Christian ethos, for instance it can “intensify...individual freedom”, so Archer concludes: “what is significant for Pentecostals is what is discontinuous, such as the importance of traditioning, community, narrative, and so forth” (2015, p.324).

#### **4.2.3.4. Mini-conclusion**

If we are to accept that Pentecostalism’s epistemology includes narrative, which is reasonable considering historic and current Pentecostal practice, then a non-modern approach is required. This section has presented various arguments used by scholars for and against a postmodern approach. We have looked at the areas of subjectivity and objectivity and non/sub/pre-modern suggestions. It appears that Pentecostalism is finding an alternative approach to that offered by modernity (Archer, 2015, p.324), and postmodernity is an area that has possibilities. In subsequent chapters I will show how my empirical research reflects these discussions, in particular revealing the extent to which subjective experience remains key to Pentecostal hermeneutics.

#### **4.3. Chapter conclusion**

In this chapter I have outlined some of the discussions regarding Pentecostal hermeneutics generally, and then focussed on one of the triadic aspects of that discussion: the Scripture. In order to understand the ongoing discussions regarding Pentecostal hermeneutics and Scripture I have given an overview of some of the key topics that have been involved in the progression from early Pentecostalism to current debates. These have included differing opinions regarding inerrancy, historical-criticism, historical- grammatical approaches, and finally postmodernism. The extent to which these are utilised by Elim lay leaders will be seen in chapter 6.

It is clear that there are a range of views regarding how much postmodernism should be adopted by Pentecostals. Pentecostals believe in the continuing supernatural move of God, and therefore cannot fully endorse a modernist approach that denies such. Pentecostals also expect to encounter God through the text of the Scripture (having both a *radical*

*openness* and an *affective epistemology* (Smith, 2010)), and on occasion that text may speak to the reader in ways other than the authors' intent (although as I argue in the next chapter, in line with the *Supreme Author's* intent). Both these points seem to point towards a postmodernist approach. However, I do not wish to argue for a totally subjective reading, nor for an open door to multiple meanings in the sense that postmodernism allows. Rather, that the authors' intent is of great relevance; this at times is determined through various historical- grammatical methods such as narrative, rhetorical and canonical criticism as suggested by Purdy (2015), however I would disagree with Purdy's need to pin that to postmodernism (2015, p.94)). Yet, we will see how the inclusion of a Pentecostal pragmatism which seeks to find a Spirit-led way forward, does not restrict hermeneutics to an authorial-intent framework. A synthesised hermeneutic that allows for the inspiration of the Spirit with both the author and the reader will be evidenced (which may simply be accepting the two/three-step approach or a version of the "paradigm shift"). It is not my intention simply to suggest what makes sense, rather in this study I want to identify the grassroots hermeneutics employed by Church Session members, especially regarding the issue of women in ministry. Both the top down (academic writings to inform practice) and the bottom up (actual practice in Church Sessions to inform academic writings) will provide a healthy balanced approach to this study. Within a Pentecostal hermeneutic, Scripture cannot be isolated, it is part of a triad, the next chapter addresses the role of the Spirit and then role of the Community in Pentecostal hermeneutics.

## **CHAPTER 5. PENTECOSTAL HERMENEUTICS – THE SPIRIT AND THE COMMUNITY**

### **5.1. Introduction**

So far, I have considered arguments for and against a distinct Pentecostal hermeneutic, limited to the topic of the Scripture. As I explained in the previous chapter, Scripture is one part of the triad (also including the Spirit and the Community) often invoked in describing a Pentecostal hermeneutic (Yong, 2002; Archer, 2004a; Cartledge, 2013). With regards to a biblical Pentecostal hermeneutic the Scripture is the centre of focus, with the other areas supporting and explaining how Scripture is to be interpreted (and likewise Scripture informing how the Spirit and Community should operate). A significant part of my research involves responses to biblical passages regarding women in ministry, and therefore has an emphasis on Scripture. Arrington says:

The starting point and very foundation for Pentecostal faith and praxis has been the biblical text. The real issue in Pentecostalism has become hermeneutics, that is, the distinctive nature and function of Scripture and the roles of the Holy Spirit, the Christian community, grammatical-historical research, and personal experience in the interpretive process. (1994, p.101)

It is natural now to turn to the role of the Spirit in determining and informing a Pentecostal hermeneutic, once again referencing Smith's key aspects of a Pentecostal worldview (see Pentecostal methodology section in chapter 2). Once again, we will see that there are various positions regarding the role of the Spirit in forming a *distinct* Pentecostal hermeneutic. For instance, those in favour of multiple interpretations of Scripture, who often utilise aspects of postmodernism, turn to the role of the Spirit in the process of (re)interpretation. Following the look at the role of the Spirit I assess the role of the community of faith; however, as will be evident, there are many intersections and crossovers that prohibit clear demarcation between the two. In order to set the scene for contemporary Pentecostals, I will briefly outline the role of the Spirit in early Pentecostalism, particularly in the way this influenced hermeneutics.

### **5.2. The Spirit**

The role of the Holy Spirit in the hermeneutical process is to lead and guide the community in understanding the present meaningfulness of Scripture. (Archer, 2004a, p.248)

Pentecostalism, particularly in the West (Cartledge, 2011, p.63), was built upon a foundation of a number of movements, including the holiness and restorationist<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> A term that broadly refers to those who want to see a restoration of New Testament Christianity in the modern day, for instance, the Pentecostal expectation of the gifts of the Spirit (Archer, 2004b, p.42).



movements (L.R. Martin, 2013b, p.3). Whilst there was no vacuum from which Pentecostals developed a hermeneutic (Warrington, 2008, p.1), their experience of the Spirit baptism was key to helping them shape their approach to biblical interpretation. The transformative encounter with God through His Spirit, with speaking in tongues as evidence, was, according to Archer, a combination of the view of baptism in the Spirit from the Wesleyan-holiness tradition and tongues as evidence (Archer, 1996, p.72; Yong, 2002, p.283). Baptism in the Spirit became a central motif of Pentecostalism, forming part of the four/five-fold gospel,<sup>67</sup> and was a “supernaturalistic” experience (Archer, 1996, p.64). With such evidence of the supernatural (speaking in tongues and other signs/wonders), Archer argues that Pentecostals approached the Bible using the Bible Reading Method (as described in the previous chapter) and with an assurance of the Spirit’s immanence (L.R. Martin, 2013b, p.6), being *radically open to God* (Smith, 2010, p.12).

In his study of the roots of American Pentecostalism, which came to influence much of the global classical Pentecostalism, Archer analyses the Holiness emphasis on the Latter Rain as both a pre-cursor to Pentecostalism and an explanation of the role of the Spirit in hermeneutics for the early Pentecostals (2009, pp.140–150). The Latter Rain motif refers to a prophecy from Joel 2, just a few verses before the verses quoted by Peter on the Day of Pentecost in Acts 2, in which it says:

Be glad, O children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God, for he has given the early rain for your vindication; he has poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the latter rain, as before. (Joel 2:23)

The expectation of a latter rain, was interpreted by various Holiness groups as a common expectation for a fresh outpouring of God’s Spirit (Archer, 2004b, p.46). Following the turn of the century and the experiences of such an outpouring, Pentecostals referred back to this motif to explain their experience. In 1909 D. Wesley Myland gave a number of lectures that explained the Pentecostal experience of the Baptism of the Spirit in the biblical terms of the Latter Rain.<sup>68</sup> Myland argued for a three-fold interpretive approach to Scripture, comprising of a historical, spiritual and prophetic (or dispensational) approach. Accordingly, Myland interpreted the texts regarding the Latter Rain with all three of these approaches. Under the third approach he found the best place for the Pentecostal experience of the

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<sup>67</sup> Jesus as Saviour, Healer, Baptiser in the Spirit and soon coming King often described as the foursquare gospel. The fifth aspect, when used, is Sanctifier, a tenet which is dropped by a number of Pentecostal movements; Waddell traces these historically from Luther to Azusa Street (2013, p.180).

<sup>68</sup> He particularly based this upon Deuteronomy 11:10-21.

Baptism of the Spirit. This approach emphasised revelation, reliant upon the Holy Spirit, but that also found assurance from Scripture. Archer quotes Myland, saying “Every Scripture must be interpreted by Scripture, under the illumination of the Holy Spirit, to get its deeper sense” (2009, p.144). The revelation that comes from the Holy Spirit, was found by these early Pentecostals, “within the confines of the sanctuary not the library” (2009, p.144), that is, through prayer not through study; although this did not abrogate study *per se*.

It appears that on top of a ‘Scripture to explain Scripture’ approach, there was a real openness to the role of the Holy Spirit in all areas of life, including His role in interpreting/revealing and bringing to remembrance the Scriptures. The Latter Rain therefore, was not just a motif to explain the Pentecostal experience, but it reinforced the idea that the Spirit’s role was central to the hermeneutics of the Joel passages, along with all Scripture. Yong claims that there needs to be a healthy tension between Spirit and Word,<sup>69</sup> he gives the example of the role of the Spirit in hermeneutics from 1 Corinthians 14:29 which says, “Let two or three prophets speak, and let the others weigh what is said”. He argues that this is clearly more than “Scripture interprets Scripture”, and that both the Word (primarily communicatively) and the Spirit (largely transformatively) operate together (2002, pp.256–257). As we will see later, Yong (and others) argue that the Spirit and Word should not operate separately from that of Community. Moving on from this brief account of the role of the Spirit in early Pentecostalism, I will now address the question “Is the Spirit essential to interpretation?”.

#### 5.2.1. Is the Spirit essential to interpretation?

Before we can answer this question directly, we must consider what role the Holy Spirit has in both a practical and theoretical sense for the life of a Christian. Grey argues that a defining feature of Pentecostalism is a “pneumatic experience or encounter with God in all areas of life” (2011, p.11). A brief survey of Scripture demonstrates the Spirit’s involvement in many areas, for instance, His role in:

Creation (Genesis 1:2 “And the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters”),

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<sup>69</sup> Perhaps with Smith Wigglesworth’s 1947 prophecy in mind, in which he says “there will be evidenced in the churches something that has not been seen before: a coming together of those with an emphasis on the Word and those with an emphasis on the Spirit” (Clark, 2019). The term “Word & Spirit” is also used by Warrington to promote Pentecostal bible reading studies (2019).

Anointing (creatively, spiritually, etc.) of various individuals (e.g. Bezalel to make the sacred items (Exodus 31:2-3), Jesus in His public ministry (Isaiah 61:1, Luke 4:18)),  
 Bringing to remembrance Jesus' teachings (John 14:26),  
 The conviction of sin (John 16:8),  
 Empowering for witnessing (Acts 1:8),  
 Confirming theological formation (Acts 15:28 "For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us..."), to charismata and gifts (e.g. 1 Corinthians 12), etc.

Fundamentally, pneumatology must recognise that the relationship of the world to God is largely dependent upon the Holy Spirit (Yong, 2002, p.28). By pneumatology, I refer specifically (like Yong (1998, p.453; 2002, p.27)) to a Christian and biblical pneumatology rather than a more abstract or inter-religious one. Whether through the Holy Spirit's role in creation, incarnation, or His role on the day of Pentecost (and subsequent ongoing Pentecostal experiences), He essentially communicates the things of God to the world (e.g. Romans 8:16 "The Spirit himself bears witness with our spirit...", and Hebrews 10:15, 1 Corinthians 2:11-13, etc.), and in some sense communicates the things of the world to God (e.g. Romans 8:26 "but the Spirit himself intercedes for us"). As part of His varied roles in mediation, and for our sake, 'interpretation', the Spirit helped early Christians resolve a theological dispute in the Council of Jerusalem (Acts 15). He was also promised as the one who would not only bring to remembrance the things Jesus taught (John 14:26), but even more:

When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth, for he will not speak on his own authority, but whatever he hears he will speak, and he will declare to you the things that are to come. (John 16:13)

Specifically then, the Spirit is the Spirit of truth, and can not only bring immediate guidance and interpretation, but can prepare the way, prophetically, for the future. I use the word 'can' here deliberately, for Scripture does not necessarily bring illumination to a reader, however as Cross says "the written text becomes real for some of its readers when the Sovereign God causes it to be so through his Spirit" (2002, p.67), particularly as they are *radically open* and expectant to encountering God (Smith, 2010, p.38).

It is right for us to consider if the Scripture can be understood, applied and interpreted *correctly* in any way that does not rely upon the role of the Holy Spirit. For a Pentecostal it would be normative to expect the Holy Spirit to interpret and reinterpret Scripture, perhaps with a *Rhema* word, as I briefly mentioned in the section on the Scripture. But this could lead to the view that a non-Pentecostal does not rely on the Holy Spirit in "rightly

dividing the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15, KJV). The distinctive aspects of Pentecostal practice and experience in hermeneutics will be explored during the analysis of the empirical research later on. However, at this stage it is worth expressing Keener's thoughts on the relationship between "traditional exegesis" and "Spirit hermeneutics":

Spirit hermeneutics, then, may be *more* than simply traditional exegesis, as argued earlier. Yet it should also not be less *than* traditional exegesis. (italics in original) (2016, p.116)

Keener is saying that a hermeneutic that relies on the Spirit should also utilise traditional exegesis, particularly arguing for a reading that is aware of context and background. A Pentecostal reading should therefore not be a lazy reading that simply expects the Spirit to reveal everything. Rather a Pentecostal reading should expect the Spirit to reveal truth, whilst the reader also studies the Scriptural texts. Through the Spirit, the Pentecostal can receive revelation that goes beyond viewing the Bible simply as literature (Holmes, 2013, p.273).

Such thoughts raise questions regarding the role of the Spirit in original inspiration and subsequent reception (both immediate: the intended audience of the author, and future: today's readers). Pinnock quotes Ephesians 1:17 ("that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give you a spirit of wisdom and of revelation in the knowledge of him") explaining that the Spirit (who breathes in relation to the authors) breathes also in relation to the readers (1993, p.3). The argument is that an integral part of Spirit's role is in aiding the interpretation and application of Scripture. Likewise, Cross makes the point:

as a Pentecostal I also believe God's Spirit did not just inspire writers in the past. God's Spirit inspires readers and hearers in the present...the Spirit preserves us from the easy error of reading into the text whatever pleases us. (2002, p.68)

As such the Spirit's role was essential to the writers of Scripture and remains essential to the hearers. Through such inspiration and interpretation, heresy and errors are avoided. As true as this may be, we will later see (under the section on Community) that errors are still possible even in the safeguarding of a community of faith. Yet, this does not detract from the necessity of the Spirit's role both to the writer and hearer.

Various Evangelical positions regarding the role of the Spirit in inspiration influence Pentecostal considerations. For instance it is uncontroversial, from any Christian perspective, to say that the Holy Spirit inspired the original human authors of the Bible. But there are differing views as to whether the original authors understood the full message of

their own words. There is the view that “authorial intent” is the only possible meaning of the text. As I will explain, it does rather depend on whether the ‘author’ is viewed as human or divine. Gordon Fee, for instance considers that the author’s intent should be the primary edge of hermeneutics (1991, p.37). It is worth noting here that Pinnock criticises Fee for writing a book “entitled *Gospel and Spirit: Issues in New Testament Hermeneutics* and say[ing] nothing about the Spirit’s role in interpretation” (italics in original) (1993, p.7). There are also views that take a more middle ground. For instance, Yong explains that there can be a difference of interpretative approaches depending on the specific text, with some allowing for a more “open” (i.e. reader-response) and others more “closed” (“authorial intent”) (2002, p.259). Alternatively the middle ground can be represented where the reinterpretation of Scripture is possible, as long as it does not disagree with “authorial intent” (for example, see Menzies (1994, p.117)). And finally there is a view that allows for a reinterpretation that takes no account of “authorial intent”; we saw this earlier regarding a reader-response approach (Kočí, 2014, p.230). From one spectrum position to the other, depending on the views offered, the Holy Spirit is either involved throughout or somewhat disconnected. Whatever conclusion is reached, I agree with Yong’s contention that there is an inseparable link between the Spirit and the Word (and as we will later see: the Community) (2002, p.270).

Poirier’s argues that meaning ultimately lies with “authorial intent”. He basis his views both on a historical theology that recognises there is nothing new with a hermeneutic of intentionality (2006, p.11) and on a philosophical understanding of where “meaning” resides (2016, p.70). As such, he appears to leave no room for the role of the Holy Spirit and reinterpretation. I emailed him for clarification on this position and I asked him directly about the role of the Spirit in the interpretive process. He replied that a “pneumatological dimension to hermeneutics...is not something the New Testament normally envisions” (2017b). He went on to explain that in places where the New Testament authors appear to take an Old Testament quote out of context (and seemingly not according to the author’s intent), this “doesn't mean that \*they\* didn't think it did”. Let me give some examples to illustrate this. Purdy, for instance says:

Scripture’s use of Scripture, as exemplified in Matthew 1:23 [“Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a son, and they shall call his name Immanuel”], supports the view that a text is not restricted to a singular meaning and suggests, contrary to Fee and others, that the interpreter, led by the Spirit, is not limited to original or authorial intent in determining meaning. (Purdy, 2015 p. 73)

Poirier is arguing that Matthew thought that Isaiah's original intention (Isaiah 7:10-14) incorporates Matthew's messianic use of these words. This is of course possible, but debatable. Isaiah's primary intention was clearly to give King Ahaz a sign during his own life. It is quite possible that Isaiah did know that the prophecy had a larger and later fulfilment. And according to some views of authorial intent, if the human author did not intend certain meanings, then such meanings cannot be held (see my section on Supreme Author for alternatives). Perhaps more convincing in challenging Poirier's position are the examples of recontextualising and updating (reinterpreting) meaning where Jesus says, "you have heard it said...but I tell you" (Matthew 5). Clearly Jesus feels able to interact with the text, aware that He was changing/updating the meaning for the new context. Poirier may again argue that Moses intended the texts to mean what Jesus expounds them to mean. If that is the case then Moses had been rather vague in his many opportunities of explaining them himself (Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy particularly). Rather, I contend that Jesus is able to reinterpret due to two significant aspects. Firstly, due to recontextualisation, and secondly, due to who He was.

#### **5.2.1.1. Recontextualising**

The new context to which Jesus was speaking was the imminence (and immanence) of the 'Kingdom of God'. It could be argued that context changes meaning. This at least is partly what a postmodern interpretation would accept, and what an 'ordinary' Pentecostal does when reading the Bible. The 'ordinary' Pentecostal expects the text to speak into their context, to receive a word from God, to be edified through the 'hearing' of the Word (see Davies (2009a)). Like others (e.g. Archer (2004a)) I would argue that this is a valid approach to the Scriptural texts within the confines of the interrelations of Scripture, Spirit and Community. As we will see later on and under the section on community, the potential problems of subjectivity need to be thoroughly addressed to allay the fears of 'anything goes'. We also need to address the concern that a recontextualisation could remove any restrictions on meaning, especially if we simply argue that the context has changed. For instance, some would argue that Paul's restrictions regarding sexual morality in 1 Corinthians are simply context based to the church in Corinth. Similar arguments can be made for the role of women as described by Paul in 1 Timothy. It could be rightly argued that it is not fair to recontextualise one and not the other. As evangelical authors McQuilkin and Mullen said:

When we gave up holy kisses and head coverings, no one worried. When we gave up washing feet and silent women, some folks winced a little. Now we

are challenged by fellow evangelicals to give up Adam and Eve, role distinctions in marriage, limitations on divorce, exclusively heterosexual unions, hell, faith in Jesus Christ as the only way to acceptance with God and—most pivotal—an inerrant Bible. (1997, p.72)

Elim Pentecostals likewise, have mostly decided that head coverings are not required, and that certain activities (such as shopping or washing) on a Sunday are permissible. Yet many areas are simply taken as still relevant (for instance the areas listed in the quote above as current challenges to be given up). Each of these decisions leaves the hermeneut with some challenges. There are certain principles that can be employed in recontextualisation, for instance the position of the teaching (Old or New Testament), and the recurrence of the teaching (a one-off or frequently repeated). Even then any recontextualisation can perhaps only be made with the guiding of the Spirit and within the interaction of the community.

For Jesus, His recontextualisation of grace and truth over and above law (John 1:17) makes sense only within the fulfilment of the incarnate mission of atonement and redemption; which are central characteristics of the Kingdom of God that Jesus preaches and demonstrates. It is because of this new context (the “now and not yet” of the Kingdom of God) that it is permissible for such (re)interpretation. (Re)interpretation from our perspective could equally be argued to be valid under the advent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Indeed, this is an avenue of argument that can be used by those in favour of a Pentecostal hermeneutic.

#### **5.2.1.2. Supreme Author**

The second important aspect to consider is who Jesus is. He is the *Word*, even the *Supreme Author*.<sup>70</sup> It is this that equally allows Him to reinterpret Scripture no matter the context. As clay in a potter’s hands (Jeremiah 18), so God (Father, Spirit, Son) can recontextualise the words that were first inspired by Him. Not only are we told that “all Scripture is God breathed” (2 Timothy 3:16), but this is amplified in 2 Peter 1:20-21:

First of all you must understand this, that no prophecy of scripture is a matter of one’s own interpretation, because no prophecy ever came by human will, but men and women moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God. (NRSV)

This states two important things, firstly that interpretation is not *simply* subjective (“one’s own interpretation”); and secondly, the initial prophecy itself was not *simply* manmade

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<sup>70</sup> A useful exploration of the human and divine authorship, especially as it relates to Elim, is made by Frestadius (2018, p.293ff).

(“no prophecy ever came by human will”).<sup>71</sup> God is both inspirer of the human author, and inspirer of the human reader. As McQuilkin and Mullen say “the inspired author of Scripture or the incarnate Son of God has the authority to set aside or add to what is written” (1997, p.79). If then the *Author* explains or updates the meaning, then much hermeneutical mystery is resolved. But unlike McQuilkin and Mullen who argue that this is limited “only” to Jesus, I argue that this update, explanation and contextualisation is evidenced with, but **not** limited to, Jesus. There are numerous examples of New Testament writers and speakers who (re)interpret Old Testament passages in ways that would seem hermeneutically suspect (as also noted by (Frestadius, 2018, p.283)), yet, I would argue, are inspired by the Holy Spirit. Where some argue that Scripture cannot mean what the author did not intend it to mean (e.g. Poirier and Fee), I would agree with Westphal who says “The meaning of Scripture doesn’t go beyond the intentions of **God** as author” (my emphasis) (2016, p.26). The hermeneutical principles for interpreting Scripture must therefore lie with God (the Spirit), and His Church (the community).

I have argued that Jesus could reinterpret because of the new context (Kingdom of God) and because of who He is (*Supreme Author*). I have also mentioned that some would argue that in our context (post-Pentecost), under the leading of the Holy Spirit (*Supreme Author*), reinterpretation remains a valid approach. However, Poirier would disagree; in the private correspondence he also claimed that “it does not take a special dispensation of the Spirit to make” the Scripture accessible to us. He is making this point as an argument against a distinct pneumatological hermeneutic. First of all I agree with him in part, in so far as the Scripture is accessible to us. I agree that any person can find meaning in the Scriptural texts by reading them. Yet, like Jesus’ hearers who in hearing “do not hear” (Matthew 13:13), clarity of meaning is dependent on more than just a hearing/reading. This is where I agree with those who argue for the interrelation of Spirit, Scripture and Community (e.g. Yong, Archer, Purdy). So, although I agree with Poirier that the Scripture is accessible, I disagree with him regarding the role of the Spirit. For on the day of Pentecost Peter quotes Joel, saying “I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh” (Acts 2:17). I would argue that it is in the essence of the Pentecostal outpouring (‘dispensation’ to use Poirier’s term)<sup>72</sup> in which (re)interpretation is possible through the Spirit (whom is available by “all flesh”). Not just those who call themselves Christians, but all people, can be inspired by the Holy Spirit to

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<sup>71</sup> This second point is echoed by Westphal (2016, p.17).

<sup>72</sup> ‘Dispensationalism’ is not a term or view that Classical Pentecostals held (Sheppard, 1984).



understand Scripture in their context as He, the *Supreme Author*, chooses to communicate His truth to them. As Noel (quoting Lewis) says “the author and interpreter are both necessary as sender and receiver of Divine assistance” (2010, p.265).

Putting these two significant aspects to one side for a moment, there are claims and concerns that some raise over a Pentecostal hermeneutic, or a dependence upon the Spirit to bring interpretation, because it can tend towards a narrow, confined, even gnostic approach (a critique raised by Paul Lee, quoted in (Karkkainen, 1998, p.88)). The argument here is that if someone is outside of the ‘club’ of Pentecostalism, then the Scriptural texts remain veiled. If Pentecostals argue for a distinct hermeneutic, then the ‘club’ remains similar to the special wisdom of the Gnostics. What this argument fails to account for is a wider pneumatological understanding (as I have just given above). According to the account on the day of Pentecost, the Spirit has been poured out on all flesh. That is generally understood to mean that all kinds of people (male/female, young/old, Jew/Gentile, slave/free) are welcome to receive what has been received by the believers on that day. However, if we truly understand the role of the Spirit as convictor of sins (John 16:8), and specifically the sin of not believing in Jesus (John 16:9), then clearly the Spirit is relating to non-believers. It is therefore quite reasonable to say that the Spirit can help believers (Pentecostals and non-Pentecostals) as well as non-believers to understand the Scripture. Claims of Gnosticism or special knowledge/revelation are, according to Pinnock, to be dismissed through the role of both the Spirit and the community, he says “Later revelation should not contradict earlier revelation but should cohere with its central vision. By this means, the early church protected itself against the Gnostic heresies” (1993, p.11).

Even if some may agree that the Spirit is essential to interpretation, they may argue that there are still critical approaches that are also useful. For instance Karkkainen (like my mention of Keener above) does not think a reliance on the Spirit de-necessitates a “critical-historical exegesis” (1998, p.89). He sees such an approach as forming a useful foundation, upon which “pneumatic illumination” brings deeper significance. In my introduction to the historical-critical approach in the previous chapter, I mentioned that “disinterested scholarship” is one of its four characteristics. However, such impartiality could have the tendency to distance the scholar from the text *personally*. Pentecostals approach the text with an expectation of encountering God through the text, this is part of their *radical openness to God* (Smith, 2010). This does not mean that they cannot approach the text for

the purposes of study and scholarship, rather than even in that process there remains a partiality, an expectation of encounter, of treading on 'holy ground'. I would rather argue that a historical-critical approach should not demand impartiality, but rather a genuine openness. For a Pentecostal scholar there needs to be a way to maintain an expectation of ongoing personal encounter whilst considering any tools that may be useful in developing their understanding of God through the text.

A legitimate concern from this section is that in removing some boundaries of objectivity, there opens up a flood-gate of subjectivity, a topic I pick up later in this chapter. In a hermeneutical balance of objectivity and subjectivity I see no contradiction in a historical-grammatical exegetical approach coupled with a reliance on the inspiration of the Spirit, because I can still faithfully hold to the Spirit's role in all *levels* of interpretation. So, to answer the question "Is the Spirit essential to interpretation?", my answer is a firm "Yes".

#### 5.2.2. The Spirit: Experience and *yada*

Experience is a central aspect of Pentecostal life, this is demonstrated in public testimonies (e.g. Smith's *narrative* (2010, p.12)) and the expectation that God is wanting to be a part of their everyday lives. However as Cartledge says "what is normative in theology is not experience per se but the 'living God of Scripture'" (2013, p.137). Yet, experience and theology should not be held as simply separate spheres. For Pentecostals, experience is a form of lived theology, God as active in every area of life, God in the everyday, even the mundane. I chose the word "mundane" carefully, to express the belief that there is no separation between the earthly and the spiritual, the sacred and secular; along the lines of one of Smith's Pentecostal aspects: "enchanted naturalism" (2010, pp.90–97). Because experience is central to Pentecostals, it forms an important part of their hermeneutic. I remember as a new believer learning so much about God from what I saw other people do in a service, as well as what I was being taught in the sermon. Another of Smith's Pentecostal aspects is an "affective, narrative epistemology" (2010, p.43ff), he explains that experience and knowledge are transmitted through narrative, in this case testimony, or, in my case practice ('lived narrative'). Here I will briefly consider how experience and knowledge are Spirit-linked aspects of a Pentecostal hermeneutic.

A number of Pentecostal scholars contrast the modernist, and even Greek,<sup>73</sup> approach to knowledge, which they argue relies upon a mental capacity, with the Hebrew idea of knowledge '*yada*', which is seen as far more "dynamic, experiential, relational knowledge" (Johns and Johns, 1992, p.112). According to Becker, *yada* (which is used to refer to sexual intercourse in the Bible (Moore, 2013, p.12)) is concerned with intimate experience as well as the cognitive aspect (2004, p.39). Such an explanation of knowledge better explains the kind of relational two-way knowledge that Pentecostals refer to regarding their experience of the Holy Spirit. They view their relationship with the Holy Spirit as both intimate and experiential. The implication is that 'knowing God' is far more than an accumulation of knowledge, but a "relationship between knower and known" (Moore, 1992, pp.90–91), an "active relationship" (Ellington, 1996, p.25).

Pentecostals would argue that their epistemology is informed by a number of categories, including, and with a certain primacy, the affective and aesthetic (for instance see Smith (2010)). A secularised (modern) epistemology, which argues for an objective and rationalistic knowledge (and in terms of biblical criticism relates to an historical-critical approach) is wholly inadequate to encapsulate the experience a believer has with the Holy Spirit (Johns and Johns, 1992, p.110; Ellington, 1996, p.26). Even in the non-secular circles of Evangelical thought there can be a tendency to try to "sever rationality and experience" (Cross, 2002, p.55). But Pentecostals want to love God with all their mind as well as their soul, spirit and body. A radical openness to God does not require an emptying of the brain.

In Smith's arguments for a Pentecostal epistemology he hopes that such a focus on affection will "press philosophers to also develop epistemological models that honor something more like a "biblical" understanding of knowledge" (2010, p.68). Inherent to Pentecostalism is a relational knowledge, a knowledge that comes from an inner experience of the working of God by His Spirit. Contrasting the sources of epistemic knowing, Martin compares the "religious rationalists (Evangelical fundamentalists)", who base their dogma on the inerrancy of Scripture (which I looked at in the previous chapter), with Pentecostals who look to the "genuineness of their encounter and continuing relationship with God through his Word and his Spirit" (2013a, p.211). For Pentecostals,

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<sup>73</sup> For instance Johns and Johns (1992, p.118) and Waddell contrast Greek epistemology with Pentecostal experience (2013, p.184).

encounter and relationship take them beyond themselves, both in the sense of ‘them and God’, and also ‘them and other believers’.

According to Smith, Pentecostal spirituality is rooted not only in affective, but also “narrative epistemic practice” (2010, p.43). *Yada* with its emphasis on a relational form of knowledge complements the narrative, which orally can include testimony and preaching/prophetic declaration. Oral communication, for Ellington, is the best means by which relational knowledge, rather than simply information, is transmitted amongst “ordinary” believers (1996, p.26). I would prefer the term ‘narrative’ rather than “orally” in Ellington’s claim, for narrative expresses a wider aesthetic, for instance, drama, art, architecture, positioning, etc. Narrative and *yada* come together within the community of faith (L.R. Martin, 2013a, p.218), emphasising the centrality of the community of faith by re-emphasises the role of the Holy Spirit in uniting the life of the Church with God (Cartledge, 2016, p.258).

Such lines of thought, which links narrative with *yada* seeks to place experience within community. Although often individual, experience is not exclusively isolated, it can occur within a community. For instance, the experience can occur during a service, or through testimony it can be referred back to a community. There is both an individual and a communal faith-experience for Pentecostals. The individual faith experience derives in part from the influence of pietism and western-individualism (Cross, 2002, p.49; Cartledge, 2013, p.137), (although Clark expresses limits to Pietistic influence much beyond this (1997, p.9)). However, the communal aspect of Pentecostal faith allows for experiences to be explained, as well as shared.

Moore (2013, p.12) attempts to explain the “interplay between knowledge and lived-experience” for Pentecostals. On the one hand he highlights the experience of knowing God through His Word aided by the Holy Spirit, on the other he emphasises the Pentecostal practice of sharing testimonies in gatherings as an expression of lived-experience. The testimonies and the Word become transformative experiences of the Spirit. Knowing God is therefore more than simply an experience, it is transformative in a way that should direct the activity of Pentecostals. Therefore Johns and Johns talk both of *yada* and *praxis*,<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>74</sup> Davies also utilises these two concepts by proposing two questions for individual Bible reading: “What does this mean to me?” and “What do I go and do about it?” (2009b, p.223).

where the knowing and the doing come together (1992, p.122). An example of this can be seen in the Pentecostal foursquare tenet of 'soon coming King'. This is a belief that encourages practical transformation in believers, who in knowing Jesus, are motivated to be active in witnessing.

The Spirit provides a meaningful link between the Scripture and the hearer. For knowing the Spirit, in the sense of *yada*, as we just saw, implies transformation. Pentecostals therefore engage with the Scripture with an expectation of transformative encounter rather than merely for head knowledge. A number of Pentecostal scholars make reference to this distinction in their own study and approach to Scripture. For instance, Waddell describes his approach to the Bible: "as a Pentecostal reader I am apt to find out as much about myself as I am about the text" (2013, p.197). Martin explains this as a distinct change from approaching the text in order to critique it and instead, now, "I become the object of critique to the voice of God" (2013a, pp.205–206); Pinnock describes this as being "seized by the text" (2009, p.164). Whereas McKay emphasises the distinction between the "objective and analytical" that does not impart life, and the prophetic approach which "draws us to God and gives life" (1994, pp.17–18). In his own journey with God, following the baptism in the Spirit, McKay experienced a new dimensions in approaching the Bible, saying "I found it increasingly difficult to be purely academic about my faith, because the Spirit was speaking to me" (1994, p.19). He continues by explaining that the Spirit was speaking to him about areas which can best be described as *praxis*. For Pentecostal scholars and for non-academic believers, the Spirit wants to bring transformation to the hearer through the Scripture. But this raises the issue of subjectivity, which I examine later.

### **5.3. The Community of faith**

In order for one to be a Pentecostal hermeneut...one needs to be recognized as a Pentecostal...In this way the reader is an extension and participant of the community not an isolated individual. (Archer, 2009 pp. 224–225)

Having already covered two of the three areas of the conceived triad of Pentecostal hermeneutics, this section considers the third: the Community. Issues regarding the community of faith have already been looked at as they intersect with both Scripture and/or Spirit. This section aims to focus on those areas that are central to the community of faith with regards Pentecostal hermeneutics, over and above Scripture of Spirit. In particular, I examine the role of community in various definitions, from the local church to

the global Church, and Elim as a movement. I also then consider the proposition of a fourth member to the triad (making it a quadradic). Throughout it will remain clear that encounters and relationship are important aspects of Pentecostal life (methodology and hermeneutics).

A church by definition is a group (community) of Christian believers; biblically they are a localised expression of the body of Christ (Romans 12:5). Elim churches, similar to many Evangelical and Charismatic churches, often have mid-week meetings to enhance the communal and relational aspect of their shared spiritual journey. Cartledge describes the Christian community as a place of belonging and “mutual responsibility and accountability for their interpretations and actions” (2006, p.130). Mid-week small group meetings may well provide an appropriate place for individuals to pray for one another, challenge one another and be held accountable to self-proposed standards (for instance, “pray that I don’t gossip this week”). The Scripture remains a key focus and measuring line by which standards and lives are measured. The community therefore becomes a place of interpretation and testing of beliefs and practices. Cartledge says that “the text of Scripture is consciously interpreted within the context of the community and its life by means of ‘ongoing’ inspiration of the Spirit” (2006, p.121). Cartledge, like others, sees an essential link between Scripture, Community and the Spirit.

The community is argued to be the place in which Pentecostals develop, nurture and find a safeguard to their interpretation. Holmes says of early Pentecostals, how:

Authority was also being exercised through people telling and retelling their stories of how the Spirit was at work in their lives, thereby examining and re-examining the interpretations of the Bible in the light of the insights of all Spirit filled believers. (Holmes, 2013, p.279)

From my own experience, interactive group Bible studies can be an excellent place of inquiry, illumination and inspiration, as well as correction and teaching, endorsing the Pentecostal distinctive of *narrative* (Smith, 2010, p.12). The role of testimony remains central to Pentecostal practice, whether in a small group or a main meeting. Nel says: “that encounters with God within the faith community in ways similar to those recorded in the Bible is conditional for understanding and interpreting biblical accounts” (2017c, p.6). Such encounters with God can range from internal inspiration to external signs and wonders. Within the community, where narrative and testimony are expressed, opinions can be weighed, heresies identified, and teachings brought. Archer says that “not all interpretations are equally valid; some are simply wrong. The interpretive community will

decide which are and are not acceptable” (2015, p.331). Yet there is clearly still a danger that a community can be wrong, history gives us many examples of cults that demonstrate this. As Keener says “our appeals to community risk the danger of circularity. A set of beliefs may function coherently within a community yet confront serious challenges in dialogue with other communities” (2016, p.279). However, the community of faith as an interpretive locus has biblical precedent (e.g. Acts 15 and the Council of Jerusalem – as discussed earlier) and must be strongly considered as a continuing place of interpretation.

Within a feminist context, Serene Jones argues that the definition of community is kept open in order that traditional boundaries and assumptions are shaken up, particularly regarding areas that have been hindered by “gender-exclusionary standards” (2000, p.130). The community of faith, for the purposes of this study, is to be understood in terms of a narrow definition: ‘a local Elim church’, as well as the broader definition: ‘Elim in Great Britain’, whilst also being cognisant of global Pentecostalism and the widest definition of ‘one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church’.<sup>75</sup> Although Church Sessions may not generally think of their hermeneutics in terms of ecumenism, they are likely to be influenced by each definition of the community of faith to some degree. In order to consider the role of the community of faith in hermeneutics, with particular reference to the two aspects of the triad we have already considered: the Scripture and the Spirit, we must briefly consider the Community from its narrow (local) to broad (global and historic) definitions.

### 5.3.1. The Local church

Within Elim, local churches have one set of “Foundational Truths” that have been formed through various committees and agreed upon at the National Conference. They were influenced by similar statements of faith from Pentecostals in America, and shaped from that. These Truths have been occasionally altered, with the last change in the early 1990’s.<sup>76</sup> The Truths set the basis for non-negotiable doctrine. Within the local church there can exist a diversity of opinions about a variety of non-essential, negotiable doctrines. For instance, these would include views on pre-millennialism and amillennialism, whether

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<sup>75</sup> As quoted from the Nicene-Constantinopolitan creed (Noll, 2012, p.50). Although it is worth noting that Pentecostals are not generally known for being creedal.

<sup>76</sup> This change removed the necessity for believing in pre-millennialism. The Foundational Truths are currently undergoing a thorough re-assessment by a Committee that will report back to the Elim Leadership Summit of 2020.

healing is in the atonement,<sup>77</sup> and whether women should be ministers, to name a few. It is unlikely that a written position statement would be made by a local church on these ‘non-foundational’ truths, probably because opposing views are likely to be held by members of a congregation. However, the strength of influence the Pastor has (which will be regulated by various factors such as how long he/she has been there, their level of training, the level of training of the congregation, etc.) will largely determine how various Scriptural passages are interpreted. I anticipated that agreement or disagreement with the voice from the pulpit, will be influenced by the previous teachings the congregation has been exposed to, and that differing opinions will need to be held in ‘friendly’ tension, or, as I later term a ‘dissatisfied unity’.

I have not set out to examine the hermeneutics of local congregations, rather I focus on local Church Sessions. Both in the survey and in the focus groups there were opportunities for discovering the influence of the Pastor and others (for instance, from the congregation) on the hermeneutical process. I expect that there is an important hermeneutical framework that is present within the local community of faith, although this may well be expressed in a variety of ways. It is clear from previous research (Carter, 2016; Nunn, 2018) that the local church (especially the Church Session) is a prominent place in which the hermeneutics concerning women in ministry is developed.

### 5.3.2. Elim nationally

Beyond the local community, each Elim church is part of the larger Elim movement, which is both a social group and a hermeneutical community. As already stated, Elim has a nationally agreed “Foundational Truths”. According to Elim’s Constitution (Elim, 2012, p.1), no teaching is permitted contrary to these truths in an Elim church, or by an Elim minister. Although there is no top-down system to impose this, I expect it is reliant on a bottom-up reporting/questioning of taught doctrine within a local church to a Regional Leader. Similar to the situation in a local church, the Foundational Truths present a doctrinal orthodoxy within Elim nationally, allowing for a divergence of views on doctrines outside of these Truths. These Truths can be seen as “ecumenical creeds of the church” (J.B. Green, 2016, p.168) which provide a hermeneutical framework for faithful Scriptural readings. Such

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<sup>77</sup> Warrington expresses two options for this position, the first believing that healing like forgiveness is easily available through faith in the work of the Cross; the second view accepts that some healing will come after death (2008, p.271).



readings of Scripture, with reference to these Truths, should not vary widely from one Elim church to another.

The Conference is central to the governance of Elim. It is here that the voting rights of Ministers and Lay Representative have the opportunity to shape decisions. Frestadius, in considering what he terms two of Elim's "epistemological crises"<sup>78</sup> (2018, p.287), looks to the community of the Conference as the place in which these crises were averted in relation to experience and Scripture. He utilises the approach that Thomas proposes from Acts 15 (1994), which I covered in the previous chapter. According to Frestadius therefore, the community of the Conference provides a hermeneutical safeguard for Elim.

Outside of Conference decisions and the Foundational Truths, there is some limited scope for creating a hermeneutical 'orthodoxy' or 'orthopraxy'. The most obvious avenues for Elim nationally lie through their training centre: Regents Theological College (RTC). Not only does the college train a majority of future Elim ministers, but it offers ongoing training to current ministers. However, it is not clear that the college is seen as an avenue to form or create a distinctly Pentecostal hermeneutical approach to the Scriptural texts. As noted earlier, in their current course on hermeneutics, RTC has two course books: the Bible, and *How to read the Bible for all its worth* (Stuart and Fee, 2014). This book is weighted towards an Evangelical hermeneutic (particularly of authorial intent) rather than alternative Pentecostal approaches (Noel, 1998; Grey, 2011; Frestadius, 2018, p.282).

Another avenue of influence is Elim's national magazine *Direction*. Rather than being academic, this magazine is aimed at the wide range of Elim congregants, encouraging a sense of the relational nature of the movement. Local, regional, national and international news is reported, testimony articles are used, and some teaching articles too. Regularly there are articles on the importance of the Bible (Warrington, 2015; Glass, 2016; Warrington, 2016), and even one on hermeneutics (Newton, 2016). Specifically the issue of women in ministry has been addressed, although not particularly with hermeneutics in mind (Glass, 2013).<sup>79</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> In his account, the first crisis relates to the issue of British Israelism; the second, to the experience of the Restoration movement (2018, p.287).

<sup>79</sup> A number of other articles over the last 15 years or so have showcased or referred to women in ministry, including a book review that speaks positively of women in ministry (Stevenson, 2002); an article regarding Elim training when "men and women" can achieve "their potential in God" (Woodfield, 2003a; Woodfield, 2003b); an inserted article by Elim's popular writer/theologian

Through regional and national events hermeneutical approaches sensitive to Elim's viewpoint can also be showcased. The annual Elim Leaders' Summit would be a prime example of such an opportunity. The majority of the speakers at the Summit are from within Elim, although 'outsiders' are invited to speak specifically. Some of those may be Pentecostal, but equally may not. For instance, the Reformed Pastor-Theologian R.T. Kendall has spoken on a number of occasions, preaching and teaching with a hermeneutic that appears sensitive to Pentecostal theology. There are also national women's events (Aspire) (Elim, 2019b), youth events (Limitless) (Elim, 2019c) and men's events (Mpower) (Elim, 2019d).

All of these national opportunities provide Elim with platforms to shape hermeneutics. Whether or not this is in the mind of the national teams involved is another matter. Although I do expect that both the DNA of Elim<sup>80</sup> and the current impetus for the future of Elim will be at forefront of their thinking, and therefore indirectly shape their hermeneutic.

### 5.3.3. The global and historic Church

Elim, locally and nationally, sits within the broader Catholic Church. The global Church influence may most be experienced within Elim locally where they are part of Churches Together (with local churches being encouraged to be a part of this initiative), and nationally through the Evangelical Alliance,<sup>81</sup> and internationally through partnerships with Elim Global<sup>82</sup> as well as other overseas movements. Apart from these influences, discussions in the local and global media (whether popular or Christian) bear influence upon the matters that Elim considers important. For instance, when the law was passed in the UK Parliament recognising same-sex marriage, Elim discussed the implication of this at their annual conference. Debates occurring in the wider context, along with the 'tradition' of the global Church, provide opportunities for hermeneutics to be considered and honed.

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George Canty had an insightful piece on women in ministry (Canty, 2003); a brief mention from the General Superintendent of "one of our finest women ministers" (Glass, 2007); an article that mentions the "young men and women" of Elim's past and of the New Testament (Blount, 2015), a short article that mentions the positive impact ministry by women had had on the writer (Lancaster, 2015), and a testimony article by one woman minister who mentions the topic of women in ministry (Nicholls, 2016). Apart from these passing mentions (notwithstanding the Canty inserted article) there have been no articles (in the last 15 years) dedicated to the topic of women in ministry.

<sup>80</sup> 'DNA' is a term used by Elim when discussing its historic distinctives, for instance in Church planting, healing and evangelism.

<sup>81</sup> Elim had the privilege of their General Superintendent (at that time) becoming the Chair of the Evangelical Alliance Council in 2014 (Alliance, 2016).

<sup>82</sup> This is a fellowship body that provides relationships among organisations and churches across the world whose primary affiliation is to the Elim family (Elim Missions, 2019).

With Elim having just celebrated its centenary (in 2015), there is a sense in which its connection with the global Church helps provide a link with the older historic Church.

The connection between church tradition and Pentecostalism is one that Oliverio argues convincingly. He talks about an ecumenical-Pentecostal hermeneutic, one that draws upon the “hermeneutics of tradition” seeking continuity between Church traditions and Pentecostalism, seeing such tradition as legitimate sources of theology (2015, pp.311–318). He argues accordingly, that Pentecostals should not be afraid of other traditions, and should engage with Church history, learning from this wealth of experience. This historic focus is also acknowledged by Thomas, who says:

I would suggest that for the Pentecostal interpreter the hearing of testimonies should not be limited to the contemporary voices of the Pentecostal community but be extended by means of *Wirkungsgeschichte* to include the voices of those who have preceded us in discerning their way on this narrative journey. (2013, p.118)

Historically, as Cartledge points out, the community (whether Israel or the Church) has been involved in interpreting Scripture (2006, p.116), and community is the place where both Scripture and narrative tradition are “interpreted experientially” (2006, p.131). Ecumenical and historic approaches (and differences) may well provide Pentecostals with useful sharpening tools.

However, as Menzies explains, early Pentecostalism found “spiritual experiences” the method in which the unity of the faith and theological disagreements were balanced (2016, p.98). Pentecostals could all point to a personal experience, and an encounter with God; therefore their theological differences became less critical. He suggests that this principle should be incorporated into “wider ecumenical dialogue”. It can be argued that it is our experience of God that unites us, and theological disagreements can find some place of unity if/when experience becomes a common denominator. Current engagement between Pentecostals and the World Council of Churches (WCC) illustrate that there is some movement, but also some way to go. Presentations have been made in the Pentecostal World Conference (PWC) (of 2010) by the General Secretary of the WCC, and likewise by the Chairman of the PWC at the WCC of 2013 (Guneratnam, 2013). Pentecostal theologians were involved in the production of the WCC’s “The Church towards a common vision”, and continue to be involved in the Joint Consultative Group of the WCC and Pentecostals (Robra, 2019, pp.172–174).

Pentecostalism, as stated earlier, did not arrive in a vacuum, but has a clear early biblical precedent along with nineteen centuries of tradition which have shaped practice and theology. The Pentecostal community of faith is in continuity with the community of faith in which the “Scripture was originally forged” (Ellington, 1996, p.30), and needs to acknowledge the practice and theology of wider traditions. Pentecostals, positioned historically and globally, will find useful voices to potentially shape and sharpen their hermeneutics, if for no other reason than helping Pentecostals give reasons for their disagreements (as suggested by Robra (2019, p.174)). The community of faith, local, national and global, remains a place where subjectivism can be addressed (as I explain in the section below), where hermeneutical standards can be showcased, where disagreements can be examined, and lessons can be learnt. I will now briefly turn to the role of a trained leader within that community.

#### 5.3.4. The trained leader

Origen says, that unskilled “hearers” hear in the scriptures only dissonances, as if the Old Testament conflicts with the New, or the Prophets with the Law, or the apostolic writings with the Gospels. If they hope to appreciate the divine harmonies of the scriptures, then they have to be trained for it; the required sensibilities and skills must be inculcated in them. (C.E.W. Green, 2016, p.104)

This quote regarding Origen is both challenged by and affirmed by Pentecostal practice. On the one hand Pentecostals have a regular reliance upon the Holy Spirit to be their teacher, but on the other, the role of a Pastor is often also seen as Teacher (with Ephesians 4:11 quoted in support). Each believer has direct access to God through faith in Jesus, and each believer personally is filled with the Holy Spirit, part of whose role is to teach believers “all things” (John 14:26). Along with that, the pietistic forerunner to Pentecostalism (Cross, 2002, p.59) encourages a tendency towards an individualistic approach to hermeneutics. However, the practice of Elim Pentecostals, demonstrates their affirmation of the body of Christ, the Church, and within that the different gifts including teaching.

In his engagement with the discussions on Pentecostal hermeneutics, Harlyn Purdy argues that the triad of Scripture, Spirit and Community is insufficient, and that a fourth aspect, a “Trained Leader”, is necessary; making the triadic a “quadratic” (2015, ix). He argues that such a trained person is required for a Pentecostal hermeneutic, and that other scholars either overlook this, or ignore its importance. Purdy is writing in an African context in which he identifies literacy as an important criteria that a trained leader provides. He explains

that in his context “63 percent of adults and 47 million youths (ages 15-24) are illiterate” (2015, p.148). A literate leader therefore becomes an essential requirement to “interpret Scripture to equip the community for mission” (2015, p.142). This leader operates within the context of the community of faith, and according to Purdy is vital, not just for the reading of Scripture (hence literacy) but the interpretation (hence trained).<sup>83</sup>

Purdy’s requirement for a trained leader is understandable within an illiterate context, although it could be argued that all that is required is a use of those who are literate to read the Scriptural texts publicly. The potential danger of demanding a trained leader is the removal of understanding the Scripture from the hands of the congregation back to an individual, echoing pre-reformation times. I doubt that Purdy is promoting such a turn, and contextually his argument makes good sense; although, it is quite possible to accept that literacy is required by at least one member of a congregation, whilst holding interpretation as a communal event directed by the Holy Spirit. Another danger of one individual being the conduit of ‘sound doctrine’ is the cult of the charismatic personality, a thought echoed by Cartledge (2013, p.142) who uses the phrase “Pentecostal *magisterium*” to describe such an outworking. One person then becomes the focus and the authority, potentially drawing the glory that should be God’s.

Purdy argues with Kenneth Archer’s descriptions of early Pentecostalism, saying that Archer does not provide a clear enough recognition to the role of leaders within the community (2015, p.72). Purdy is right in so far as Archer refers back to how, in early Pentecostalism, they used the Bible Reading Method (including its pietistic approach) (2001, p.43). As I mentioned earlier, the Bible Reading Method was pre-critical and functioned like a proof-text method. Archer explains that “from their perspective anyone could purchase a concordance and determine what God had said about the subject under investigation. In their minds, this eliminated the need for help from biblical scholars” (2009, p.63). Obviously Archer is assuming literacy here, but the argument he makes is for an inclusive interpretation by any ordinary believer, which initially seems to preclude the need for a trained leader.

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<sup>83</sup> This is similar to the illiteracy of medieval England when the clergy was relied upon for the explanation of the Latin text (Lawson and Silver, 2013, p.30).

Purdy refers back to Acts 2 and Acts 15 from which the community is involved in the interpretive process, to argue that the way that the community is involved is not as Archer describes, saying: “Archer and others seem to include the community without any restriction or clear description of how its involvement works and they give no recognition to the significant role of leaders, trained or otherwise” (2015, p.72). However, it is fair to say that Archer does mention how the pastor or teacher is involved in the interpretive process, as Purdy explains:

Archer seems to treat scholar, pastor, and congregation together under the category of community. It is true they are part of the community; however, the trained leader serves from a place of authority in the interpretive activity”. (2015, p.141)

Thomas, in his argument for a Pentecostal hermeneutic based upon Acts 15, acknowledges the role that leadership, through James (as well as Peter, Paul and Barnabas), plays in this passage, but concludes that the passage gives more primacy to the “leadership of the Holy Spirit” (1994, p.49). It seems to me that both Archer and Thomas acknowledge that leadership is a present (if not necessary) feature of communal hermeneutics.

There are practical and theological implications from this discussion regarding a trained leader. Practically, Purdy’s argument explains the need for such a trained leader in a context that is majority illiterate. Theologically, we have seen the role of leaders within the early church whilst seeing a variance in the emphasis on their role by modern academics. Both leadership and teaching are gifts (or offices) from the Holy Spirit given for the building up of the Church. Modern Pentecostal practice affirms the continuing place of a trained leader, whilst also allowing for communal and individual interpretation. Therefore, for the sake of this study I will assume the phrase “community” is inclusive of congregation and leader (etc.). However, the determination of the role and influence of leadership in the interpretive process within Elim’s Church Sessions will be discussed in the analysis of the empirical research in chapters 6-8.

#### **5.4. Subjectivism**

The Pentecostal tendency towards experience and relational knowing (e.g. Smith’s “affective, narrative epistemology” (2010, p.43)), presents an opportunity to cry ‘subjectivism!’. Whilst an appeal to experience is “essential to authentic Christianity” for a Pentecostal, Evangelicals fear the “relativity, plurality and heterodoxy” that this could bring (Cartledge, 2013, p.137). Cartledge goes on to argue that Pentecostals are not frightened to appeal to experience because “they wish to locate it not within Western-style individualism

but with a non-Western community orientation” (2013, p.137). Perhaps given the global scope of Pentecostalism this may be largely the case. However, within the UK, I would suggest that there remains much Western-style individualism in Pentecostal churches, and far less non-Western community orientation. That at least is my experience, despite the efforts to bring about a community-orientated aspect to discipleship that churches do frequently have. However, I would agree that in Pentecostal practice individualism is not all there is; the community of faith has a significant role, as we have already seen. But, whilst allowing Pentecostal practice a place of prominence, we cannot accept it uncritically (Stephenson, 2006, p.88).

Pentecostal hermeneutics, in so far as it implies an experience and encounter with the Holy Spirit, must contend with the criticism of subjectivism. Martin asserts that the Pentecostal approach, despite being open to multivalent readings of Scripture, is not “tantamount to uncritical subjectivity” (2013a, p.208). As an example of an attempt to be objective, the historical-critical method called for a “standing back from in order to look at” approach (Ellington, 1996, p.25). But in reality any reader of the text brings a level of subjectivity to it, as Waddell says “a ‘neutral’ approach does not exist” (2013, p.183). Baker suggests that Pentecostals can deconstruct a “passionless objectivity” with a combination of “orthodoxy (right belief)...orthopraxy (right action), and orthopathy (right feeling)” (2013, p.96). This combination, he argues, helps “collapse the false dichotomy between reason and feelings”.

One attempt to temper subjectivity, is through the invocation of Scripture, “the Bible says...” is not an uncommon phrase. But the role of the Spirit in the interpretation of the Scripture, “I feel the Holy Spirit saying through this passage....”, ensures subjectivity remains a live issue. Keener describes a situation where two people hold opposing views and yet both claim that God has spoken to them (2016, p.106). He uses this and other examples as a springboard for asserting the important and primary role of the canon (specifically and literally as a measuring stick). Describing the process as a “hermeneutical circle” (2016, p.116), he explains how Scripture is read in the light of present circumstances, and how revelation is measured according to Scripture.

According to Moore, the Spirit is essential in providing an interpretation of the Scripture (1992, p.75). Likewise, Ellington argues that the role of the Spirit in the interpretive process will also challenge our subjectivity:

It is the transformative action of the Holy Spirit which persistently intrudes on Christian experience and prevents our interpretations from becoming simply a process of reading our own needs and wants into the text and hearing only that which we want to hear. (1996, p.22)

Yet as Harrington and Patten ask “How does someone other than the interpreter know if indeed the Holy Spirit has informed the interpretation?” (1994, p.113). They clearly highlight an issue regarding subjectivism on individuals who are isolated from a wider body of hermeneuts. And as Pinnock says, “It is possible to be mistaken about where the Spirit is actually leading us” (1993, p.20). This is a genuine and recurrent observation that requires careful consideration. A response is to reinforce the place of Scripture, so that any interpretation (via the Spirit) must not contradict the “explicit or implicit sense of Scripture” (Harrington and Patten, 1994, p.113). The difficulty of course lies in being able to assess what the ‘sense of Scripture’ is. This can lead to a circular argument if Scripture does require the Holy Spirit as interpreter: ‘to understand Scripture you need the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but that inspiration must not contradict an understanding of Scripture’. To overcome this issue, the argument must rely on a plain-sense reading of Scripture as the ‘sense of Scripture’, this then allows the plain-sense interpretation to trump the Holy Spirit interpretation; which seems on the face of it to be absurd (except where the plain sense reading is not in conflict with the Holy Spirit interpretation). If the Holy Spirit is to be involved in the hermeneutical process, then there must be some measure by which the plain-sense and alternate interpretations can be applied, whilst at the same time providing checks and balances. By introducing the community of faith into this process, there is a potential balance to the claim of subjectivity.

Returning to Thomas’ exploration of Acts 15 and the Council of Jerusalem that I discussed under the previous chapter on Scripture. In the community of the Council, Thomas finds his answer to the danger of subjectivism. For here the community of faith<sup>84</sup> engage with a challenging question that they are facing; and in the light of Scripture, the Holy Spirit and each other they propose an answer. The “discernment of the faith community” (L.R. Martin, 2013a, p.232) is the safeguard that is proposed by many Pentecostal writers. Purdy notes the differences that communities of faith provide in North America compared with Africa. He says that “in the North American context the moderating influence of the community is an important correction to a strong individualism” whereas “in Africa the challenge is for the community to allow, even encourage, individual leaders to emerge and

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<sup>84</sup> Thomas allows for such a community to be a local body or a denomination (1994, p.51).



offer their trained critique” (2015, p.140). The sense in which the community of a local church within Elim provides a hermeneutical layer will be analysed in chapter 8.

It is within the faith community that testimonies are heard, signs and wonders recounted, prophetic words shared, and it is here that they are tested (Pinnock, 2009, p.168). For instance, Johns and Johns give an example of a Bible study (as part of the faith community), which helps remove the extremes of “privatized subjectivism” and “totalitarian objectivism” (1992, p.116). No one individual interpretation is enforced in such a group discussion. Within such a community there is an “epistemology...of *participation and accountability*” (italics in original) (1992, p.116). Pentecostals get to know God in this arena of involvement, and can be corrected by those they ‘hear’ with. Interestingly, Davies encourages Pentecostals to be unashamed in their subjective approach to the text, and that such subjectivity can lead to greater riches of interpretation, saying that “our readings are worth hearing by others” (2009b, p.222). The strength of the community, the hearing of others, is where there can be a verification of testimony (L.R. Martin, 2013a, p.226).

Simply referring to the community of faith does not allay the danger of group-subjectivism or self-deception; as Westphal notes, “We are relative. Only God is absolute” (2016, p.25). Therefore we, as individuals and as community, are quite open to being guided by subjectivism. But it is to this which Ellington proposes the invasive reality of God, describing God as “intrusively real” so that our “subjective experience is constantly being challenged and proved” (1996, p.21). Davies agrees that a corporate view is not necessarily true, and that it is the “task of the Holy Spirit himself to ‘lead us into all truth’” (2009b, p.228). God is able to communicate into groups who are open to hearing from Him, and both the “gifted community” and the leadership do “a lot to prevent the church from going ‘off the rails’” (Pinnock, 2009, p.163). Poirier however, calls the attempt to enlist the community as a safeguard a “narrativist conceit of envisioning the community as the authenticating reader” (2004, pp.64–65). However, his argument draws upon Augustine as a prime account of a premodern interpreter who has authorial intention as a foundational precept, yet, he ignores the fact that Augustine’s “doctrinal orthodoxy” was both in the Scriptural texts and in the Church (Demacopoulos and Papanikolaou, 2008, pp.255–256). Although Poirier acknowledges Holy Spirit authorship, his stance on authorial intent removes the possibility for the Spirit to continue to inspire, whether that is individually or within a community. Most Pentecostals would rather allow for an ongoing inspiration that finds a safeguard

within a community and/or with reference to doctrinal orthodoxy. With such safeguards, Pentecostal openness should be largely free of rampant subjectivism, either individually or corporately.

The triadic of Spirit, Scripture and Community continues to invoke an interrelated self-necessity, neither one or two of these alone appear sufficient to hermeneutics. For instance, some Pentecostal/Charismatic experiences have come under scrutiny, from snake-handling and drinking deadly poison (Archer, 2001, p.37), to 'lurid phenomena' during the 'Toronto blessing' (Clark, 2001, p.67). Grey suggests that it is "the balance of the Spirit (to discern that their experience is indeed from God) and text (to anchor the experience in the canon)" that mitigates self-deception (2016, p.153), and brings the necessary checks to the community of faith. However, without a theology that holds to 'encounter' or 'invasive reality of God' it would not be clear how the so-called safeguard of community can escape heresy and group-deception. Pentecostals do have a theology of encounter (Warrington, 2008), and do hold to a "position of radical openness to God" (Smith, 2010, p.12), this provides a genuine expectation that God is able to assist His Church in the process of hermeneutics.

### **5.5. Conclusion**

This chapter has examined much of the academic discussion regarding the hermeneutical roles of the Spirit and the Community, largely presenting *prescriptions* of Pentecostal hermeneutics. In accordance with an ongoing *radical openness to God* (Smith, 2010, p.33), I have presented a case for the necessity of the Spirit in all areas of Pentecostal hermeneutics, allowing for a dynamic (re)interpretation of the text by the hearer, as he/she is open to the Spirit. Both the role of such (re)interpretation and the place of experience came under the scrutiny of subjectivism. Within the various categories of community, I have found essential challenges to the boundaries of Pentecostal hermeneutics. Not only does community provide an element of hermeneutic safety, but within the broadest categories of community, the Pentecostal is encouraged to see beyond their perspective. It was particularly argued that subjectivism is mitigated through the role of the Spirit and the community.

I hypothesise that Elim Pentecostals, at grassroots level, are generally unaware of varied hermeneutical approaches (although they may demonstrate a 'grassroots hermeneutic'<sup>85</sup>). The empirical research and analysis (of chapters 6-8) will show how they expect the Spirit to speak through the biblical texts (*radical openness*), how they relate to the community of faith, and how they apply historical-grammatical (and other) approaches. The following three chapters *analyse critically* the way in which Pentecostal hermeneutics is practised (*descriptive*), and will consider the value of the triad, and discover a pragmatic, relational and flexible approach.

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<sup>85</sup> The growing grassroots theology, primarily utilised in Africa (Benedetto, 1999, p.122) (see for instance (van Klinken and Phiri, 2015), although not limited to it (for example, its growing use in Asia (Chan, 2014)), inspires this idea of a Pentecostal grassroots hermeneutic, for instance: Grey's use in her study in Australia (2011).

## **CHAPTER 6. ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH WITH REFERENCE TO SCRIPTURE**

We felt Scripture had to be the basis, had to be the starting point and ultimately the destination point. (Larry, FG2)

### **6.1. Introduction**

In order to assess the extent to which the theoretical triad of Scripture, Spirit and Community (Yong, 2002; Archer, 2004a; Cartledge, 2013) is used by Elim Pentecostals in their hermeneutics, I will analyse the data in ways that highlight the prioritisation of one aspect of the triad over the other aspects. In this chapter I look at the way in which Scripture is prioritised.

As I explained in previous chapters, Scripture remains a key love of Pentecostals (Hollenweger, 1997, v; L.R. Martin, 2013c, viii). It is a foundation of authority and seen as God's Word. There are times however, in the hermeneutical process, when Scripture is not enough. I explain how the findings demonstrate that a knowledge of biblical culture and context are helpful for modern readers in understanding the verses that are traditionally seen as restrictive for women in ministry. I also examine which hermeneutical principles are used by Elim Pentecostals in their interpretation of the four passages provided for discussion.<sup>86</sup>

To facilitate my exploration of the way in which Scripture (above Spirit and Community) is prioritised in the hermeneutical process, I start by examining how Elim Pentecostals articulate their view of Scripture, assessing this in terms of categories such as literalism and inerrantism. This then connects with a discussion of various hermeneutical approaches, including historical-grammatical approaches. I conclude with a section analysing the ways in which the respondents use and refer to Scriptural context. Throughout I will be *critically analysing* (Sprague, 2005) how they actually practise their hermeneutics; for a researcher "It is imperative to *critically reflect* upon the practices of a community of faith if a method is to truly represent and inform that community" (Grey, 2011, p.9).

### **6.2. Elim Pentecostal views on Scripture - Literalism and inerrancy**

On this issue, at one level, Pentecostals are modernists and read their Bibles in faith as the inspired, infallible, and often, inerrant Word of God, even if they may never have heard of these terms. This is in part because the earliest Pentecostals at the turn of the twentieth century came mostly from

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<sup>86</sup> Acts 2:17-18, 1 Corinthians 14:34-35, Galatians 3:28 and 1 Timothy 2:12.

the Holiness movement and carried over their commonsense realist approach to the Scriptures. (Yong, 2011, p.4)

I introduced four scriptural passages (see footnote 86) into the e-survey and across the focus groups (FGs) in order to help explore the hermeneutical approaches of Elim Pentecostals. As well as that, within the e-survey there was a section that specifically asked the respondents to consider how they viewed Scripture as a whole. The topic of literalism and inerrancy was introduced in chapter 4 in which Fundamentalism is linked with literalism, and Evangelicalism with inerrancy. The following discussion presents an analysis of the ways in which Elim Pentecostals both **say** that they view Scripture and in practice **demonstrate** their view of Scripture.

In chapter 4, I explained that there are a number of relevant terms used to describe the views that people have regarding Scripture. I took the lead from Jelen et al.'s research who explored data from a larger study of "political/religious attitudes of urban blacks" (1990, p.308). Jelen had previously argued that the distinction between literal, inerrant and infallible were too subtle in most surveys (1989). In the 1990 research they chose to use data from a survey that had given four questions regarding Scripture, which reflected four main views. I chose to replicate these questions word for word in order to make a clear distinction between the various positions. In hindsight the fourth option (God has nothing to do with the Bible) was not necessary for my target audience.

The three corresponding terms to the questions in the survey completed by Jelen et al. (1990) are: 'infallibilist', 'inerrantist' and 'literalist' (along with a fourth option, see below). These are used on a scale of rising stringency, so that 'infallible' allows for more interpretive freedom. I relate these to the four options (as used in Jelen et al.'s study) I gave in the e-survey:

1. The Bible is God's Word, and is meant to be taken literally, word for word.
2. The Bible is God's Word, and all it says is true, but not all of it is meant to be taken literally.
3. The Bible was written by people, inspired by God, but contains some human errors.
4. The Bible is a good book because it was written by wise people, but God had nothing to do with it.

The first option represents a literalist position, the second an inerrant, the third an infallible, the fourth as an alternative (which I expected no one to choose). I use these

technical terms to separate responses, although these terms were never offered as options (simply the four statements above). Here is a breakdown of which choices were made by the 38 respondents:

|                                  |   |    |
|----------------------------------|---|----|
| For the literalist (choice 1)    | - | 8  |
| For the inerrantist (choice 2)   | - | 27 |
| For the infallibilist (choice 3) | - | 3  |
| For choice 4                     | - | 0  |

It is clear that the majority of respondents chose the option that “The Bible is God's Word, and all it says is true, but not all of it is meant to be taken literally”. However, there was a significant number who chose the literalist option, which would more normally be associated with a Fundamentalist position. This is not surprising, considering that Pentecostalism does, in part, have some early connections with Fundamentalism (e.g. see Karkkainen (1998)), as I explained in chapter 4. Jelen et al., in their research, found that the majority of Fundamentalists chose the literalist position (1990, pp.310–311). According to Osborne, a Fundamentalist approach seeks to remove the “human element from the Biblical text” (1976, p.83).

Contrasting with Kay’s findings, as I mentioned in chapter 4, in which the “inerrantist group [has] a worldview that is strong in its belief in male authority” (2004, p.80), I found that the neither the literalists nor inerrantists showed such a consistent worldview. There was a very small minority who identified with either the literalist or inerrantist choices and also said that they would not accept a woman as a pastor.

I was particularly interested to see how the respondents who chose the literalist option engaged with the questions regarding biblical interpretation. I found examples of those who said that they took the Bible literally, and yet applied hermeneutical strategies to reading the Bible in a non-literalist way. There are clear indications that some people think that a literalist interpretation is the right answer, yet their own practice does not correspond so exactly.

Each of the respondents who chose a literalist option also thought that a woman should be on the National Leadership Team (NLT). A “word for word” literalist reading of Scripture usually restricts a woman from having authority over a man, however, these respondents

indicate a less literalistic application in their response. Those respondents who said that they believed the Bible was to be taken literally, actually adopted a more flexible, less-literal, approach in their practice. This is further evidenced in their interpretations of the two 'restrictive' passages (1 Tim. 2:12, 1 Cor. 14:34-35). In this example, each of the eight respondents used historical-grammatical tools in explaining their interpretation; which on the whole was in favour of women leading in church. I will detail this use of historical-grammatical methods later on in this chapter. I will argue from the evidence we will explore that this flexibility is not a discrepancy, rather it indicates a desire to privilege the Bible (by choosing the literalist option), whilst also allowing other factors to be included. I argue in the next chapter that this is centred around a freedom and fluidity that comes from the Holy Spirit.

In the pilot focus group (PFG), Diane gives an example of how she would find a literalist reading of a particular Scripture rather difficult. Whilst discussing the role of women in ministry within church, Diane was confronted with a restrictive verse (1 Corinthians 14:34-35) and said: "I understand why people struggle because if you take Scripture as it is written literally right there it says I shouldn't [speak in church]" (PFG). Her observation from this verse, if a literalist interpretation was the only option, indicates a tension between her practise (to speak in church) and the plain reading of the verse (women should not speak in church). Clearly here Diane is allowing the literalist position to make a hermeneutical step that includes her, rather than just the women in Corinth. This approach causes Diane to pause, and to struggle with the gift she believes that the Holy Spirit has given her. Her challenge, as a woman who wants to be vocally active in church, is in considering what she believes is her gift and what she reads in "God's word"; she says that "there's got to be a place that they meet" (PFG). Similarly, a literalist reading of Scripture led to one respondent saying: "It is awkward if we take it as literal and applying to all churches" (Respondent 23, Survey). This perceived tension bears somewhat on how Elim Pentecostals say they view Scripture, but, perhaps is more evident in how they actually engage with Scripture.

The e-survey responses and the discussions in the FGs demonstrate that Elim Pentecostals do, in theory and in practice, have a high view of Scripture. Their view is not Fundamentalist, because they do not remove the human element from the biblical text; as we will see, they often consider the culture of the writer and original audience. At this

stage of my analysis, whilst it would appear that Elim Pentecostals are quite Evangelical in their approach (allowing for both human and divine involvement), we will see later both the role of the Holy Spirit and community in Pentecostal hermeneutics highlight the dissimilarity with some of the Evangelical spectrum (particularly with reference to a narrow *sola scriptura*<sup>87</sup>). The responses demonstrate that Elim Pentecostals want to approach the Bible as God's Word, whilst allowing for interpretations that are not restricted to a literalist position. They adopt a pragmatic flexibility (which I discuss in more detail in chapter 2) in both how they undertake their hermeneutic and in personalising the meaning for them. These areas will be discussed more in the next section as we continue to explore the extent to which Scripture is prioritised.

### **6.3. An overview of various biblical hermeneutical approaches used**

#### **6.3.1. An extract**

The FGs provided an environment in which a variety of views regarding Scripture could be explored in more detail. As I mentioned in chapter 3, in this setting there was no option to choose a label or view of Scripture, rather the responses of the participants themselves become the evidence for the way in which the Scripture is viewed. In FG1 there was a small discussion indicating that one participant, Graham,<sup>88</sup> took a more literalist view of Scripture. He started to engage in this discussion when Imogen had mentioned the struggle she was having in interpreting the 1 Timothy passage. I include a larger extract of the transcript here (although still reduced) as it helps illustrate a number of points which are analysed in this chapter:

[Imogen frequently does not complete her thoughts, this partly indicates her urgency in expressing her view; many words are clipped as she goes from one idea to another]

**Imogen:**...but there are so many other passages in Scripture, where you see God and Jesus putting women forward as...people that you look to, the women and that, who were commended by Paul and things like that.

So, so [pause, silence]

But it is in black and white and you have highlighted it and it does look "oh, oh gosh I don't know how I relate to that" other than looking at other Scriptures and things, so...

**Harry:** I think again it goes back to what I said before, you've got the Bible which was written a few years ago, shall we say, and how do you put that

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<sup>87</sup> An example of a narrow approach is given by Dorman (1998, p.436), where only the words of the Bible are used.

<sup>88</sup> All names have been changed.



into today's society, and sometimes you're .... going to get these sticking points, because you've got these...what it's saying here and how do you actually put that into today's world...So how do we then take what was written such [a long time ago] and put that into today's society? And I think that is the challenge for a church....Any new Christian coming in would then see that and say: "well hang on a minute, that's not what, that's not what I...see in today's day to day life, it's not what's in the papers and stuff like that, how can that be true?" [Graham: frowns]. And I think that's the difficulty we've probably got, making that fit. [Imogen: affirming mmm]

**Graham:** But then there's the danger that society is leading Christianity rather than Christianity leading society [Harry: yup] if you take society as your model [Harry: yup], um, ...yes...but yeah I do take your point that society is completely different to what...

...**Imogen:** I think that's why it's important when you look at Scripture, to look at Scripture. Because I agree with you, you're saying you don't want to be led by what society's saying to us, because we want to lead society in that sense...so what we need to do is look at the passage at what Timothy, like you said, the context, the culture, and what Timothy's actually trying to say; rather than what he actually says in black and white because there might be more behind that [Graham: yeah]. Because that's not what's saying in the rest of Scripture; and that's what you know, we can isolate one verse and says 'that says something to us, oh we're not going to have women in leadership' but when you look at other Scriptures, like you said, Lydia in business and other people...

**Graham:** Yeah, the only thing is those other verses don't actually, this says in black and white that women shouldn't exercise authority, but I don't think the other verses say in black and white that women should exercise authority, so that's I ... I don't, do you know what I mean? ...but yes sorry [leaning back, hand on top of head] I tend to...yeah I ...it's a hard passage [appears to struggle in saying what he really wants to say]

**Imogen:** [Started speaking over Graham:] But as I said, you have women teachers...But if we're going to take that passage as black and white and we don't back it with anything else, then why do women teach in junior church?...

It is clear from reading this extract that there are certain dynamics at work, most likely because there are a mixture of people (and genders) in this FG who have different views. Graham is presenting an interpretation of the passage that is different to the one offered by Imogen. Graham is a little reticent in offering his opposing position, he demonstrates this in his physical positioning (leaning back with his hands on his head), in his pauses as he frames his thoughts, and in his words ("sorry"). Despite his reticence, he does propose an alternative interpretation. I would suggest that the FG, as a setting, where there are men and women who do not already know each other, tempers some opinions of the participants, this dynamic could have dampened strong opposition from being voiced. Yet, in each group, there were voices that brought alternative and opposing interpretations into

the discussion. These were helpful reflections of the diversity of views that occur across Elim Church Sessions.

In the extract above we have the words “black and white” five times. Primarily this is used to refer to ink on the page, and because of the authority of that page (Scriptural authority accepted by this reader), the authority of those words. So, in the above example it is the words “I do not permit a woman to teach or to exercise authority over a man; rather, she is to remain quiet”, that have potential authority. The term can also mean that there is a perceived clarity about a particular issue. If something is “black and white”, then it has little scope for variant interpretations. Both Imogen (here) and Diane (in the quote in the last section), indicate that the texts itself makes them pause. If their hermeneutics allows no room for other Scriptural input, or historical-grammatical input (see below), or the Spirit or Community (see the next two chapters), then the “black and white” would contain a plain sense and isolated reading alone. In FG3 Steve makes a similar statement as he describes how he had misunderstood a particular Scripture until earlier that morning, because of his plain sense reading coupled with a lack of knowledge of the culture; he concluded: “from this day on I will always look at it in a different light because I have understood the culture” (FG3). His change of view was dependent upon a hermeneutic that incorporate more than just the plain sense of Scripture.

Graham appears to want to prioritise Scripture in the hermeneutical process, and errs towards the plain sense reading. He firstly agrees that: “this says in black and white that women shouldn’t exercise authority” (Graham, FG1), and then adds that the other verses that people use for the inclusion of women, for instance the example of Lydia, “don’t...say in black and white that women should exercise authority”. Graham’s use of Imogen’s “black and white” brings, for him, a simplicity in the text and a clarity in the interpreted meaning of the text. Yet for Imogen the ‘clarity’ actually complexifies, bringing a confusion and opacity, because she incorporates other considerations to her hermeneutics. Graham finds the ‘clarity’ more plausible, indicating his openness to a more literalist interpretation. And in practice, when considering the text of 1 Timothy, he appears to take a literalist interpretation, and accepts that women should not have authority. Amongst Pentecostals, Graham would not be alone in reading this verse in a literalist way. However, my findings do suggest that many Elim Pentecostals may not be literalists. The majority of the respondents and participants were in favour of women in ministry, although not all could

determine how to argue that biblically. This indicates that they adopt a more flexible (whilst inerrant) position in their biblical hermeneutics.

The assessment of Pentecostal practice in their appropriation of the Bible and in their approach to biblical texts is helpful in evaluating their biblical hermeneutics, sometimes more so than asking them to vocalise their theology (which was hinted at in the previous section). When it comes to the role of women in ministry a variety of approaches are taken whilst reflecting a broad spectrum of opinions within current Elim Pentecostal practice.

The participants of FG1 demonstrated how different hermeneutical approaches can be used in interpreting Scripture, these form the bases of the following sections. Imogen, prior to the extract above, presented the tension she felt between the biblical text and current practice by saying: “it says ‘I don’t permit women to teach’, but we do don’t we, all the time, like in Sunday schools and things” (FG1). Imogen’s comments highlight how various practices, in this example women teaching in “Sunday school and things”, inform and challenge people’s hermeneutics. For instance, some prioritise their church experience and bring that to their Bible; whilst others prioritise their Bible and bring that to their experience (the role of experience will be explored in more detail in chapter 8).

As Imogen brings the tension of practice and hermeneutics up for discussion in her group, the other participants make affirming and agreeable noises. Harry responds to her by saying, “so how do we then take what was written such long...and put that into today’s society? And I think that is the challenge for a church” (FG1). Harry wanted to find a way to interpret a text, that he saw as potentially culturally bound (for Paul’s audience), and (re)interpret that in a current context (invoking a form of reader-response criticism – see my discussion of this in chapter 4 (Kočí, 2014)). Yet such a suggestion raised issues for Graham who thought “there’s the danger that society is leading Christianity rather than Christianity leading society<sup>89</sup> [Harry: yup]” (FG1) (perhaps preferring reception history (Kočí, 2014)). This thought is left hanging as Imogen then responds:

So, what we need to do is look at the passage at what Timothy, like you said, the context, the culture, and what Timothy’s actually trying to say; rather than what he actually says in black and white because there might be more behind that [Graham: yeah]. (FG1)

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<sup>89</sup> This discussion regarding culture in hermeneutics is reminiscent of Niebuhr (1952).

Graham, at this point, seems to affirm Imogen's suggestion that a literalist reading is not enough (he does later correct her authorship of Timothy, to Paul). He is cautious about society leading Christianity, but open to exploring more of the context of the passage and letter. This group, on this text alone, raises two key issues that I will now explore. The first is the historical-grammatical method, the second is Scriptural context.

### 6.3.2. Utilising the historical-grammatical method

"Scripture is divinely inspired, but sometimes you just need to look between the lines of the text to actually physically understand where really they're coming from" (Steve, FG3). As we continue to see the ways in which Elim Pentecostals attempt to maintain a high view of Scripture, we will explore specific hermeneutical approaches that help them "look between the lines".

In chapter 4, the historical-grammatical approach was discussed as a scholarly tool, including its theoretical relation to Pentecostal hermeneutics. Despite strong connections with Evangelicalism (Cartledge, 2013, p.130), and therefore the potential for cessationism (see discussion on radical openness in chapter 2 (Smith, 2010, p.35)), it was suggested that the historical-grammatical approach is adopted by Pentecostals in their hermeneutics. As we will now see, Elim Pentecostals often take a pragmatic approach (see my initial discussion of that in chapter 2) that includes elements that can be described as historical-grammatical, in so far as it complements the other aspects of Pentecostal hermeneutics, namely the leading of the Spirit and the consensus of the Community (as will be discussed in the next two chapters). Yong says: "Pentecostal hermeneutics emphasizes not the historicity of the biblical accounts but its capacity to open up possibilities for contemporary readers and hearers by the power of the Spirit" (2011, p.5). Their appropriation of the historical-grammatical approach, although not academic, shows a familiarity with teachings that are extra-biblical. In this section I will give examples from my research that demonstrate the use of the historical-grammatical approach, whilst exhibiting some of the tension that Elim Pentecostals have with their wider hermeneutic.

Within the four passages used to aid assessing Pentecostal biblical hermeneutics there were plenty of examples of the use of the historical-grammatical; both in the e-survey as well as in the FGs. Keener says that "reading a work in its context is not a modern invention but is the usual way of writing and reading texts", and is the case for both cultural context and Scriptural context (2016, p.117). The term 'context' will be used in two main ways,

firstly the cultural context (of either the author/recipient, or current reader), the second is Scriptural context: how the text fits within the passage, book, canon, etc. Keener's "usual way" appeared to be the case within the FGs where interaction aided such conclusions; and the e-survey respondents largely demonstrated a contextual reading (of both culture and Scripture), particularly amongst those who were more positive towards women in ministry. I will be firstly demonstrating the use of cultural context as opposed Scriptural context which will be addressed in the following section.

Generally speaking, the respondents and participants who made reference to the cultural context of the time in which the author was writing, or the cultural context of the milieu in which the recipients lived, were in favour of women in ministry. Those who objected to women in ministry did not generally refer to historical-grammatical approaches, because they didn't need to; rather, it appears they accepted a plain-sense reading (see my discussion of this in chapter 4 under the 'historical-critical and historical-grammatical approaches' section). It appears that the use of the historical-grammatical approach is a pragmatic one, i.e. used to find an acceptable way forward when a plain-sense reading is not accepted. For instance, when interpreting the Galatians and Acts passages, no respondent used an historical-grammatical approach. I propose that in such examples a plain-sense hermeneutic was adequate, because the plain-sense was acceptable for making a decision. I will now look at the way in which cultural context was used as part of the hermeneutic of some responses.

#### **6.3.2.1. Cultural context**

"I have little patience for approaches that claim to be "of the Spirit" yet ignore the concreteness of the settings in which the Spirit inspired the biblical writings..." (Keener, 2016, p.2). Keener's quote here fits nicely with this sub-section in which the cultural context is considered by respondents and participants who also valued the role of the Holy Spirit (see more in next chapter) in the hermeneutical process.

In an attempt to better understand the biblical texts, some respondents and participants talked about the cultural context of the specific verses. Sometimes this is described on the back of informed study, e.g. Respondent 28 said that he interpreted any biblical passages with "The guiding of Holy Spirit, **study by means of commentaries and scholarly writings** and from recognised teachers within the church" (emphasis added) (e-survey). Others

indicated a more indirect approach, with one saying: “It's been explained to me” (Respondent 9, e-survey); and another: “I believe this needs to be read in the context of the issues being faced” (Respondent 7, e-survey). Either way, many respondents and participants made reference to an historical-grammatical approach in ways that highlighted their desire to honour the biblical text.

Whilst tackling a contentious text, many participants referred to cultural context. In FG3 there was a reasonable discussion regarding the influence of culture on the 1 Corinthians passage. For instance, Pauline started by saying: “it's Corinth, so there would be influences such as Aphrodite and other gods, and there would be women that were domineering in that culture and it would be prevalent and well known” (FG3). Having laid out some of the cultural context, Nathalie picks up the thread. She is inspired by Paul's acceptance of Priscilla, so wants to approach the text with that in mind (Scriptural context is discussed below), but she also then adds:

I haven't looked into the history of it, but I've been told women weren't educated in those days, you'd have to correct me on that if that's wrong; so therefore they didn't think that they were sat in church to learn, they sort of thought that it was a good chance to catch up on the gossip and things.  
(Nathalie, FG3)

Here, Nathalie is suggesting a cultural influence, the lack of education for women, and explaining a potential influence that had on the Corinthian church. She is open about her lack of certainty, yet willing to suggest this as an avenue through which the text can be understood. Many cultural context approaches were suggested in this way, with few having studied this in much detail, but relying on teachings they had heard. Some responses do seem to suggest a level of acceptance regarding approaches that they themselves are not so certain of, simply because those approaches reinforce their own bias. This is probably best explained as a pragmatic acceptance of something they have heard or read.

Ken explains how he had only just researched this passage in preparation for some Sunday teaching. He concluded by saying: “So the notes that I read and the studies that I did led to it being: Paul was very clear in saying to the church in Corinth ‘there is an issue here, it needs to be dealt with, and for now this is what we're saying’” (FG2). He was aware of the nature of the text, a letter, “written to a particular people at a particular time”, and sought to understand how that influenced his reading and teaching of the text. But in his preparation, it is clear that Ken came across alternative perspectives, yet he chose the one that made reference to culture. He said: “And so when I researched this passage, I was

happier with the study notes that I read that said it was contextual” (FG2). With a variety of options available to Ken through different study notes, he was happiest with the contextual approach, and felt comfortable with the details he was given. Ken does not make it clear why he was happier with the contextual notes; I suggest that he was influenced by pre-commitments (see later section) and perhaps employed a certain pragmatism here.

A regular theme picked up in the e-survey and FGs was the behaviour of women in the services in Corinth. Diane put it this way:

it’s very much to do with the context...Corinth church was in a place where there was a lot of voices a lot of people speaking over each other, saying different things, saying “believe me I’m speaking the truth” um, and the main people doing that were women, which is why this is aimed at them.  
(Diane, PFG)

Diane imagines what the church setting would have been like, envisaging a rather chaotic scene in which people are speaking at the same time. Pauline, similarly, emphasised the specific shouting of the women (FG3). One respondent gave an explanation, saying that this was due to the seating arrangements, “The cultural side of this is the position of women within the service, in which they were often kept separate to the men” (Respondent 29, e-survey). Whether or not this is actually what took place in Corinth, this view was used by many to explain the cultural context, and therefore to read the verse as “not necessarily apply[ing] to all women at all times” (Oliver, FG3).

As some respondents identified, the plain reading of the text would cause difficulty: “It is awkward if we take it as literal and applying to all churches. Or does it just apply to the Corinthian churches! Would Paul say the same things to a current church culture?” (Respondent 23, e-survey). Yet others read the text in its plain sense and simply saw it as non-relevant today, for instance: “Specific teaching for a specific church at a specific time” (Respondent 14, e-survey). Here the respondent understands the text as an epistle, and has decided that this part is not of global relevance. The most literalist response still erred away from silencing women in church, saying: “Received wisdom suggests this directive is an aspect of order in the church and may be applied by degrees depending on the situation” (Respondent 28, e-survey). None of these response attempt to devalue the authority of Scripture, they each engage with the plain sense, and then, with different approaches, distinguish the relevance of the text for them.

Interestingly the use of culture in biblical hermeneutics recently came up in Elim's monthly publication *Direction*, in which Jim Dick<sup>90</sup> said:

It can be helpful and illuminating to uncover background and culture but nothing can beat the simple, straightforward reading and application of the Word of God. (2018, p.46)

Although, in his mind, an understanding of cultural background can be helpful, it is not necessary, the "straightforward reading" (equivalent to plain sense, or black and white) is preferable. Although Dick was referring to general biblical hermeneutics, it is the area of contentious topics that demonstrate a straightforward reading is not sufficient. Some participants, when faced with the topic of women in ministry, made explicit links between culture and their hermeneutics. Harry was particularly enthused as he leaned forward with arms stretched forward, using his hands as he spoke:

So that's what I was going to say, the culture seems to be the cruxis, this was written in a culture totally different to our culture now. Even if you go back culturally twenty years in the UK it would be totally different to where we are today [Imogen: mmm mmm], so this, can we take this, as it says here and put it straight into our culture today? It's changed, it's moved on, so do we also need to reflect that within our culture?" (Harry, FG1)

Harry identified the way in which culture had changed in his own church experience over the last twenty years. From that perspective he realised how challenging it would be to apply something written into that context, today. And yet, that is the challenge that biblical hermeneutics have, but over a far longer time period. Like many, he is suggesting that a relevant reading of Scripture is perhaps a culturally sensitive reading; not only of the cultural context of the text, but also of the reader. What relates in one context needs filtering in another; as Keener says: "Insofar as we wish to hear the Bible as communication, then, we need to take into account its cultural context" (Keener, 2016, p.73).

Whilst the FGs provided a space for alternative views to be aired and questioned, no one suggested that cultural context was an invalid reference, neither was it suggested that it should be 'the Bible only'. This deference is perhaps explained due to the nature of the groupings of people who did not really know each other. Either they generally did not disagree, or perhaps people felt unequipped to challenge assertions regarding cultural context, or they felt that it was more polite to remain quiet on this topic (although that was not the case with other topics).

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<sup>90</sup> The same Jim Dick who had previously argued against women in ministry, see (Carter, 2016, p.38).



Although most participants utilised the historical-grammatical approach to some extent, not everyone in the FGs was happy to read the restrictive verses culturally. In particular the 1 Timothy text provided Graham with an opportunity to directly challenge the historical-grammatical approach that other participants had used. Having read the surrounding verses, he said:

it says, “for Adam was formed first and then Eve.” So almost by going all the way back to Adam and Eve, [nervous laugh and smiling] he’s saying this isn’t just cultural, this comes from Adam and Eve. That’s where I have difficulty.  
(FG1)

His comments were rather left hanging with no one able to address his thoughts.<sup>91</sup> This demonstrates that despite the frequent reference to cultural context, that, in order to respond to such challenges, there are other tools that are required to supplement the Pentecostal in their hermeneutics. In particular Scriptural context, to which I turn now.

### 6.3.3. Scriptural context

Cultural context is distinct from Scriptural context. The first we have already considered and comes under the heading of the historical-grammatical approach. The second, which is similarly considered a “traditional principle” of exegesis (Keener, 2016, p.117), was frequently used by the participants, often in conjunction with the first. The responses clearly demonstrated that in the process of interpreting Scriptural verses, the immediate context and/or wider biblical context would regularly be considered. In the extract above Imogen says, “it’s important when you look at Scripture, to look at Scripture” (FG1). The extent to which this is practised by Elim Pentecostals was demonstrated in their approach to the four passages used for discussion. The way in which Scripture was used by respondents and participants continues to highlight the important role it has in their hermeneutics. The frequent use of Scriptural context demonstrates the validity of Scripture as a whole, and as an aid, in biblical hermeneutics.

When Elim Pentecostals consider a verse (or verses) of Scripture they employ a variety of hermeneutical strategies depending on their initial plain reading of that verse.

Notwithstanding the various views regarding interpretation, including the “paradigm shift” of Koč’s (2014) that I discuss in chapter 4, it is apparent that a plain reading of Scripture is generally an initial approach of Elim Pentecostals. However, there are often further stages

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<sup>91</sup> This does not mean that there are not appropriate or adequate responses to this question, e.g. (Keener, 1992, pp.115–117).

of their hermeneutical practices, which involve other strategies, such as a contextual reading, depending on the contention of the text itself.

With regards to women in ministry, the ‘restrictive verses’ discussed in this study (taken from 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy) can be seen in two distinct ways. The first is a plain sense reading that restricts women from leading or having authority (but no respondent took this position). The second is to invoke different approaches to understand the verse ‘beyond’ the plain sense reading. I have already explained how this was done with historical-grammatical approaches, here I will examine the use of the broader Scriptural context and cross-referencing, assessing how Scriptural context is talked about and how it is used by Elim Pentecostals in their hermeneutics. I prefer not to use the term ‘proof-texting’, because this often implies the collecting of verses on a topic out of the context of the surrounding verses (Archer, 2009, p.62). I am using ‘cross-referencing’ to explain the practice of invoking other passages and verses, mindful of their context, to support a particular proposition. As Larry explained:

I suppose...it’s that concept of listening to the whole counsel of Scripture [John: yeah], not just the odd verses...actually if it’s not matching up with what the whole counsel of Scripture seems to be saying then perhaps we need to look at how we address that and how we understand it. (FG2)

Cross-referencing in this way is more considerate of the message of the Bible as a whole, and is demonstrated in the responses to the e-survey and FGs. The concept of being considerate to the whole message of the Bible continues to point to Elim’s affirmation of the Bible as the “Word of God” (Elim, 2018b).

When it came to interpreting the ‘restrictive verses’, various examples of women in the Bible were frequently given. For those who already had utilised some historical-grammatical approach, the examples of women in the Bible were used to enhance their suggested potential alternative meanings (alternative to the plain reading). For instance this approach used here, with regards to the 1 Timothy text:

My understanding is that particular verse was written to Timothy regarding leadership in the Ephesians church where [a] particularly influential group of women were teaching/speaking error. This is an example of where Paul was giving particular instruction in a specific context, and may not be generalisable. It is not consistent with Lydia leading the Philippian house church or Junia being of note amongst the Apostles. Teaching would clearly have been part of both roles. (Respondent 31, Survey)

Here the respondent describes both a historical-grammatical and a Scriptural cross-referencing hermeneutical approach. Firstly, he is interpreting this letter with a mind to the

contextual setting that Timothy was facing in Ephesus, which provides him the occasion to interpret this text in a contextual, non-global manner. Secondly, as further enhancement, almost as justification of using this contextual hermeneutic, he then makes reference to other Scriptural texts in which women are mentioned in roles that “would clearly have” involved teaching. By using both hermeneutical approaches, the one enhances the other.

For those who had not indicated a historical-grammatical approach, the Scriptural examples of women were simply used as a balance to the perceived restrictions. For instance:

I'm still working it out. But I would probably balance verses against this, against other verses which tell us that Philip had 4 daughters who prophesied - so [they must] have spoken openly in some contexts - and that Junas [sic] was an apostle, and Priscilla a 'fellow worker in the gospel' with Paul. So this indicates that Paul did teach alongside women, and worked with women who had authority to speak. So, it's a case of balancing it out.  
(Respondent 9, Survey)

This respondent does not start her interpretation with reference to any historical-grammatical approach. She starts by saying that she’s “still working it out”. The challenge she faces in the verse (in this instance from 1 Timothy) has not been met with reference to the culture of Ephesus or the context of the passage in the letter; and perhaps this lack of the historical-grammatical is why she is “still working it out”. However, despite her ongoing process, she does make reference to women in the New Testament who appeared to speak and have authority. These references alone have aided her to find a “balance” between the ‘restrictive verse’ and the experiences she had in her home church. In her other responses she indicates that she “loved” having a female associate pastor, and thought women should be on the NLT, but was still apprehensive about having a female senior pastor.

Both these examples are illustrative of the regular use of Scriptural examples in Pentecostal hermeneutics. Later on, and in the next chapter, we will see that Scripture may not be sufficient for Pentecostal hermeneutics, although Scripture is necessary. There were varying approaches in participants’ recourse to Scripture. Some brought in texts from the immediate context (including letter or book level), and some referenced texts from other parts of the Old and New Testament. There were also examples that made no specific reference to other Scripture, but appear to draw upon wider the Bible generally. Finally, there were those who referred to their experiences to back up their understanding of specific verses. I will now give examples of these, developing their approaches further.

### 6.3.3.1. Localised-contextual hermeneutics

A number of participants demonstrated an understanding of the context of the passage or letter/book. This demonstrated both their knowledge of Scripture, and the way in which they approached a verse. Related to a plain reading of Scripture, this approach takes seriously the context of what the passage is saying **as a whole**. With a letter like 1 Timothy, because of its relatively short length, this is perhaps easier than the longer letter, 1 Corinthians. However, participants more regularly expressed the overall message from 1 Corinthians, rather than 1 Timothy, in their hermeneutical approach to the text from those letters.

Even within a localised-contextual hermeneutic there are degrees in which the extent of the 'local' is considered. For instance, there is the context of the immediate surrounding verses. In considering the 1 Corinthians text, Mark gives an example of this approach:

But if we look at the verses from the beginning it says "all", he uses the word "all" there which means he is not just referring to a particular sex..... so all [emphasises the word "all"] can speak, all [emphasises the word "all"] can prophesy, all can interpret tongues, all can speak...so if there were women in the church that have the gift, these giftings, I am sure they were not told to keep quiet... and if they were bringing the word of God when necessary, then there cannot be women kept silent in the church. (Mark, FG3)

Mark takes a few words from three verses prior to the discussion text, and focusing on an inclusive use of the word "all", determines that women should be allowed to be vocally involved in church in (at least) the use of *charismata*. Mark is clearly taking the position that this inclusive "all" is principally relevant in those verses. If however this was the only hermeneutic at work here, then he would have difficulty with the preceding words (and opening words) to the discussion text, in which it says, "As in all the churches of the saints the women should keep silent in the churches". Despite referring to some of the localised context, he has chosen to ignore others. This demonstrates a layered, or complex, hermeneutical strategy, and continues to point towards a pragmatic and flexible hermeneutic.

As another example of localised-contextual hermeneutics, this time considering the surrounding chapters, Larry says:

You look at 1 Corinthians 11, 12, 13, 14, it's all about this chaotic, you get this picture of a chaotic church [Ken: yeah, throughout here], and it's all about order in worship, and that's why we get communion, controlling the order of communion etc., and you know he's talking about prophecy and

how to control it. So for me, it's about 'how do we order the service?'.  
(Larry, FG2)

In order to consider the role of women in ministry from the few verses of 1 Cor 14:34-35, Larry's hermeneutical approach is to place them within the context of the preceding chapters. He understands those chapters as providing teaching into a "chaotic church", helping them to learn how to create a more ordered structure and ordered service. Therefore Larry is able to read the restriction on women, as a contextual one. He sees the Corinthians as having a problem of disorder, into which teaching is given to bring order. The restriction is not limited to women, but rather to any who are causing disorder. Although I use this one example, Larry's approach is not unique in the FGs. The hermeneutical strategies of some participants commonly rely upon the localised (whether verses or chapters) contextual hermeneutics. Clearly, these participants appreciated the authority of the Bible, and whilst dealing with a contentious topic, would address seek redress from the wider context.

### **6.3.3.2. Pauline-contextual hermeneutics**

References to Paul's writings were often used as an important part of a hermeneutic that sought to make sense of his restrictive verses found in 1 Corinthians or 1 Timothy. This approach is broader than the localised-contextual hermeneutic that remained focused on one passage or one letter, and focuses rather on the rest of Paul's writings<sup>92</sup> and actions. The fact that Paul is used self-referentially suggests that there is an element of expectation that his writings and actions are (or should be) consistent. This does imply that Paul's intention has value to these readers.

When Nathalie considers the text from 1 Corinthians, she looks beyond that text to his other writing and his actions, saying: "It doesn't seem to me, if you look at Paul's life, that that couple of verses there is actually what he put into practice, so I do think this is contextual" (Nathalie, FG3). Nathalie is referring to Paul's behaviour in Acts, and his encouragement to women in other letters (e.g. Romans 16), indicating that she would consider narrative texts as didactic. This affirms Smith's contention that Pentecostals value narrative (2010, p.43).

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<sup>92</sup> These lay leaders would generally not question the authorship of biblical books, and accept that Paul wrote the letters traditionally ascribed to him. Authorship as a line of enquiry, was not raised, and because it is not particularly pertinent to the discussion, it will not be discussed here.

Others similarly referenced narrative texts. One respondent said:

In Romans 16 he speaks of Phoebe and the work she does, which I am sure involves her taking some leadership roles. As well as Euodia and Syntyche, in Philippians 4, who helped share the Gospel. Which says to me that he did not have a problem with women teaching, preaching or working in the church. (Respondent 35, Survey)

Whilst Nathalie said:

I was thinking of Priscilla and Aquila who Paul discipled, took with them, and Priscilla is mentioned first, and she's a very, you know, she's given quite a position, an equal, sort of, standing to her husband; and they are very involved in the ministry it would seem, so I think that's [the verse] got to be contextual because it's not what Paul practised [Pauline: & Steve: yeah]. It doesn't seem to me, if you look at Paul's life, that that couple of verses there is actually what he put into practice, so I do think this is contextual. (FG3)

Both these responses indicate a desire to find a hermeneutical approach that honours Scripture. They look beyond the verse and letter to a wider source, in this case, of greeting and of narrative that they see as carrying didactic authority.

Yet, the uncertainty of why Paul wrote these 'restrictive' words, or what he meant in writing them, was often left unspecified. Some respondents sought to make sense of restrictive passages by referencing his other letters. For instance, one wrote, "Perhaps this verse is a temporary restriction on women, since in Titus 2:3-4 it explicitly tells older women to teach and train younger women to love their husbands and children" (Respondent 22, e-survey). Here the respondent seeks to find an answer specifically within another letter written by Paul. By referring to such alternate teaching, some respondents find an approach that gives them a possible way of understanding the restriction as "temporary".

### **6.3.3.3. Bible-wide contextual hermeneutics**

Continuing in our discussion of how Elim Pentecostals use Scripture in their biblical hermeneutics, this sub-section reviews the use of the wider context of the Bible as a whole. Especially when facing a restrictive verse, many respondents would rely on a hermeneutical approach that included reference to biblical passages that would demonstrate the way in which women were encouraged into ministry.

When Imogen was trying to make sense of the passage in 1 Timothy, she said:

"Because that's not what's saying in the rest of Scripture...we can isolate one verse and say: 'that says something to us, oh we're not going to have

women in leadership' but when you look at other Scriptures, like you said, Lydia in business and other people...and Jesus wasn't saying that, so what, what is [Paul] trying to get across?" (Imogen, FG1)

Imogen takes a hermeneutical approach that seeks not to isolate the verse. In order to best understand the verse in 1 Timothy she makes a general reference to "other Scriptures", and then picks up on Lydia, whom the previous participant had just mentioned. She adds to this example with a reference to Jesus, indicating that He had not been restrictive towards women in ministry. Imogen's approach here drew upon a broad spectrum, she made reference to "the rest of Scripture", she generalised when referring to Jesus, and she included a specific woman: Lydia. Despite not knowing what Paul was "trying to get across", Imogen was satisfied that there were enough examples from the rest of the canon, so that Paul could not mean that women globally were unable to teach (lead, etc.).

Other participants made reference to women from the Old Testament, "like Deborah, like Huldah, who were prophets...So, like our brother said, it has to be looked at in context" (Mark, FG3). Elim Pentecostals appear to use Scripture in such a way that all of Scripture is open to cross-referencing. From the other writings of Paul, to the words of Jesus, to characters in the Old Testament; if they are felt to be relevant, then they may be used.

Although the responses regarding the 'restrictive' verses were generally the springboard for a discussion of Scriptural context, some did use the Acts text (2:17-18) as an opportunity to use such an approach. One respondent explained that these verses (Acts) expel:

all preconceived ideas of inequality in ministry. Or any interpretation that has been placed on Paul's writings to the church. It must shine light on the fact that he was speaking to a specific church with specific issues with women. (Respondent 21, Survey)

Here, the respondent appears to take the verses in Acts as providing an overriding equality through the gift of the Holy Spirit. In her mind this equality is more universal than Paul's restrictive verses. The centrality of the role of the Spirit in hermeneutics will be something we explore in the next chapter. For now, all of these examples continue to highlight the centrality of Scripture in their hermeneutics.

#### **6.3.3.4. "Non-specific Scriptural" hermeneutics**

Whilst dealing with the contentious topic of women in ministry Elim lay-leaders regularly refer to other Scriptural texts in their hermeneutical approach to specific passages. So far,

we have seen localised and Bible-wide contextual approaches. There were also non-specific references to Scriptural concepts. For instance, when regarding the Galatian passage, there was considerable consensus that the verse meant that Christians are all equal. However, there was noticeable divergence in explaining what 'equality' in this context meant. Rather than using historical-grammatical tools, and rather than explicitly drawing upon other Scriptural texts, the responses, in their divergence, made standalone claims.

Generally, the responses fell into two positions, as explained by one respondent: "Some might read it as if all are equal in everything, but others may say: 'Yes, we are all one in Christ Jesus but not necessarily equal in ability or suitability for a high position'" (Respondent 23, Survey). These competing views are expressed with varying detail, but without a hermeneutic that relies explicitly upon particular Scriptural texts. For instance, in response to the Galatians text, one respondent said: "All Christian are equal. Men and women should all be able to follow God's will" (Respondent 35, Survey). Her response uses a concept that is biblical (following God's will), to help explain the word "equal". In her opinion, equality means allowing men and women to follow God's will. Although she does not examine what that "will" is, the inference is that men and women can lead or teach if that is God's will for them (this is gleaned from her other answers in the e-survey). Rather than relying on biblical examples of women leading, or other Scriptural texts, her reliance is less specific, yet still, conceptually, biblical.

In FG2, when the Galatians passage was discussed, there was no reference to specific biblical passages, nor any reference to context, but rather a general sense of what the verse could mean. Whilst acknowledging a complementarian perspective on this verse was possible, Larry then said:

it could be argued that that is the foundation from which leadership is then built and therefore on that foundation of equality we should be building our leadership on that basis...because foundationally we are equal [John: nods], therefore that should help define and direct how we take forward our leadership, but I can understand how others would view it differently.  
(Larry, FG2)

Larry was aware that other people had other views, but his own view was formed from a general sense of what he felt this passage, and the Bible as a whole, taught. This non-specific hermeneutical approach relies less on cross-referencing, and more on the sense; as Ellington says, relying more on "knowing God" than knowing about God (1996, p.26). When discussing this verse in Galatians, respondents often provided an elaboration, alongside the



word “equality” or similar, using a hermeneutic that is perhaps more suitably expressed as a spirit hermeneutic, or one derived from experience or teaching (and hence a community based hermeneutic), topics I look at in the next two chapters.

Amos Yong suggest “that Pentecostal hermeneutical instincts and sensibilities should lead them to question, even reject, concordism” and rather that they read “the book of Scripture soteriologically— i.e., primarily as a theological book focused on God’s redemptive work in the world” (2011, p.4). My findings illustrate Yong’s point, for, in practice, Elim Pentecostals do not rely upon concordism (or cross-referencing), rather, whilst relying on Scriptural context as a hermeneutical tool, they do also bring their own experiences and pre-commitments (see the next sub-section) into the interpretive filter. These experiences and pre-commitments are centred around a redemptive and soteriological framework (this is explored more in chapter 7, especially in reference to the Acts and Galatians verses). Scriptural context remains a central aspect to a Pentecostal hermeneutic, most Elim Pentecostals will frequently use other Scriptural passages to help understand particular texts. They will do this more explicitly when dealing with a text that they find hard to make sense of with a plain reading, utilising personal experience (which is further discussed in chapter 8), where this is helpful to them.

#### 6.3.4. Pre-commitments

Here I am specifically referring to those participants who were already positive or negative towards women in ministry (hence a pre-commitment towards the one or the other, whether consciously or sub-consciously). For it seems that such pre-commitments shape the hermeneutical response of the participants.<sup>93</sup> The use of such tools as the historical-grammatical approach, appear to be chosen according to the seeming pre-commitments to positions of egalitarianism or complementarianism. Although it was not always obvious what pre-commitments people had, especially in the e-survey where space limited answers, within the FGs there were times when pre-commitments were aired.

For instance, within FG2, Ken expressed how he approaches the question of women in ministry:

I come to this whole question in terms of wanting to encourage people to find their calling, their ministry, their fulfilment, what God has called them,

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<sup>93</sup> In some senses this pre-commitment could be considered as a small part of what Smith calls “Theology<sup>1</sup>”. He explains this as a “pre- and supra- theoretical confession” (2004, p.177); a worldview which shapes everything else.

led them into...I am about empowering women [John nodded], encouraging them to dream their dreams, so I would come to this in a very positive approach. (Ken, FG2)

Ken's choice of language in this short section is worth a brief consideration. First of all, he uses upbeat terms to explain his position, such as "encourage", "empowering", "encouraging", "positive". Ken supports his approach to the topic of women in ministry with these 'liberating' terms. His narration provides a dichotomy between his approach, which is upbeat and positive, and those who restrict women's roles, who, we are left to assume, in his view would be perceived as negative.

Ken's main point is that he has already decided that "calling", "ministry", and "dreams"<sup>94</sup> are foundational positions from which others, such as specific roles (like leadership), are derived. He expresses a similar view to Esther who said, God has "predestined our lives for a purpose and that purpose cannot just stop because we're women" (PFG). Such pre-commitments remind me of Smith's "radical openness of God" in which he describes the Pentecostal openness to God doing things differently (2010, p.35). Ken and Esther indicate a pre-commitment to God acting out His purpose (predestined) through individual calling, dreams and ministry, even if it is different/unexpected. Alongside this pre-commitment, Ken maintained a high view of Scripture. He had recently taught from the 1 Corinthians 14 passage and had related the circumstances of that writing with specific Scriptural passages relevant to Pentecost (Joel and Acts 2) and included the freedom that women were given in these. With Ken, his pre-commitment drew him closer to the text of Scripture in order to make sense of contentious texts.

Within FG2, John had made it clear that he did not accept women in ministry. And yet, as Ken was talking about "empowering women" John nodded. John was indicating that despite not agreeing with women in top levels of leadership, he wanted women to prosper in the roles that were permitted to them. Like Ken, John wanted to keep Scripture at the centre of his thinking, and indicated that his position regarding the restrictions on women was derived out of the biblical text. Whilst keeping the Bible central, Ken and John however, arrive at different conclusions. John, like other complementarians in the FGs, did not make reference to cultural context in their hermeneutic.

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<sup>94</sup> No doubt a reference to Acts 2.

Yet John and Ken, who agree in “empowering”, disagree in the power of “calling”. Ken’s main point is that “calling”, which can open the door to “fulfilment” and to dreaming “dreams”, is almost a trump-card. Where Ken prioritises the role of “calling”, John prioritises a more literalist reading of the restrictive verses being discussed. “Calling”, for John, is restricted for women. Their pre-commitments for and against women in ministry, seem to provoke them towards what could perhaps simplistically be separated as Pentecostal (Ken’s emphasis on calling) and Evangelical (John’s emphasis on Scripture). Yet this distinction is not rigid. In other examples Ken and John may find the influences reversed. Ken does hold a high view of Scripture, and John does want the Spirit to influence him; it is more the degree to which each of these have influence that creates the divergent conclusions: one in which women can be ministers, the other in which they cannot.

Although neither Ken nor John give an autobiographical narrative as to why they have such pre-commitments, some participants share experiences that have led to the (re)shaping of their views. The influence of past teaching was mentioned by Felicity, and affirmed by Imogen (with an emphatic “yes”) (FG1). However in Felicity’s opinion, current teaching continues to affect her views. Equally, the changing demographic of the church is cited as altering pre-commitments, with Larry mentioning the growing female student population in his church (FG2). Harry talked about the influence of multi-cultural growth as well as more young people in his church (FG1). Whatever may have formed, or still be forming people’s views, it is clear that these were influential in shaping approaches and responses to biblical texts. An understanding of pre-commitments, whether inspired by a Pentecostal emphasis (i.e. calling/gifting) or otherwise, is relevant in appreciating the foundation upon which individuals base their views. In chapter 8, whilst discussing the place of Community in the hermeneutical process, I will further explore the place of experience (and therefore, pre-commitments).

#### **6.4. Conclusion**

This chapter has focussed on evidence of the use and (to some extent) prioritisation of Scripture in the hermeneutical dealings of a contentious topic. Within the findings there was never any sense that Elim lay leaders were side-lining the Scriptures. Whilst discussing the challenge of the contentious topic of women in ministry, the Bible remained central. The vast majority of respondents and participants were in favour of women in ministry, however they would often fall into two groups. The first group used hermeneutical strategies such as an historical-grammatical approach, or cross-referencing, to confirm

and/or promote their view. In particular when trying to persuade others (for instance in Larry's example (FG2)), the historical-grammatical approach was used, although, as we will see, this was not the deciding factor.

The second group consists of those who have not been equipped with such tools, or feel less confident in their biblical knowledge. If they accept women in ministry, it is either because they have experienced the ministry of women, or have themselves (as women) felt God's call. For some this left a tension with their understanding of certain biblical passages. They remained unsure about how to interpret the 'restrictive' passages in the New Testament. Some in this group live with a frustrating tension of wanting to accept women in ministry, but not knowing if they should. Larry experienced this tension in the discussions they had in their Church Session, and said although Scripture was "the basis" and the "destination point...Scripture alone wasn't going to win the argument" (FG2). In the next chapter we consider the approach that Larry's Session used, and how the role of the Holy Spirit is employed by Elim Pentecostals in their hermeneutics.

## **CHAPTER 7. ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH WITH REFERENCE TO THE HOLY SPIRIT**

I read the bible to know God better, and I need the guidance of the Holy Spirit to show me what scripture means. (Respondent 22, e-survey)

### **7.1. Introduction**

In the previous chapter I explored the ways in which the respondents of the e-survey and the participants of the focus groups (FGs) explained and demonstrated their hermeneutics, particularly emphasising the prioritisation of Scripture. I showed how, especially with regard to the topic of women in ministry, hermeneutics that incorporated some aspects of cultural and contextual understanding were often utilised. Through such practices, and through some explicit remarks, it was shown that Scripture interpreting Scripture was not enough for their hermeneutics, concluding with a comment from Larry (FG2) saying that Scripture alone would not win the argument.

In this chapter I will explore how the Spirit is prioritised in the responses (both explicitly as motifs and implicitly in the hermeneutical process). I will express how the respondents and participants both spoke about the role of the Holy Spirit, and indicated a reliance upon the Holy Spirit in their hermeneutical approach. Not only was I looking for evidence of an understanding of the role of the Holy Spirit in inspiring the original writers, but also if and how there was ongoing inspiration for these current readers of Scripture; reflecting to some degree Becker's (2004) view of writer and reader inspiration, as I mentioned in chapter 4.

An openness to the Holy Spirit, in life and in the hermeneutical process, would continue to endorse one of Smith's Pentecostal aspects: "a radical openness to God" (2010, p.12). As I will demonstrate, the Holy Spirit appears to introduce a freedom in the hermeneutical process that takes hold of and goes beyond Scripture. There are two important concepts that will arise in this chapter, that of fluidity and that of pragmatism (see my introduction to this topic and definition in chapter 2). Warrington writes:

It is no surprise to discover that there is sometimes fluidity in Pentecostal praxis and thought as they seek to locate a biblical framework that is sufficiently flexible for their spirituality, a spirituality that is, by definition, dynamic since it is pneumatic. (2008, p.23)

I have chosen to use the term fluidity over and above flexibility<sup>95</sup> because it implies flexibility, relates to movement, and is congruent with the Holy Spirit. Let me explain the

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<sup>95</sup> A word used to describe the working of the Spirit in the church by Warrington (2008, p.25).

second two points together, in John 3:8 Jesus says: “The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit.” The wind and the Spirit are intrinsically linked, not just in this verse but also in the Hebrew term *Ruach*. Likewise, those who are “born of the Spirit” are linked with the wind. I wanted to capture this in my explanation of the way in which Pentecostal hermeneutics is practised. When the Spirit is involved in the hermeneutical process, there is a sense of freedom that comes through His leading. As a working concept I have chosen to capture this with the term “fluidity”, which encapsulates the freedom of the wind and the Spirit.

As part of this analysis, I am again using some extracts from the FGs as a narrative that not only sets a scene, but will also be referred back to through this chapter (and the next one). The following extracts are taken from FG2, providing a clear example of the role of the Spirit in the hermeneutical process, in which Larry shares about the journey he and the rest of his Church Session had been on. The need for exploration into this topic only arose because they had asked their children’s pastor (a woman) to preach on Mothering Sunday; as Larry said, “it seemed innocuous at the time when we asked that, but it was only when she got up to speak and a group, a fairly small group, walked out the service” (FG2). This event, along with more recent voices of student and young adult women asking: “why can’t we?”, led to discussions in their Church Session, in which they found two distinct viewpoints (for and against). They then took a lengthy process of investigation, study, discussion and prayer, which led them to a unanimous decision. I include two extracts, (one from the start of the FG, the other from the end), in which Larry summarises parts of that process:

the approach we took was, we had in one sense, we had a split board, we had a split eldership on it, and we basically tasked one person from each side, in one sense, to come up with a couple of page, sort of, discussion starter, and to present their case; and then we just unpacked it in one meeting. We then gave a month’s, we meet monthly, a month’s gap, and then we came back having prayed about it, and then came to a conclusion, and we wanted to come to a unanimous conclusion, which was challenging [John: laughs], um, but in the end, you know, you know very graciously those that were of the opposite opinion, um, gave consent and went with it even though they couldn’t fully grasp the, you know, the theological basis, or whatever we were working with, but they um, they felt it was, you know, it was good to us and the Holy Spirit sort of feeling.

...so therefore Scripture alone wasn’t going to win the argument in that sense; so we had to go away and pray about it, and it was coming back in prayer and a desire for the unity of the Gospel and not to break the unity of

the Gospel; and yeah there was a lot of silence at the beginning of the meeting [John: and Ken: both laugh and look down], see who was going to...not... “back down” sounds like there was too much confrontation you know, there was a lot of love and grace in the room. But you know, at some point someone had to say, “okay I feel the Spirit has released me to go with this perspective”, and acknowledging in humility and grace that it was the guys who were opposed to women in ministry actually said “no, for the unity of the gospel, for the sake of the gospel, we don’t feel strongly enough to make this a standpoint, sort of thing”. (Larry, FG2)

In this example, the Holy Spirit is mentioned with an implied reference to the Scriptural texts along with a very practical role in bringing a unanimous agreement. I will start by analysing these two mentions (“Seemed good to the Holy Spirit”, and “The Spirit has released me”) exploring what they appear to mean in Larry’s example, and using other responses to endorse or challenge these positions. I will then have a final section that considers broader terms used in the responses, that demonstrate the hermeneutical fluidity provided by the Spirit, whilst also considering a hermeneutical framework based on redemption and soteriology.

## **7.2. Seemed good to the Holy Spirit**

The first mention of the Holy Spirit in Larry’s narration is drawing from the Acts 15 account of the Council of Jerusalem, in which an agreement is made by these early disciples regarding the ongoing requirements of the law. As they act upon their decision they report, in verse 28: “For it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us”. This very passage, as I mentioned in chapter 4, was used by Thomas in describing a Pentecostal hermeneutic as one in which the Spirit and the community are involved (Thomas, 1994). Larry and Luke’s (the author of Acts) use of “us” point towards the hermeneutical role of Community (see the next chapter). For now, the emphasis is on how the Spirit is involved in current hermeneutical practice, especially in helping to bring a sense of agreement (or understanding), in what *seems good*; in what, I argue, is a Spirit-led pragmatic response.

Larry explained that prior to the meeting in which an agreement was made, they had taken time (in this case the meetings were one month apart) in which they prayed. Their Church Session contained two sides that had different views regarding women in ministry. Each side had had an opportunity to present their views, with at least one person preparing material in advance. It was on the back of this prepared study that a period of prayer was initiated, prior to a decision. Outside of Larry’s example, Diane explains the challenge of allowing the Spirit space to speak:

I think for me that's one of the biggest challenges in allowing the Holy Spirit to speak to me, through God's Word, or through other people, or through what I am hearing or just in the silence, it's allowing the Holy Spirit time and space, and not just going "I've got to say something now, so I'm just going to say something" rather than actually just going with it, isn't it? And like you say, being open to that and then acting on that. (Diane, PFG)

Diane indicates a tendency to want to be active and get on with things. But she explains that time is required for her to be still to hear what the Holy Spirit may want to be saying to her and through her. Having discerned what many Pentecostals call the unction of the Spirit (Yong, 2012, p.206), Diane acknowledges that she should act upon it. Just like Larry's group allowed time to hear the Spirit, so she explains the need to slow down and make "space". Although she does not elaborate on what "space" looks like for her, my own experience indicates that this could refer to one or any of: being still, being silent, reading the Bible, praying whilst intentionally open to listening, seeking the counsel of others, etc.

Larry describes the prayer in two ways: "go away and pray" and "coming back in prayer". These terms serve different purposes in his narrative. The first is descriptive of the Church Session members *individually* praying about these topics in the month gap. The second explains that when they returned, as a *group*, they again prayed before any decision was made. Larry later explained that before they went away and researched the positions, they had said: "we want to pray for the Spirit's leading and pray that the Spirit would make each of us open to hearing what the other side is saying" (FG2). Here he makes it clear that the times of prayer, are times when the Spirit is involved in some capacity. Also, the term "it was good to us and the Holy Spirit" implies that their prayer time had been informed and/or inspired by the Holy Spirit. At some point, whether individually or corporately, this time of prayer had brought the group opposed to women in ministry, to a place of sensing the Spirit's freedom on the matter.

Larry presents a picture in which some of the group were unable to grasp the "theological basis" and that the "good to us and the Holy Spirit" was an alternative aspect that allowed them to keep the unity. Both aspects are clearly theological; I assume that Larry is referring to the difference between the ability to resolve certain Scriptural texts, and the ongoing radical openness to God's Spirit. These distinctions remind us of the early introduction I gave to the terms "biblical hermeneutics" and "theological hermeneutics" (see chapter 4). Hence, the role of the Spirit in their hermeneutics was a role that did not directly resolve issues over particular biblical verses, rather superseded those concerns, providing a sense



of “good” through a leading of the Spirit. In this example, the Spirit provides a route through which interpretation of specific texts is bypassed, and a way is found to move forward, that is Spirit-directed.

Within the e-survey the sense of the Spirit’s role is revealed through words and themes like ‘prayer’ and ‘seeking God’. Nearly half of the respondents explicitly used descriptions that pointed to a reliance upon God for their understanding of Scripture. Words like, “ask”, “pray”, “meditation”, “listening”, “think” and “reflect” were used in conjunction with “God”, the “Holy Spirit”, “meaning”, “interpretation”, “clarity”, “wisdom” and “understanding”. All of these answers help build a picture of a desire in the respondents to know God and to understand His will (in order to apply it, which some respondents made clear). But the process of knowing God’s will or understanding the Scriptures includes asking God for help *in* that process. The respondents are demonstrating their dependence upon God, as well as highlighting their own limitation in understanding Scripture without God. One respondent answered this way:

I think about/reflect upon it, drawing upon all that God has taught/revealed to me over the past 50 or so years, being open to/seeking Holy Spirit discernment/wisdom/ understanding. To some extent I must draw upon the instincts God has placed & developed within me, at the same time checking and accepting my human frailty. (Respondent 24, e-survey)

This respondent was able to articulate how he viewed his own position in reference to God’s in the hermeneutical process. Not only does he indicate that his understanding has developed over time, but he discusses the role of his instincts. He makes it clear that he perceives his instincts as having been placed by God. He sees their genesis and development in him from God, and that such instincts form part of his hermeneutic. By using terms like “placed” and “developed” it appears that he sees an initial and an ongoing involvement of God in his life, through such instincts. This awareness of his self, how he has been taught, how his instincts work, is then related to both his “human frailty” and to God. Although he does not expand on what he means by this “frailty”, I assume he means either limitations due to his finitude, and/or aspects of a fallen nature that still influence his redeemed status. Either way, in comparison with God, humanity is frail. He then says that because of his “frailty”, the process requires “checking”. This seems to suggest that he does not want his frailty to hinder or shape his interpretation. As another respondent remarked regarding his approach to understanding the Scriptural texts: “If there are apparent contradictions, then it is my understanding that needs to be examined” (Respondent 36, e-survey). The “checking” and examination are left un-developed in their responses, however

this likely refers to both the role of the Spirit and a hermeneutic that involves Community (as I will be exploring in the next chapter). Both these responses suggest that humanity is dependent upon God. The respondents demonstrate an awareness that sin has an epistemological influence. Not only does the fallen nature of humanity affect their ability to understand God, but even in a redeemed state, there are limitations to their understanding of God's revelations. According to the line of thinking espoused by these respondents, humanity remains dependent upon God for revelation (echoing 1 Corinthians 2:10, for example).

Arrington argues that "A fundamental principle of Pentecostal hermeneutics is: Scripture given by the Holy Spirit must be mediated interpretively by the Holy Spirit" (1994, p.104). Yet the approach that Larry's group took seems to introduce further aspects of the work of the Spirit which went beyond interpreting the text. Although many respondents indicate a clear sense of the Spirit's guidance as they interpret Scripture, there is also (as with Larry's situation) a guidance of the Spirit that occurs outside of direct Scriptural interpretation (I would like to use the phrase "Spirit hermeneutics, but Keener uses this to specifically refer to an approach to biblical hermeneutics (2016), therefore "theological hermeneutics" as used by Yong (2002), will have to suffice).

Claire, in another group, acknowledged some tension she experienced between this biblical and theological working of the Spirit in her hermeneutics:

Because if anybody started to quote chapter and verse from the Bible I would feel very, I would feel the sand shifting under my feet very rapidly, you know in terms of "well actually Claire I don't agree with what you have just said because this comes from the Bible"...and it's quite hard then to just say that the Holy Spirit makes me feel very at rest about certain opinions I have. It doesn't stand up in a court of law does it? (Claire, PFG)

Claire is explaining the tension she would feel if challenged from the Bible regarding a view that she felt came from the Holy Spirit. She compares this with a court of law, (indicating similar feelings that were evidenced in the binary of the "black and white" explored in the previous chapter from FG1), and suggests that the "chapter and verse" possess a firmer base than those opinions for which she believes the Holy Spirit has given her rest about. She is not saying that one necessarily has more authority than the other, rather she is simply acknowledging the discomfort she feels when challenged about some biblical texts.

With a clear sense of the working of the Spirit in her biblical hermeneutics, Claire said:

I know we're supposed to really hold on to the Word, but sometimes there's a sense of interpreting it in the Spirit, um and whether we are right to do that or not, then Jesus left His Holy Spirit with us in a sense to deal with the bits that we were uncertain about. (Claire, PFG)

Here, Claire has understood Jesus' teachings regarding the Holy Spirit<sup>96</sup> to mean that the Spirit will play a specific role in helping readers interpret Scripture. This is echoed by Esther in the same group:

Gosh, we need to pray and ask Him and invite Him. I need Him to help me understand every single Scripture. I have to ask the Holy Spirit to help me, and actually to like, the only way the Holy Spirit is going to help me is if I'm in line, if I'm living according to His purposes really, if I'm sinning and I'm doing all that, then I'm grieving the Holy Spirit, practically I need to be open to His teaching really. (Esther, PFG)

Esther packs a lot into these few words, in which there are two key concepts that expand on how the Spirit helps us to say that it *seems good*. The first is that she is reliant upon the Holy Spirit to help her interpret Scripture. The second, is that she believes that if she is "sinning", and therefore "grieving the Holy Spirit", then the Spirit will not help her. In her view, the Holy Spirit will only give her interpretation of a text if her life is "in line...according to His purposes". Esther makes it clear that she sees a distinct connection between understanding the Bible and the role of the Holy Spirit. However, here she presents a caveat regarding the purity of her life as a determining factor. This thought aligns with other responses that indicate the Holy Spirit is not just present to help interpret difficult passages, but a central part of life (linking somewhat with Smith's "narrative epistemology" (2010, p.43)).

The connection between the Spirit and interpretation in Esther's example is explicit, unlike the implied connections in Larry's example. It is probable that Larry would have agreed with this connection, however it was not made clear in the discussion. Although, in Larry's group John did say:

but obviously we're all Pentecostal churches, we're fundamentally Bible believing Christians, and we've got to have the Scripture as the, you know, absolute authority, but with the Holy Spirit's interpretation. (John, FG2)

For John, and there were none who voiced a different position (nor appeared to disagree) when he said this, it is "obvious" that Pentecostals believe the Bible and require the Spirit's interpretation. John claims that Pentecostals are "fundamentally Bible believing", which, if that was all he had said, would be no different to an Evangelical position. However, he goes

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<sup>96</sup> Most likely: "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13).

on to add that the Holy Spirit has a role in the “interpretation”. John explicitly identifies two parts of the triad (the Scripture and the Spirit) in his statement. Whilst, earlier he had already explained how he saw the Spirit’s involvement:

that we would look to try and see what the Scriptures say, but if it’s, if we’re not getting a direct guide out of the Scripture related to an issue, then we’re going to pray through it [Larry & Ken: nodded], you know, we’re going to go away with it, wait for God to speak to us individually. (John, FG2)

All three participants in this group seemed to concur that in times of interpretive challenges, the leading of God is required. Larry had given an actual practical example of this from his Church Session. John, who was coming from a different view regarding women in ministry, acknowledges here that the process that he has witnessed in his own Church Session is to take the Scripture aided by the Spirit (utilising prayer as a means of guidance). Yet, in all this there remains a distinction between the individual hearing of God and the group having consensus on a topic. This I will explore in more detail in the next chapter. The “*seems good*” that may require a community to validate, is enabled by the Holy Spirit in various theological hermeneutical ways (e.g. prayer, discernment) as well as biblical hermeneutical ways (the involvement of the Spirit on the Scripture).

### **7.3. The Spirit has released me**

Larry’s second mention of the Spirit came in the meeting in which their Church Session came to a unanimous agreement. He said that someone had to say, “okay I feel the Spirit has released me to go with this perspective” (FG2). I want to briefly analyse what this seems to mean for Larry’s example, and how other respondents indicated the possibility of the Spirit allowing alternate views to the one’s they held.

‘Releasing’ is different from Larry’s first point of “seemed good”. Although I am possibly stretching Larry’s actual circumstances, the wording “seemed good” implies a perspective which now affirms a particular position. In this case the “seemed good” affirms women in ministry as a concept. This is apparently true of the Acts 15 “seemed good”. However, the idea of feeling “the Spirit has released me” is not affirming the concept of women in ministry, per se, rather it is no longer arguing against women in ministry. According to Larry this is what happened in his context. Some of those who had been against women in ministry, following debate, discussion and prayer, had not altered their views, but had sensed the cause of “unity” as more valuable. This response can be formulated as pragmatic; in chapter 2, I explained the ways in which pragmatism and Pentecostalism had been discussed in academic writings, in particular (Holm, 1994; Frestadius, 2018), and I

defined my use of pragmatism as a combination of 'doing what works' with a guiding sense of the Holy Spirit. We will see how this appears relevant to Larry's example.

Larry explained that the final meeting started with seeing which side would "back down", although he clarified that this was within a context of "love and grace", not confrontation. Clearly at this point there were still differing views. In this example, neither Scripture alone, nor an historical-grammatical approach, had convinced them all for women in ministry. Yet the disagreement was overcome by a focus on "the unity of the gospel". Larry does not explain what this term means for him, although a number of interpretations would make sense within this Elim context. I would assume he means that a division in the Church Session, which could lead to a split in the congregation, would be damaging to the overall presentation of the Gospel. By which I mean, that loving one's neighbour should be evidenced in church practice, and church splits are negative advertising for a Gospel of love and grace. Larry conceived that one of the groups needed to say that the Spirit had released them "to go with this perspective". This eight-year process for them as a Church Session is concluded without all assenting to a personal acceptance of women in ministry (conceptually), but an assent to accepting women in ministry for the sake of unity within the Church Session and within the church "for the sake of the gospel". From Larry's description, this assent appears to me as if the Holy Spirit has enabled a pragmatic response amongst this Church Session. If there had been no assent, then there would have been disunity. The pragmatic response found a way forward that would also keep unity.

The releasing that the Spirit provided them, was to accept a position that they did not fully agree with theologically or exegetically. Despite differing views, their feelings were not such that they would make a "standpoint" on it; by which Larry is implying that they could have fought on the issue, but they chose not to. This indicates that the decision was made according to a certain hierarchy. It can be assumed that other theological differences, for instance, the divinity of Christ, or His resurrection, would have been areas on which a "standpoint" would have been made. I assume that this does mean that the Spirit's releasing on this topic does not simply open the door for a releasing on *any* topic. This suggests that the topic of 'women in ministry' has become, to this Church Session, an issue in which unity was more highly valued than disallowing women in ministry.

In other situations, research has demonstrated that the topic of women in ministry within Elim churches can lead to people leaving the church (Nunn, 2018, p.38). Clearly, some matters of faith (outside of the Foundational Truths) are viewed more highly than others depending on the local church. There is however, no clear picture of how such a categorisation is made. Quite possibly this is dependent upon local factors, such as the demographics of the church and Church Session, and specific triggers (such as in Larry's example, where people walked out of the service when a woman was teaching from the platform). The 'releasing' in Larry's church, occurred within a specific set of circumstances: where "love and grace" were evidence; after a process of discussion, debate and prayer; and for the sake of "unity" (a topic I cover in more detail in the next chapter).

What we see in Larry's example is an indication of the way in which the Holy Spirit is active in the challenge that arises from the interpretation of specific texts, as well as in the initial interpretive process. This is the case individually ("go away and pray"), as well as corporately ("coming back in prayer"). Not only in Larry's case, but also in the e-survey, there are evidences of the personal and instructive role of the Spirit, for instance Respondent 15 mentioned the Spirit as the one who "speaks to me" (e-survey). The Spirit's role is here explained both in personal and instructive terms. By claiming that the Spirit's role in hermeneutics is as the one who "speaks to me", the respondent indicates the personal power of Scripture when God is involved in the process of hermeneutics. As another respondent explained, the revelation that the Spirit brings is "not just through my mind, but also through my Spirit" (Respondent 9, e-survey). By this, she seems to be expressing a revelation that is more than human, more than natural, but rather Spirit to spirit. There at the spiritual level, the text of Scripture can transform and take hold of the reader, all because she is open and the Spirit is active (NB Smith's "radical openness" (2010)). This activity of the Spirit in speaking and instructing has a purpose, one respondent said he was always "willing to let the Spirit teach me" (Respondent 30, e-survey). However, a brief discussion in FG1 indicated one challenge to this:

**Felicity:** Well the Holy Spirit will lead us into all truth. If we allow Him to.

**Imogen:** If

**Felicity:** If we allow him to

**Imogen:** Absolutely right. (FG1)

Both Larry and these respondents appear to indicate that the Spirit's role in hermeneutics is functional, purposeful and transformational (although also conditional: "if we allow him to"). In particular, within Larry's group, we have the example given of how the Spirit

transformed a situation, encouraging a hermeneutical fluidity that could say “the Spirit has released me”.

These opening sub-sections have been based on two phrases that Larry used in describing the experiences he had of his Church Session, as they went through the process of approving women in ministry. The Holy Spirit is named as a key influencer in the hermeneutical process. Larry’s example has been used because it is a reasonably well-contained narrative that illustrates the role of the Holy Spirit. These roles are echoed in other responses in various ways as I have demonstrated, endorsing a key and diverse role the Spirit has in the hermeneutical process of Elim Pentecostals. The Spirit is seen as involved with individual hermeneutics, as well as in corporate hermeneutics. When a contentious topic brings a Church Session to an impasse, then there is space for a Holy Spirit pragmatism. This, we saw, regarded unity as more valuable than the continuing impasse, or the disallowing of women in ministry. Therefore, some Elim Pentecostal Church Sessions have allowed a broader theological hermeneutic, one that is directed by the Holy Spirit, to inform their decisions where a biblical hermeneutic alone had not brought consensus.

#### **7.4. Gift, calling and a pneumatological framework**

So far, following an extract from FG2 we have seen an explicit example of the way in which the Spirit has allowed a pragmatism and fluidity in the hermeneutical approach to the topic of women in ministry. In this section, I will consider how a redemptive and pneumatological framework can be used as a hermeneutical lens. This will involve including some of the descriptions of the work of the Holy Spirit that were less directly related, yet still relevant, to the hermeneutical process; for instance, “calling”, “gifting”, “purpose” and “anointing” (some of which were mentioned in section 6.3.4).

In the previous chapter, I mentioned Amos Yong’s description of Pentecostals as reading Scripture soteriologically (and redemptively) (2011). His approach considers the way in which Pentecostals have traditionally interpreted Scripture, primarily the book of Acts, “not merely as history but as salvation history” (2011, p.5). Yong argues that Pentecostal hermeneutics considers the capacity of the text to influence the reader here and now, by the power of the Holy Spirit. This openness to God through the text, along with an emphasis on the salvific message available in the text helps to identify the way in which some of my participants respond to the verses discussed.

Both the Acts and Galatians verses provide examples of a redemptive and soteriological framework. In both, God, through Jesus and/or the Spirit, is empowering and including believers. Texts interpreted through a redemptive framework provide an opportunity to make hermeneutical decisions to preference one verse (the one read redemptively) over another, as I will later demonstrate.

Although the soteriological framework, as presented by Yong, is useful, most of my examples have a more pneumatological focus, emphasising calling and gifting. One respondent does however seem to draw directly upon the concept of a redemptive framework, commenting on the Acts verses: “God’s promise of a New Covenant was fulfilled, and the Holy Spirit was to be poured out on people regardless of gender, therefore women may be leaders in church” (Respondent 22, e-survey). Here, he takes the redemptive thread of a new covenant, connects it with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit and infers gender equal leadership roles. His hermeneutical approach does appear to confirm Yong’s description. The verse is seen through a redemptive framework, and is then given a reading which includes leadership.

The inclusion of women in the Acts and Galatians verses provided some respondents with a way in which they could read the verses in 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy. They preferred the soteriological inclusion over the seeming exclusion. One respondent illustrates this through her comments regarding the Acts verses:

It expels all preconceived ideas of inequality in ministry. Or any interpretation that has been placed on Paul's writings to the church. It must shine light on the fact that he was speaking to a specific church with specific issues with women. (Respondent 21, e-survey)

Here, the respondent interprets the outpouring of the Spirit as the primary authority for ministry. She uses this authority as a lens through which the ‘restrictive’ Pauline passages should be read. There is a sense that in her decision to view this text as more authoritative, she is privileging a hermeneutical approach based on the Holy Spirit. Later on in the e-survey, when answering the question “Please try to explain how you interpret any Biblical passage”, she starts by saying “I ask the Holy Spirit (when I don't understand a passage)”. For her, it appears that the Holy Spirit plays a prominent role in her hermeneutics, in particular when there is a tension. This is also reflected in the way in which FG participants express their approach to the restrictive verses (as seen below).



The activity and inclusivity of the Spirit provides a hermeneutical fluidity, one which gives permission to follow the flow of the Spirit. As such it is possible to have a hermeneutical approach that prioritises one verse over another because of its standing within the broader pneumatological and soteriological framework. For instance, the Acts and Galatians verses are directly referring to the redemptive story (of the work of the Spirit and of Christ), whilst the 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy verses are not directly related to that story.<sup>97</sup> And if those verses are presented in conflict or tension, the pneumatological and redemptive framework can provide a preferential reading.

Within the e-survey, the pneumatological hermeneutical approach to the specific texts was not always evidenced. The Acts text was presented as the second passage to comment on (with 1 Timothy as the first). This text was, potentially, the first opportunity to engage with a Scripture that may be positive towards women in ministry. As an example of the few respondents who did not see these verses (from Acts) as relevant to women's ordination,<sup>98</sup> one wrote: "This verse does not seem to be connected with women in ordained ministry" (Respondent 3, e-survey). This suggests he did not associate women being ordained (ministry) with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit (gifting). Respondent 18 said: "I believe it means women can have visions and prophecies which can be weighed up and shared as much as anyone else - I do not believe it transpires into women being ordained" (e-survey). Here, she indicates the Holy Spirit does gift women in specific ways, but she does not relate that, or this verse, with ordination. None of the respondents suggested that this verse (and hence the Holy Spirit) was not important to life, rather, some simply explained that the verse was not relevant to women in ministry. Others however inferred its relevance, with one saying: "It means all hands on deck!" (Respondent 7, e-survey). He saw the outpouring of the Spirit on men and women as a non-discriminatory invitation to the ongoing mission that Jesus had left the disciples.

Another respondent saw the verse in Acts as providing an alternative reading on the topic of women in ministry. He said, "This allows me to balance...Paul's view. The Spirit speaks through us all, even Paul mentions women throughout the church involved in the work of

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<sup>97</sup> Some may argue that the 1 Timothy passage is directly related to the redemptive story, due to the following verses mentioning "saved through childbearing". However, the meaning of this is so contested that its direct link to a soteriological framework is questionable.

<sup>98</sup> The term "ordination" was used to help respondents understand my specific use of "women in ministry".

the church” (Respondent 30, e-survey). According to his approach, the Acts verses provide a “balance” to the restrictive verses from Paul’s writing. Paul’s restrictive verses are not simply over-ruled by Acts, but given a different lens. “The Spirit” becomes the central player in his hermeneutical approach, and in this reading, the Spirit, who came upon men and women, is seen as speaking through men and women. This reading is further enhanced with a consideration of some other activities and writings of Paul, namely women “involved in the work of the church”. This brief example illustrates how a pneumatological framework provides a hermeneutical fluidity to preference one verse over another.

It would appear that these varied responses indicate that there are degrees in which texts are viewed with a pneumatological framework. All the respondents could see the Holy Spirit was poured out upon women, but some read that as a pneumatological inclusiveness for ministry, others, did not. Like other hermeneutical approaches, Pentecostal hermeneutics can take one verse (or biblical concept like soteriology) through which others are understood.

The quotations used so far in this section have all come from the e-survey. As a method, the e-survey provided more anonymity and no facility for challenging or clarifying opinions written. It is possible that these encouraged more statements opposed to women in ministry than the FGs. Those statements, even though in the minority, present a useful insight into the diversity of Elim Pentecostal lay leaders’ positions. As a method, the FGs provided a clear place for interaction, where it seemed the role of the Holy Spirit in calling and gifting figured more emphatically, regarding women in ministry (although as already seen, not universally). Whilst the Acts and Galatians passages provided an instructive account of how equality through the Holy Spirit can/not be interpreted for women in ministry, it was the restrictive passages that largely informed the more fluid aspects of Pentecostal hermeneutics.

Earlier, I mentioned how the role of the Spirit in hermeneutics was purposeful, which resonates with Smith’s category of an “Eschatological orientation to mission and justice” (2010, p.44). I will now use a short extract to show how some participants talked about purpose whilst engaging with the topic of hermeneutics. For instance, when presented with the ‘restrictive’ passage from 1 Corinthians 14, Esther took the discussion from how she

thinks tensions in biblical hermeneutics should be resolved, to the broader questions of life and purpose:

I think it comes back to your relationship with Christ really and being um, if you were authentic and you were living in the Spirit and walking by the Spirit, which we're supposed to do, and you're living in the love, gentleness, self-control, blah blah blah, and you are being as righteous as you could possibly be, then I think it's being led by the Holy Spirit irrespective of your circumstances...He's created us all, He's giving us all life, and He's predestined our lives for a purpose and that purpose cannot just stop because we're women, it can't just be that we've been here just to procreate. (Esther, PFG)

Esther's concluding thought is to challenge a perceived (more essentialist than constructivist<sup>99</sup>) view in which a woman's role and purpose is to "procreate". Ultimately, she is responding to a text which implies women should be silent and submissive. Esther's hermeneutical response to that is through recourse to the Holy Spirit. This recourse is two-fold; firstly, an individual's response to the Holy Spirit; secondly, a pneumatological view of purpose.

Firstly, let us consider an individual's response to the Holy Spirit. In Esther's view, although the Holy Spirit can lead someone despite their circumstances, there is still an emphasis on "living in" and "walking by" the Spirit. She partially quotes the 'fruit of the Spirit' (from Galatians 5) and summarises with an emphasis on being "righteous". Esther is saying that in order to be led by the Spirit in the interpretation of challenging passages (as in this example), the individual reader needs to be walking in step with the Spirit in their life. She is increasing the scope of influence that the Holy Spirit has, from only having an interpretive aspect, to having a whole-life aspect. This whole-life aspect then leads her on to her second point, of purpose.

Esther sees the Holy Spirit as a vital agent in creation, life, future and purpose. That purpose, in her opinion, transcends gender. As much as the Holy Spirit aids interpretation, Esther's emphasis goes into a larger sphere, that of ontology and existentialism. By referencing the Spirit as creator and life-giver she is reinforcing the dependency of

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<sup>99</sup> Constructivism is the theory that "focuses on the social, cultural, and linguistic sources of our views of women and women's nature", and as such gender is not so much a given quality, but one that is formed (Jones, 2000, p.32). Essentialism on the other hand, broadly defined "refers to any view of women's nature that makes universal claims about women based on characteristics considered to be an inherent part of being female" (Jones, 2000, p.26). Jones explains that the essentialist position argues that there are certain things that a woman *is*, and as such these "universals" or "essences" "are believed to determine what a woman can become" (2000, p.27).

humanity on the creative, life-giving, force of God. Humanity's being, in her view, is essentially referenced to God (as Smith argues (2004, p.97)). Likewise, the very purpose that God has for her (and in this case "women"), is bound up in who God is, rather than limited to biological functions. Esther may not have phrased it quite like that, but these ideas do come across in her words. The Holy Spirit not only brings interpretive guidance but also gives purpose; as one respondent said: "Everybody can be used by God" (Respondent 25, e-survey).

The idea of the Holy Spirit's involvement in life and purpose is central to the terms "calling and gifting" that some respondents use. These terms appear crucial to their hermeneutical approach when considering some of the designated passages. For instance, when considering the role of women in ministry in the light of Galatians 3:28, one respondent wrote: "Again the gifting and calling of the person is the primary consideration. The gender is secondary" (Respondent 11, e-survey). In the light of this verse, the respondent sees the issue of men and women as "secondary" to the calling and gifting of that individual. Although the Holy Spirit is not explicitly mentioned in the response, the implication, through the use of such terms as "calling" and "gifting", is clear. The respondent has introduced these terms to his interpretation, neither of which are used in the actual verse. Rather, the issue of gender equality, which is inferred in the verse: "nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus", becomes the platform from which the Holy Spirit's role takes prominence. The respondent sees gender equality in this verse, and in considering the ministry of women, presents the "gifting" and "calling", rather than the gender, as the requirements for ministry. This demonstrates a way in which broader pneumatological hermeneutics are used in Pentecostal hermeneutics.

The same respondent later explained that in approaching **any** Scripture he will pray and "listen to what God is saying". The description of a hermeneutic that relies on the Holy Spirit (in part), and the way in which "calling" and "gifting" are introduced, demonstrate that, for this respondent, the Holy Spirit has a key role both in how he describes, and how he practises his hermeneutics. His introduction of the Holy Spirit into the hermeneutical framework, along with the practical example, helps demonstrate how Pentecostal hermeneutics can function.

Diane expressed the role of the Holy Spirit in her life, whilst acknowledging the tension she felt with the “restrictive” verses: “I do believe God’s Word...but I also believe what His Holy Spirit has gifted me with, and there’s got to be a place where they meet” (PFG). Here she demonstrates a frustration with a hermeneutic that would not allow reference to the Spirit, and finds rather, that the Spirit in her life (who has gifted her to be vocal in church) offers an alternate reading, a pneumatic hermeneutic. Ken actually offered a recent example of how he had preached on the 1 Corinthians passage the previous week (one week prior to the day of Pentecost). He explains:

I did actually, on Sunday, tackle this subject within the context of the empowering of the Holy Spirit. And how the Holy Spirit falls on folks and how we move in the gifting, how we move in fulfilment of what we’ve been called to be. (Ken, FG2)

Using the words “empowering”, “gifting” and “called”, Ken approaches the Corinthian passage with a hermeneutic based on the work of the Spirit. Life and purpose, as a Pentecostal, bring a Spirit-centred approach to his hermeneutic. Ken is able to express a hermeneutical avenue that Diane was struggling to verbalise.

Some women ministers in practice function because of their sense of calling and gifting (Carter, 2016, pp.56–62), others are restricted, and some try to balance out a variety of feelings and thoughts whilst navigating roles of leadership. My respondents seemed to echo similar broad views. For instance, one female respondent said: “However, I am a free, liberated, strong-minded, Spirit-filled woman, with authority to speak to and counsel those around me, and it's not a simple issue for me” (Respondent 9, e-survey). In her example, she is in a position of leadership (an Elder) and appears to be surrounded by people who think no issue of it. However, despite recognising her own giftings and opportunities, she still finds the issue somewhat unresolved, admitting that her “preference would be to come under the ultimate authority of a man”. However, she then (dis?)qualifies that by admitting “whether this is God's preference, is something I don't know fully yet”. Those around her don’t think the issue needs to be explored, she meanwhile has a place of authority in which she is happier under the ultimate authority of a man, even though she is not sure if that is God’s will or not. The issue remains live, even if slightly hidden from people around her. Her testimony demonstrates an ongoing, although tense, pragmatism, that finds a place for operating in leadership whilst holding onto uncertain thoughts about such legitimacy.

Reflecting the data, much of the analysis in this chapter has indicated an openness to the Spirit, preferencing pneumatological interpretations of specific texts. Yet, outside of specific textual interpretations, some respondents found a broader pneumatological approach helpful in dealing with the topic of women in ministry. It appears then, for some of these participants, that the role of the Spirit transcends a detailed biblical hermeneutic, in so far as the individual may still be left uncertain as to how to understand a particular passage. However, the transcendent work of the Spirit enables functionality according to calling and gifting, rather than specifically textual analysis; again demonstrating that this Pentecostal hermeneutics contains a level of fluidity due to the Spirit's involvement. As Felicity said: "if He's gifted you in that area, then He's gifted you in that area, and your gift makes room for you" (Felicity, FG1). Such comments indicate that some women function in ministry because of an experience of the Spirit; they feel liberated by the call of the Holy Spirit, rather than having all the answers from the Bible.

### **7.5. Conclusion**

This chapter has considered the various ways in which the Spirit is given prominence explicitly and implicitly in the responses from the e-survey and FGs. The Holy Spirit clearly plays a key role in the hermeneutics of Elim Pentecostal lay leaders. A redemptive and pneumatological framework is used by a number of respondents/participants in explaining how they approach Scripture and life. To some there remains a tension, as their sense of what the Spirit is saying appears in conflict with what the Bible appears to say. In some examples this tension leads to an ongoing restriction of women in ministry, in others there is an uncertainty about how to balance these tensions, whilst in others a fluidity from the Spirit encourages women in ministry. As we have seen, the responses can be pragmatic, seeking a unity or keeping the peace; although this in itself does not require a particular position regarding women in ministry.

Using Larry's example as a major narrative, it appears that the Spirit plays a key role in bringing unity as individuals spend time being open to Him through prayer. The Spirit is also described as helping some people accept a position with which they may not be able to argue using more conventional biblical hermeneutical tools. Finally, the use of Spirit-infused terms (such as calling, gifting and anointing) demonstrated an expectation that God could use people despite them not having all the answers to 'restrictive' passages (such as the ones offered for discussion).

In order to further understand the hermeneutical strategies of Elim Pentecostals, the next section on Community will enhance the other two aspects of the Triad: Scripture, and Spirit, that have now been discussed. Here, we will see how this third aspect has an important hermeneutical role.

## **CHAPTER 8. ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH WITH REFERENCE TO THE COMMUNITY**

One is not a Pentecostal hermeneut because one uses a Pentecostal method; rather, one is a Pentecostal hermeneut because one is recognized as being a part of the community. (Archer, 2009, p.225)

### **8.1. Introduction**

The last two chapters have been an exploration of the ways in which the respondents of the e-survey and the participants of the focus groups (FGs) explained and demonstrated their hermeneutics, with particular reference to the Scriptural texts and the Spirit. Throughout this analysis it has been clear that the triad of Scripture, Spirit and Community are inter-woven. As much as I have attempted to isolate them, they have frequently pointed to each other. For instance, Esther, who had strongly advocated for her need of the Spirit in interpretation, also said: "I need to listen to other people, I need other people to pray and help me to understand this, that's how I see it practically" (Esther, PFG). This chapter provides a consideration of the way in which community is talked about, viewed and used in the hermeneutical practice of Elim Church Sessions as they discuss the role of women in ministry.

Initially, I continue to centre my discussion around Larry's example, referring to the extract given in the introduction of the previous chapter, whilst drawing upon other given responses. I then briefly look at the way in which experiences from the communal sphere are used in the hermeneutical process. Finally, I end with a section that considers the community of Elim in the hermeneutical process.

### **8.2. Community in the responses**

In Larry's extract in the introduction of the previous chapter, he explains how the process of their decision making was, in some regards, collaborative and communal. I noted earlier how he describes their individual and corporate reliance upon the Holy Spirit; but here, I want to draw up on the role of community in the hermeneutical process. Throughout the FGs, due to the nature of the discussion, the Church Session was primarily the community discussed. Brief mention of Elim as a movement was made and will be picked up at the end of the chapter; broader senses of community were inferred by use of such terms as "reading" and "studying". I have not developed these areas due to their limited mention.

In Larry's extract he says that they:



basically tasked one person from each side, in one sense, to come up with a couple of page, sort of, discussion starter, and to present their case; and then we just unpacked it in one meeting. (FG2)

The role of community in this precise hermeneutical challenge (whether or not to approve of women in ministry in their local church) is evidenced in a few ways. Firstly, I will discuss the empowerment of an individual; secondly, the role of community and consensus. As I briefly consider these areas, I will refer back to other responses from the e-survey and FGs.

### 8.2.1. The empowerment of individuals

In Larry's example one member of each side of the debate was tasked with doing some research on behalf of that side. Both sides were entrusting and empowering individuals to enhance and explain their position. This approach is reminiscent of, but dissimilar to, Purdy's (2015, ix) fourth category for Pentecostal hermeneutics: the trained leader (as I briefly mentioned in chapter 4). In Larry's example there is no indication of the individual having been trained, rather, they were entrusted to do the research on behalf of the others, perhaps because of their ability, or their interest in the topic, or their gift. Their influence is located within the authority given to them by others. Most discussions within the FGs concerning the empowerment of individuals related to the role of the Pastor. Within Elim a Pastor (or more than one) is empowered and entrusted to inform/teach a group of people – the local church. Generally speaking within Elim, the Pastor (Purdy's trained leader), is empowered within the local church to provide teaching and guidance week in, and week out.

There is a case to be made that in local churches there can be an empowerment of the Pastor along with a lack of enquiry by the congregation. Imogen caricatured this as: "ahh it's the Pastor, he speaks no wrong" (FG1). Imogen explained that this was not her own opinion, rather she saw the Pastor as "a man"<sup>100</sup> (inferring 'merely a man') and said she felt "everybody was equal". What she has witnessed however, was an un-reflective acceptance of the words from one individual, because of their office. Esther actually provided an example of that herself, responding to the possibility of being told by her Pastor that women have to be silent, she said:

because I believe he [the Pastor] has been put in that position, and he shared "well Esther no you can't...I'm sorry Esther but this is what the Word

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<sup>100</sup> By which she is referring to her own Pastor, not that the role of Pastor generally should be for men.

of God says and that's Scripture", and I'm very vulnerable and gullible, you know what I mean, and actually....I'd go home...but I'd be devastated. (PFG)

Esther's acceptance of the hermeneutical authority of her Pastor was couched in words of self-awareness. She recognises that she has this view towards the trained leader, whilst also seeing such a view as potentially gullible. This example shows how the position of trained leader could be significantly influential, however, Esther's uncritical acceptance of the voice of the Pastor raises concerns. She goes on to describes her inability to critique what she is being told:

I've said I'm very gullible, so you tell me something, you tell me something, and I'm just going to believe it...which is daft really, so I need to learn, I need to pray that I'll learn how to test the Spirit, how to test the Word of God. (Esther, PFG)

It appears that Esther is aware of her uncritical acceptance of the views of others, not just the view of the trained leader (although that is her main subject). But then she describes how she wants to develop discernment through reference to the Spirit and Scripture. This is a helpful demonstration of the triad in action. The Scripture, the Spirit and the Community each need 'testing', one with the other; a point that is further explored in the next sub-section.

Although Esther acknowledged unreflective acceptance of the voice of the Pastor, she also demonstrated awareness of her need to change through the help of the Spirit and Scripture. Likewise, Steve said: "if it's the voice of the Pastor alone that's very very dangerous" (FG3). Having already acknowledged the role of the Spirit, Steve saw hermeneutical 'safety' within a community, in his case the Eldership, rather than with one person (again, on this occasion, the Pastor). The community is regularly expressed as a place within which interpretations are tested and formed; one respondent simply said: "It is good to hear others' opinions" (Respondent 8, e-survey).

Imogen mentioned the role of God in the empowerment and entrustment of an individual, linking the authority of God with the individual and the community, saying: "I'd want to make sure that whoever is leading [the church] has the authority of God on them to lead" (FG1). Within the institution of Elim the recognition of God's authority on a person to lead, is formalised in particular structures. For instance, the ordination of ministers occurs at the end of a period of time when calling and gifting have been given "full proof".<sup>101</sup> The NLT

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<sup>101</sup> The Elim Constitution uses this term in the context of approval for ministry: "At the end of the period in training the National Leadership Team shall, if it considers he has made full proof of his

recommend such individuals to the Conference for approval for ordination. Approved ministers are then appointed to a local church in agreement with the local church Session. The Session itself is comprised of all such appointed Elim ministers, and local lay leaders (Deacons and Elders). Although there are different local church constitutions that deal with the appointment of church Session members, there is normally a combination of nomination and/or approval by current Elders and church Members. In this way 'God's authority to lead' is tested through a wider community. If there were no clear sense of such authority upon a person, then at some stage in that process (it would be hoped) they would not be put forward to lead by the community. This process relies upon the community, in this case both Elim nationally and locally, recognising God's call upon a person. The community's involvement in approving the leadership of a Pastor, in part, approves the capabilities (rather than infallibility) of that Pastor in teaching and aiding biblical interpretation. Thus, the community and the Pastor have a natural link within the hermeneutical undertaking, with the Pastor having a recognised authority from the community.

The influence of the Pastor (or leader) has been discussed by a number of scholars in terms of the changes in leadership in recent times. Within Pentecostalism, Clark traced the way in which leadership had changed in the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa (2007); whilst Matviuk looks at Pentecostal leadership in Latin America (2002); and Carter takes a more Western look at the topic (2009). Here he says that there should be a "dependence on the Holy Spirit to guide both the leader and those he or she leads" (2009, p.186). Within FG2, Ken said: "we are a small church, so the Pastor has quite a significant influence". This simple description neither endorses or criticises the authority that Ken perceives the Pastor to have. Larry immediately picks this up and, equally descriptively, adds that in his church, which is significantly larger, "the senior pastor certainly has a lot of influence". These statements concur with my own experience where, in a small church the Pastor carries influence, because they can get to know each individual in the congregation personally; whilst, in a larger church they are often the 'platform voice' for vision and teaching, and thus influential. The relational position may be different, but in both cases the Pastor has considerable influence. That influence can have different outcomes depending on the role

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ministry, recommend a Minister in Training to the Conference for acceptance as a Minister and also for ordination" (2016a, p.36).

that the community has (whether Church Session or congregation), and the extent to which the Holy Spirit is depended upon.

In the PFG there were two examples regarding the authority of the Pastor, considered in language of approval and disapproval. Beth said “if [the Pastor] did come up with something that we really felt wasn’t right then we wouldn’t just go along with that”. She indicates that the Pastor’s authority should have confines of limitation; in this case what “we really felt wasn’t right”. Feelings for Beth, perhaps given by the Holy Spirit (my assumption), carry more authority than the words of the Pastor. But that limitation of authority was not accepted by Esther, who said:

I would come under that leadership even if I felt sometimes that [the Pastor] wasn’t right....it would hurt my flesh sometimes, but I would still come under that authority because I believe that God has placed him there.  
(PFG)

Esther saw the Pastor as an authority “placed” by God, and therefore with God’s authority. Even if she did not agree with the Pastor’s decision, she has already decided to “come under that authority”. That submission could come at the personal cost of hurting the ‘flesh’. Where Esther provides a blanket submission to the authority of the Pastor, Beth offers a caveat. Both acknowledge the Pastor’s authority, but deal with disagreements differently. These examples illustrate the different views that people have regarding ordained leadership and authority within Elim. Ordained leadership does not simply mean that others will accept that authority; as we have seen, Esther indicates that she does accept that authority, whilst also wanting to change her “gullible” approach. On the whole, those respondents and participants who talked about this, indicated a considered approach.

Across Elim there is a frequent entrustment and empowerment of individuals. However, as explained, the community still has a role to play, especially in the delegation of authority. Furthermore, we have seen different approaches to dealing with disagreement with the Pastor. Where Beth had indicated resistance “we wouldn’t just go along with that”, Esther had indicated compliance “come under that authority”. This sub-section has focussed on the way in which individuals relate to authority of other ‘empowered’ individuals (frequently the Pastor). However, Church Sessions provide an important window into relational community and the place of consensus in decision making. I now turn to consider these areas.

### 8.2.2. Community and consensus

With Larry's example, two individuals were empowered to do the research for each side of the debate. They then provided a written summary which was presented to the Church Session for discussion. Although the presentation of findings came from individuals, those findings were then discussed in a group setting, reducing the emphasis on the individual. This style of communal discussion is quite common within Elim local churches, for instance within a mid-week group Bible Study. Claire gave her thoughts regarding the hermeneutical help she has received within group Bible Studies:

I like when we are together doing Bible Study and people give me a different perspective that I haven't thought of before, and they bring a different experience into it, and there's almost a light on moment, a eureka moment, when suddenly you think "ooh" and it touches you, you know, kind of deep inside. (Claire, PFG)

Claire has found help in her understanding of Scripture through the communal and interactive setting that the Bible Study provided. Not only is it the community that, in this case, provided her with hermeneutical inspiration, but her description: "it touches you" resonates with the embodied nature of Pentecostals (Smith, 2010, p.42), also potentially suggesting a role of the Holy Spirit. This communal interaction is not a replacement for individual inspiration, however it does add another facet to the process.

The community, likewise, can provide a place for different voices to be heard. One respondent explains her approach to interpreting any Biblical passage. She includes looking at the meanings of the original language (through a website), looking at other English translations, considering the cross-Testamental progression of ideas, asking God to bring revelation and insight to her mind and through her spirit, and she then completes her explanation by saying:

Then I go and talk to those that think differently from me, as they often see it in a new way. Because 'WE have the mind of Christ' (not 'I have the mind of Christ'). (Emphasis in original) (Respondent 9, e-survey)

In saying this she is recognising that her presuppositions need to be challenged. By seeking someone who thinks differently she is opening herself up to other opinions. Not only will this offer her presuppositions an interrogation, but through the process will allow her a possibility of strengthening her views. Rather than presenting herself as capable of discerning the meaning of every (any?) passage, she locates the hermeneutical process theologically, "WE have the mind of Christ". I would argue that she is using this verse to refer to a communal hermeneutic, whilst her own hermeneutic is Spirit-led. One reading of the verse in its context would imply the "we" as a group of individuals (e.g. 'we all

individually have the mind of Christ'). However this respondent is, I believe, led by the Spirit to consider that the verse can also mean "we" as a community (e.g. 'we all together have the mind of Christ'). It is also interesting to notice that in answering this question about how she interprets any Biblical passage, she has taken a specific verse to explain a part of her interpretive process. Whilst other respondents have referenced other "Scripture" as a general *tool* of the hermeneutics (as seen in the previous chapter), she has used a specific Scripture to explain and demonstrate her hermeneutics, which in this instance includes a communal aspect. This is similar to the way that Thomas discusses the interpretation of Scripture and the role of the community (2013, p.121).

John identifies some of the hermeneutical roles of the Scripture, Spirit and Community as he responds directly to Larry's example (as quoted at the beginning of the previous chapter):

it's been my experience up to now with any other issue really, that we would look to try and see what the Scriptures say, but if it's, if we're not getting a direct guide out of the Scripture related to an issue, then we're going to pray through it [**Larry & Ken: nodded**], you know, we're going to go away with it, wait for God to speak to us individually, come back and try and reach a consensus through it, try and get to a point where we share the same heart on it, and if we don't get to that point, maybe that's the sign that well actually we don't progress for now, then we come back to it at a later time. I think that's the way we've always tried to be, you know. (John, FG2)

In this example he presents a process; the starting point is an examination of Scripture. But if an examination of the Scriptures does not provide clarity, there is an individual seeking of God – which both Larry and Ken affirm. That in turn feeds into the Church Session as a group who want to find consensus. If, following this process, there is no consensus, then the issue is postponed.

Discussions on consensus or unanimity were held in two FGs, which we will look at in a moment. I will first briefly explain the way in which decisions are made nationally and locally. Within the business meetings of the annual Conference (the governing body of the movement) proposals are made, discussed and debated upon, after which they are voted on by all those eligible. In normal circumstances this is a simple majority, in some cases (for instance, with a proposal that will change the Deed Poll) a higher percentage may be required. There appears to be no Constitutional requirement of a unanimous decision (Elim Constitution, 2012, p9). It is therefore accepted that the majority vote rules, and those who voted against have to accommodate the wishes of the majority. However, at local church

level, the Sessions seem to operate under some different approaches, these are likely to have been more culturally acquired. Technically, according to the Constitution, with a Church Session: "All questions shall be decided by a majority of votes" (2012, p26). However, within two FGs, it became apparent that some Sessions work on a consensus or unanimous approach.

Robert expressed his experience of decision making from his Church Session:

You know how some votes are unanimous, some are majority, we never have majority votes, we'll always have a consensus of opinion, and normally people...not because they're frightened or anything, they'll see another guy's perspective on it and think "I'm in the wrong here, I'll go with the majority and make it unanimous". (FG3)

Robert's experience here points towards a culture that expects decisions to be unanimous. This unanimity does differ from consensus, where, as we will see, there can be a pragmatic approach to agree on a way forward, whilst not necessarily having assented to changing one's viewpoint. In the same FG Steve also said: "we don't take a vote, generally speaking we need to be unanimous, and it's very very very rare that we're not; very rare that we're not" (FG3).

Within the same FG, Mark provides some theological basis for the desire for consensus, calling upon unity and disunity as evidence (or not) of the Spirit's work:

usually where the Holy Spirit is working there is consensus, because the Holy Spirit will not work in disunity...the Holy Spirit's mission is to speak to everybody involved in that group and bring everybody to unity, that is why if there is disagreement on an issue, whatever it is, better for everybody to go back and pray...and if He says "yes, please change your mind, this thing is correct it is from me", go back and say "sorry I made a mistake at that time, let us go ahead and do it". But the Holy Spirit will always bring unity. (Mark, FG3)

Mark is clear that he sees unity as a sign of the Spirit's working, allowing for the Spirit to change someone's mind. Unlike Larry's example in which some lay leaders were able to say that the Spirit had "released me", and where the mind of the individual on the topic may not necessarily be changed, Mark expects unity to be evidence when all minds are in agreement (bringing unanimity and unity together). Technically with Larry's group, all minds were in agreement, agreement to keep unity and accept a position (although here, the unity is not unanimity). But Mark seems to prefer the Spirit's role in changing a mind or a view. Both Larry and Mark see the Spirit as involved in bringing unity, however that unity may be framed (as "released" or "changed"). Mark concludes by saying:

But the Holy Spirit will always bring unity, I believe in us working with the Holy Spirit and with the Word of God, because the Word of God will guide us. If we are sometimes saying “the Holy Spirit...” and the Word of God is saying something different, that can’t be the Holy Spirit. (FG3)

Mark identifies “unity” as a key aspect of the role of the Holy Spirit. The Scripture and the Spirit working together should form unity in the Community. Perhaps Mark is thinking of Ephesians where Paul urges the believers to be “eager to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (4:3). Mark clearly identifies the Spirit and the Scripture as authoritative, and as part of the Spirit’s working, he suggests “unity”. “Unity” therefore, carries authority by the very nature of being caused by the Holy Spirit. However, Mark is not arguing that “unity” is by definition authoritative (for instance, atheists could be united), but “unity” as a working of the Spirit is therefore authoritative. Seen in this way, “unity” is a form of second-order authority, dependent upon the working of the Holy Spirit.

Unity is not just relevant to a Church Session, but also to the whole congregation; disunity in one, can affect the other. For Mark, where the Session is facing disunity, then the appropriate response is to pray. If unity is a sign of “working with” the Holy Spirit, then this does raise the question of Church Sessions (and others) who do not come to a place of unity. Mark explicitly said that “the Holy Spirit will not work in disunity”. The implication was that other participants who either disagreed with the views being aired, or who were part of a Church Session that was not in agreement, were not working with the Holy Spirit. This sobering thought, that, in Mark’s views required prayer and saying “sorry”, were the closing comments of FG3 and allowed no opportunity to respond.

The concept of unity or division was also explained as part of Larry’s rationale for wanting a consensus in their Session:

...if we did it on a simple vote and seven out of twelve voted for women in ministry and leadership but the other ones didn’t and we allowed that to continue, then we were sowing the seeds of potential division...(FG2)

Like Mark’s example, they were concerned that disunity would cause damage and division, both in the Church Session, and potentially in the congregation. This desire for a unanimous decision, un-required by the Constitution, appears to be evidence of a theological destination (unity), whilst also demonstrating a Pentecostal pragmatism. Their desire for consensus was seen as a central outworking of the unity visible in the Gospel. It is clear from their actions as a Session, that a lack of consensus would have undermined their authority in presenting the decision to the church. A unanimous decision added authority



to their position, where a split decision could have sowed “the seeds of potential division”, within and beyond the Session. A “unanimous conclusion” is perhaps the most analogous to the way in which the likes of Thomas (1994) uses the term ‘community’ in explaining what a Pentecostal hermeneutic should look like. Thomas argues that it is within the community of faith in Acts 15 that a consensus is reached, having already considered Scripture and been led by the Spirit. Perhaps Larry’s Session drew upon this example of decision making, rather than lowering the target to ‘majority rules’.

The concept of unity however, does not automatically lead to women being encouraged into ministry. John explained that in his situation women are not allowed to be elders, and he indicated that there does not seem to be a problem with that in the church:

so it’s always been male, and it continues to be male, and it doesn’t necessarily seem to be an issue for the church going forward...it always seems to have worked up to this point, so it’s never been a topic that we’ve had to seriously address in terms of a decision making for a woman elder to come on board. (John, FG2)

Although John does not use the term “unity”, the implication is, from his perspective, that the church is in unity whilst holding a position restricting women in ministry. The limitation of the focus group meant that I was unable to examine the views of those in John’s church to see the extent to which there is agreement with this position. However, Nunn’s work on Elim congregations provides evidence that women generally want to be released into ministry, whilst at the same time are conflict averse and “disdain disunity” (2018, p.71). This tendency towards conflict aversion may appear to others as being in unity; whilst in fact, the reality may be better described as a dissatisfied unity.

Whilst community can be a place of interpretation, it may also be a place where different views are held together in loving tension. The communal approach, in Larry’s example, led to a consensus within the Church Session. But in the wider congregation (reflecting some aspects of the Church Session), although there was an acceptance, there was no common agreement on the interpretation, as Larry said: “But at the end of the day, you know, I’ve sat and had that discussion with people who disagree with me on that interpretation” (FG2). Community becomes both a place of interpretation, and a place of grace, where differing interpretations (on this topic at least) remain.

Nathalie equally found that the community provided love and grace through a time when she could have felt rejection. Whilst being a deacon, she was put forward for a vote to

become an elder. The vote did not affirm her nomination, and as she said: “at no time did anyone give any reason other than that I was a woman” (FG3). But despite this, within the community of the congregation she found acceptance: “a lot of people were very gracious and I felt extremely loved at the time rather than rejected” (FG3). Despite the fact that Nathalie felt it was her gender that had precluded her from being accepted as an elder, the community of that same local church still provided grace which helped her feel “extremely loved”.

Nathalie’s and Larry’s examples provide two cases where there is a sense of unity in the community despite a certain level of disagreement; as I expressed it earlier: a dissatisfied unity. One respondent recorded a different outcome:

Personally, this issue caused a family in a past church to leave us. Unable to reconcile past teaching and strong masculine views on leadership with my own or even Elim's views. We parted well still brothers in Christ just attending different Churches. (Respondent 30, e-survey)

It appears that this family did not accept women in ministry, whilst the church did. These differences were not resolved in a way that allowed for a continuing unified fellowship in that local church, but rather the family left to find another church, one that likely had similar views to them on this issue. This story highlights the tensions, struggles and challenges in being able to fellowship together whilst holding differing views. Although not a Foundational Truth (in the technical sense for Elim), people’s view on the topic has the ability to bring division (as well as unity). Where a church makes a stand on the topic of women in leadership there remains the possibility that people will be unable to reconcile their views, and feel that they need to leave. This is perhaps why one respondent said:

The members of the session at the time debated and studied scripture, and shared their positions on this. There was an even split, and we decided to keep the status quo. (Respondent 32, e-survey)

For them, the “status quo” involved choosing not to accept a woman minister because they could not all agree on the decision, this is most likely evidence again of a dissatisfied unity.

In the examples from FG2 and FG3, the community (in this case the Church Session) becomes the final testing ground for their hermeneutical process. Their contested issue also includes contested texts, with both groups approaching the issue with reference to specific scriptural texts (such as the ones provided for discussion in the FGs). It is possible that when an un-contested text or issue is encountered that their hermeneutical process is simplified. For instance, they may simply agree and not spend time studying the Scriptural

texts or praying individually.<sup>102</sup> That is why the example of women in ministry is an interesting one, for it provides a complex discussion and a more in-depth hermeneutical process for analysis.

Although in these examples there is a place for individual reflection and prayer, the community becomes the place in which individual interpretations can be heard and challenged. Specifically in Larry's example, the individual presentations were "unpacked". Grey makes an interesting observation regarding individual interpretation in the European context:

The indigenization of Pentecostalism in the context of secular Europe has resulted in a focus of individualization, which includes the experience of the Spirit as both an individual and individually interpreted. (Grey, 2011, p.28)

Within the context of a Church Session decision, this individualization is reduced. The group provides a potential space for diverse opinions. I say 'potential' for two reasons. Firstly, the group may all agree, secondly it is possible that a strong individual will influence the group and restrict (consciously or unconsciously) debate. On this first point, Diane noted that within the discussion in their FG there was a general agreement regarding women in ministry:

I think one thing that stood out to me early on is, I think around this table we probably are all of a very similar mind on this topic, I think it would be really interesting if we'd had as part of this discussion, whether male or female, people that perhaps had a different ... take, that would have sat there and said "this 1 Corinthians 14 I believe that's for the church now, not just for the church back then". (Diane, PFG)

Despite her group having a common view, Diane was eager to hear a different opinion. She was eager to explore opposing views with someone else. The PFG provided an example of a group that all agreed, whereas the other FGs did introduce a difference of opinion.

On the second point, the influence of a strong individual may not necessarily be constant. English de Alminana argues that authority and power are not static, rather they are dynamic within their own relational setting and social contracts (2017, p.7). Practically, within a Church Session, the influence of one individual may alter for a number of reasons. For instance, when the members of the Session change (including the introduction or

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<sup>102</sup> This approach to uncontested texts is not dissimilar to Higton's explanation of "Biblical settlements" in which a community has a specific lens through which they read Scripture (2008, p.366). As such, Elim Pentecostals may find that most Scripture fits well within their hermeneutical lens, and can simply be accepted. In chapter 7, as one example of a hermeneutical lens, I discuss the potential soteriological lens that Pentecostals may use, as suggested by Yong (2011).

removal of dominant voices); or, the views of the individual are altered; or, when dynamics of relationships alter outside the Session; or, when there is genuine openness to the Spirit.

As Mark explained from his perspective:

go back and pray, and if He says: “yes, please change your mind, this thing is correct it is from me”, go back and say: “sorry I made a mistake at that time, let us go ahead and do it”. (Mark, FG3)

For Mark, an openness to correction from God is an important part of leadership. Likewise, Larry said that they agreed to an openness early on in the process:

And we said, “if we’re going to go down this journey we’re not just going down the journey of us going “well I believe this position and I’m going to stick with it” we go in asking the Spirit to open our hearts to what the other person’s saying so we are willing to change and be willing to listen to the Spirit’s voice. (Larry, FG2)

These examples illustrate a radical openness to God (Smith, 2010), along with an awareness of the potential for personal/individual error. The community, depending on certain conditions (e.g. an openness to the Spirit), can provide a space for hermeneutical correction and collaboration, much like Thomas’s exegesis of Acts 15 proposed (1994, p.45) (see my discussion of this in chapter 4).

In Larry’s example, when the decision was eventually reached that they would support women in ministry, he explained how the decision was relayed towards to the congregation. In speaking to a group of younger women who were pleased with the decision, he said they were told:

Don’t flaunt it, don’t lord it, don’t get high and gloat over this, there are people that hold a view that is different and they hold it for very genuine reasons, so let’s love them and honour them whilst going forward with the decision we’ve taken. (Larry, FG2)

According to Larry’s account not only was this the approach they used in helping others to respond to the decision, but they also, as a leadership team sat and honoured those who had varying views:

we’ve given them the time, and we’ve said: “we honour where you stand...we’ve taken a different decision, but that doesn’t mean we are denying that you are taking this belief on the basis of Scripture and the Spirit, and you know, we want to honour you, we want to love you, we want to be gracious with you in that”. (Larry, FG2)

Larry concluded by saying that “as far as I am aware we haven’t lost anyone over the decision” (FG2). This statement elicited a response of surprise and respect (an “ooh”) from Ken who sat up straight as Larry said this. The process of taking a split ‘board’ through to a united decision, then presenting that decision to a church in which members also had

differing views, but managing the process in a way that maintained unity despite differences of opinion, is, in my opinion, worthy of Ken's "ooh".

The way that Larry presents their process provides an account that appears quite positive. I am aware of the limitation of my method, in which no other voices from Larry's church are presented. Voices from the other side (either from the Church Session members who had initially argued against women in ministry, or even from the women to whom this meant much) would have been informative. I am however reliant upon Larry's own presentation, and give it as such. From his perspective then, as a leadership team, they respond graciously towards the wider community of the congregation, in particular towards those who did not agree with women in ministry. The Church Session had come to a decision through a process of Scriptural investigation, seeking the Spirit and testing the views communally. In turn, when the decision was presented, they allowed for differences of opinion, whilst also affirming the decision they had made. The community of the Session, in particular (for some examples) a consensus, is presented as an important part of the hermeneutical process in addressing contentious topics.

### 8.2.3. Experience-infused interpretation

In chapter 6, I introduced the place of pre-commitments in the process of biblical hermeneutics. This is conceptually linked with experience, which is contained within a less formal sense of community within the hermeneutical process. From within the sphere of the community, the experience of the respondents and participants forms and informs their hermeneutical approach. Grey, in the light of her research, puts it this way:

While Pentecostals treasure Scripture and claim to "read it and believe it, they are actually doing something to the text in the process of reading and believing. Pentecostals are transforming their understanding of the text based on their experience. (2016, pp.147–148)

Some respondents made it explicit that in approaching a passage in which they found challenges despite using a contextual approach, they would add personal experience. Steve explained: "So personally I think ladies in ministry are a really good thing, and you know [I have] experienced ministry under two ladies and they were exceptionally good" (FG3). Such experiences are formed and framed in the communal setting, and help provide some respondents with a hermeneutical lens through which meaning, for them, could be ascertained.

Within the discussion (and set questions in the e-survey) regarding the interpretation of the four given passages, it was clear that there were some real tensions. For some, the tension lies between the plain reading of those verses and the sense of God's calling and gifting. Diane said (as I quoted in the previous chapter) "I do believe God's Word...but I also believe what His Holy Spirit has gifted me with, and there's got to be a place where they meet" (PFG). The meeting point of God's Word and God's Spirit is only viewed as potentially tense when they seem incompatible. For instance, Acts 2 was viewed as compatible with women being called and gifted. But some participants felt ill-equipped to handle the more restrictive verses. The tension of experience and the Bible is nicely summarised by Atkinson, who says "Personal experience should never set the limits on what a person allows the Bible to mean, but neither can experience be left out of the equation" (2003, pp.50–51). Oliver includes God in his description of experiences, when discussing the tension between different verses regarding the role of women, Oliver ended up concluding that:

we're all gifted in different ways, we've got different perspectives, experiences of life, and I think it's helpful to think that we can all contribute to what God is calling us, bringing all our experiences and insights, you know. (Oliver, FG3)

In the realm of experience, within the sphere of community, Oliver found a sense of the way in which communal insight and experience, framed as part of God's work, can help resolve the hermeneutical impasse that can exist where experience and community are ignored.

Imogen referred to her experiences in local church as part of her hermeneutic when tackling the 1 Timothy passage, saying: "'I don't permit women to teach', but we do don't we, all the time, like in Sunday schools and things" (FG1). Her experience includes seeing women teach, in this case to children. She uses her experience as a filter through which she interprets this passage. If nothing else, she is saying that from her experience, current practice is in tension with her plain-sense interpretation of this verse. She adds a variety of other layers to her hermeneutical strategy, including non-specific and Bible-wide contextual hermeneutics, as well as using aspects of an historical-grammatical approach. She acknowledges the "black and white" plain-sense reading of the text, but explains that only through use of other Scripture can this be understood. However, it was not only through other Scripture that she made sense of this, it was also through relating her experience. She later defends her positions by referring to: "my experience....my own personal experience" (Imogen, FG1). Here Imogen is defending her approach to the

theological question of authority through her own experience. By doing this she is affirming the embodied and affective nature of Pentecostal epistemology, as suggested by Smith (2010). Each hermeneut comes with a certain amount of background, assumptions and even expectations when approaching the Bible. Some participants talked about their experience, or feelings, whilst attempting to engage with the biblical passages, others were less explicit.

#### 8.2.4. Authorities

The triad of Pentecostal hermeneutics has been evidenced throughout the responses of the e-survey and discussions in the FGs. To some extent, I have used a few key examples (particularly Larry's) to illustrate how these three operate when faced with the contentious topic of women in ministry. However, I also asked a direct question within each FG to hear how various possible 'authorities' were considered when making a decision that has caused tensions. Within each FG, I light-heartedly suggested possible responses, making sure that these were not seen as a definitive list. For instance when, in one FG, I suggested the Elim Constitution amongst the list, the respondents laughed. Larry immediately responded to my question and having explained the pivotal role of the Scripture, prayer and the Spirit, said: "don't tell Chris Cartwright, but I'm not sure the Elim constitution overly came into it" (FG2). Before I look further at the responses, I will first look at how the e-survey respondents prioritised a simple list of possible authorities.

The e-survey respondents were asked to prioritise six choices in "the order of importance that you think is being considered" when a Church Session makes a decision. Their responses are therefore meant to reflect their perception of governmental experience in local church, and give guidance on what Pentecostal lay leaders *think* should be authoritative in their decision-making process. The six choices, listed here in the order they were chosen by the majority, were:

- A) The voice of Scripture
- B) The voice of the Spirit
- C) The voice of the Pastor
- D) The voice of other members of the Session
- E) The voice of the past
- F) Other (optional)

The “Scripture” and the “Spirit” were generally chosen as the top authority, with “The voice of Scripture” being rated by 73% of respondents as the most important. When “Scripture” was not rated as the top authority, then it was always positioned second. The “Scripture” and the “Spirit” dominate the first and second choices of what respondents view as important for making a decision in a Church Session. Similar majorities chose the “Pastor” as the third authority, with “other members of the Session” fourth, and “the voice of the past” fifth.

Whilst the prioritisation of these choices gives a simple picture of how these lay leaders perceived ‘authorities’ in the process of decision making, the FGs provided an opportunity for deeper exploration. Due to the nature of the FGs, the FG participants were able to demonstrate a pragmatic hermeneutic that grapples with competing authorities in contentious topics. The FGs as a method allowed for a deeper qualitative exploration of competing views, nuancing the ideal order of authority that the e-survey indicates.

When I asked FG3 what they thought provides the final authority in a discussion or debate, Nathalie gave her opinion after four others had voiced theirs. Talking about Scripture and the Spirit, she expressed her concerns about the subjective interpretation or feeling that both can give. When there is contention between views on the Scripture or the Spirit, Nathalie proposed that Elim should be the benchmark:

I would go ‘Elim’, because you would trust, that actually, say on an issue such as women in ministry....you're an Elim church, that's what you agree with the constitution to go by, so if they make a decision, actually you either go by that or you come out of the Elim movement. (Nathalie, FG3)

Her views on Elim rather surprised me considering Elim’s diversity of practice. As Harry said: “what I’ve picked up interestingly, is just how different cultures are even in our own church denomination, it’s quite interesting to hear the different cultural views of what’s going on” (FG1). Yet, as far as Elim’s constitution is concerned, women are allowed to minister at all levels of leadership. Immediately following her statement, Pauline added “I would think that as well” (FG3).

Steve also agrees with them and says: “Elim are the train track aren’t they, they’re the parameters, it’s what happens in between that” (FG3). Such parameters, for instance, would be Elim’s Foundational Truths. Pauline and Nathalie made affirming noises during Steve’s analogy. Pauline then says, “So the final authority would be, if you’re an Elim church, then it’s got to be Elim” (FG3). Elim is both an institution with decision-making



structures, such as the NLT, annual Conference and constitutions; but it is also viewed communally to which each participant was a part of. Elim Pentecostal experience occurs as part of an institution, which can provide a “train track” through decisions, publications and platforms. But there is also an aspect that endorses the embodied nature of relationships within Elim. Harry said, “we’re all one under the Elim banner [*Imogen: yeah no you’re right*]” (FG1). Here there is a recognition of commonality, an identification of the institution “Elim”, along with community “we”. As Pentecostals, the corporate and communal (as well as individual) is also linked with the Holy Spirit. The complexity of such relationships has been considered in the French Polynesian Classical Pentecostal church, in which one study concludes: “how an institutional apparatus aiming to control individual lives can paradoxically build its legitimacy on a claim for personal autonomy and a mistrust of institutions” (Fer, 2010, p.173).<sup>103</sup> The complexity of the relationship between Elim as an institution and Elim as a community was evidenced in the diversity of the discussions. I will now give a couple of examples of this.

Nathalie’s choice of words, quoted above: “so if they make a decision”, is instructive. There is a distancing in her use of “they”, as if Elim does not include her. It is possible that she does not see the process of decision making within an Elim Conference as inclusive. At least as an observer at Conference, she could justifiably feel distanced from the policy decision making process. Equally however, there is an implication that such decisions in Elim are considered by a body of experts who guide or decide on important theological decisions. Historically the topic of women in ministry has both been considered by committees and by the whole of Conference at different times (Carter, 2018b). Any decisions are finalised by a vote at Conference, which should help Elim Ministers and Lay Representatives feel like the “we” rather than the “they”; whilst observers (for instance other lay leaders) may then feel distanced. It is this distancing that I suggest elsewhere that has been an historic problem to local church acceptance of Elim Conference decisions (2016, p.75).<sup>104</sup>

During the discussion in FG3, although not everyone had spoken, it seemed to me that Elim’s authority was going to be left unchallenged. But Mark in his final thoughts starts by saying “Well I would say it depends on the issue on the ground, because if it’s scriptural

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<sup>103</sup> As a comparison with neo-Pentecostalism and the way in which institutions in Africa are changing, see McCauley (2014).

<sup>104</sup> I contrast the Swedish Pentecostal Movement’s public debate and subsequent acceptance at local church level, with Elim’s private debate and ongoing local church issues.

doctrine, the Bible will trump whatever Elim is saying” (FG3). As he says this both Nathalie and Pauline laugh in agreement, and Nathalie adds: “we trust them”. Mark does not dismiss Elim as an authority, but specifically places Elim under, rather than above, the Scripture and the Holy Spirit; for him these have more authority. It seemed to me that the participants were in agreement. Whilst the others saw Elim as a good place to refer to when there was a hermeneutical impasse, Mark was explicitly clearer in placing Elim in a hierarchy. This group appeared to view the institution of Elim as a source of hermeneutical reference and authority; but, in at least Mark’s opinion, that authority still had to be tested.

It seems then that Elim is not **the** source of authority, but rather **a** source, particularly where there are disagreements. No one was suggesting that Elim was a higher source than either the Scripture or the Spirit; rather, if there was a contention, then Elim as an institution and as a community, was a place to refer to. The institution provided the train tracks, the community provided a place for discussion (such as the FGs themselves). For three lay leaders in FG3 it was clear that Elim provides an important input into their hermeneutical process.

### **8.3. Conclusion**

This section has examined the ways in which community has been referenced in the responses with regards to the hermeneutical process. Using Larry’s example, we initially saw how individuals can be empowered to bring clarity on the topic. This has similarities with the role of a local Pastor within Elim. Their empowerment and position is clearly important, although depending on the individual, different procedures and outcomes are likely.

The empowerment of an individual, in Larry’s example, was then contained within a process of communal discussion and prayerful consideration. Likewise, within Elim, the local church (and Pastor) is part of a national movement which has certain official positions. Locally and nationally these carry authority, but themselves are subservient to (or reliant on) the Scripture. This sense of communal accountability and safety helps to provide a place in which consensus can be sought. Individualism and subjectivity are somewhat mitigated through a community. It appeared that all participants agreed that God’s authority, rather than an individual’s, or a movement’s, is what matters. But the manifestation of that authority is perceived in different ways, including through an individual and through a movement.

Individual and shared experience, from within the communal sphere, also informed the hermeneutical decisions of Session members. Everyday communal aspects of church life, where *operant* theology may be more prominent than *espoused* (Cameron et al., 2010, p.54), seem to inform some participants in their hermeneutics. Women involved in teaching in Sunday school, for instance, appears, for some, to advocate for women in ministry; whilst experience from other churches, for instance, where women are not involved, appears to endorse a restriction for women in ministry. Although experience of *operant* theology is clearly powerful, it is only one factor in the hermeneutics of an Elim Pentecostal lay leader.

There has been a diversity of responses in this study. Some cases where there was agreement and women ministers were accepted; other cases of dissatisfied unity, where women were still accepted; further cases where agreement could not be reached, so women were not accepted; some cases where there had been no discussion on the topic, so no change was initiated; and finally, other cases where people left the church because they could not agree with the decision to accept a woman minister. Clearly, with this cross-section of reactions, the community is a part of the hermeneutical process, but not the **only** part of the process. The whole triad of Scripture, Spirit and Community are required in the hermeneutical process when, for instance, there is a tension in the plain reading of the text. When considering a contentious topic, a triadic hermeneutical approach is evident in the practised theology of many Elim Pentecostal lay leaders.

## **CHAPTER 9. CONCLUSION**

The real issue in Pentecostalism has become hermeneutics, that is, the distinctive nature and function of Scripture and the roles of the Holy Spirit, the Christian community, grammatical-historical research, and personal experience in the interpretive process. (Arrington, 1994, p.101) [as already quoted in chapter 5]

### **9.1. Introduction**

In this concluding chapter I provide ongoing dialogue with key theological partners as I summarise the findings of my research. I briefly outline how the Scriptures remain central to Pentecostal hermeneutics, whilst demonstrating a number of ways in which biblical hermeneutics are practised, including various contextual analyses. Likewise I show how the role of the Spirit is fundamental, especially in providing a sense of freedom and pragmatic fluidity. Furthermore, the third aspect of the triad, the community, is highlighted as an essential place of relationships, in which Pentecostal hermeneutics finds balance.

Having then presented an account of Pentecostal hermeneutics, I construct further proposals that go beyond the findings (although inspired by them). Here we see that the sphere of the Holy Spirit should have an influence on every aspect of the Pentecostal's life including hermeneutics. As such, the freedom of the Spirit, along with relationality (with the Spirit and with other believers) are given prominence. I then finish with a short section that suggests some ways forward academically, as well as some practical thoughts aimed specifically for the Elim Pentecostal movement.

### **9.2. What we have learnt about Pentecostal hermeneutics**

Pentecostal hermeneutics is generally summarised with reference to the triad of Scripture, Spirit and Community. Having been partly proffered by Thomas (1994) and Arrington (1994), then developed by Yong (2002) and Archer (2004a), this triad is frequently included as part of a distinct Pentecostal hermeneutic. In this thesis I have not set out necessarily to redefine or challenge this *prescription* (although I do end up enhancing this), rather, I have sought to develop a more detailed *description*, specifically in relation to the way in which the three are interdependent in the practised hermeneutics of Elim lay leaders. As such, I am able to offer a fine-tuned account of the use of the triad, and as we will see, offering additional key nuances.

The findings have indicated that there is some evidence of a working order within the triad. By this I mean that if there is no tension with regard a particular topic, or in the initial reading of a biblical text, then there is a pragmatic acceptance of a consensus or a plain sense reading, and no further explicit recourse to the Scripture, Spirit or Community is made. Yet, when a topic or text appears to present a tension (whether with culture, other texts, other interpreters, etc.) there is an opportunity to deliberately include the Scripture, Spirit and Community. The findings not only concurs with Thomas' use of Acts 15, where a tension existed (1994), but as a *description* of the practised approach of hermeneutics by Elim lay leaders, provide a helpful insight into the relationships of the hermeneutical triad.

In a basic attempt to capture this graphically, *Figure 1* demonstrates the common practice of Elim lay leaders' Pentecostal hermeneutics. Where there is no perceived tension in a topic or text,<sup>105</sup> the hermeneut(s) simply carries on. Where there is a perceived tension, then the hermeneut(s) has three immediate options (each of which will contain different aspects as I will later explain): further biblical hermeneutics, seeking the Holy Spirit, and gaining counsel from the community. If there is still a tension following one of these options, there can be either a deeper level of enquiry along the same lines, or recourse to some or all of the other options. Once there is no longer a perceived tension, then the hermeneut(s) can carry on. 'Carrying on' may be quite different depending on the situation and the outcomes. Within the groups studied there were examples given where a Church Session had decided not to implement any changes, and carried on. Also, there were examples of agreed change, and carrying on with that. In both cases, there was an agreement (even if that meant a dissatisfied unity) and the Session could carry on.

In *Figure 1*, I include an ellipse which covers the whole process, within which is the label "The Holy Spirit". This depicts the broader role of the Holy Spirit that includes leading, guiding and teaching the hermeneut(s) no matter which route is taken. This role of the Holy Spirit can be conceived as a distinct Pentecostal aspect or worldview, although such pneumatology is not limited to Pentecostalism (Smith, 2010, p.32).

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<sup>105</sup> In my empirical research the topic was "women in ministry", and the texts provided were Acts 2:17-18, Galatians 3:28, Corinthians 14:34-35, 1 Timothy 2:12. Naturally the Scripture was the first place of reference when discussing specific texts, whilst a 'topic' allowed for any of the triad as the starting point for hermeneutics.

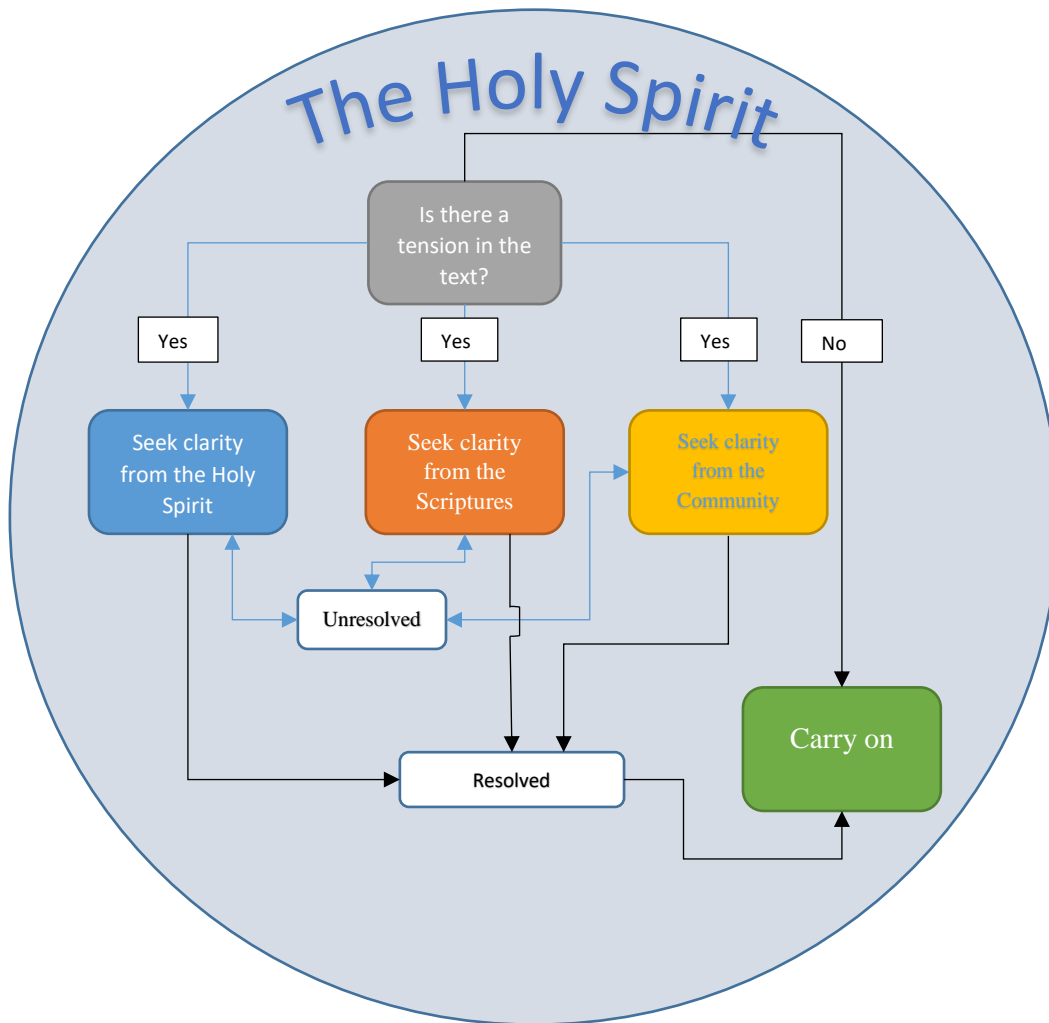


Figure 1

A number of issues raised in the early chapters (4-5) regarding the current academic discussions on Pentecostal hermeneutics have been referred to in lesser or greater detail during the analysis chapters (6-8). I will now draw these threads together in a more cohesive manner.

### 9.2.1. Paradigm shift - tension

In chapter 4 I explain how Kočí attempts to provide a means to navigate the challenges presented by two postmodern interpretive approaches: Reception History and Reader-response criticism (2014, p.219). Whether or not Pentecostals want their hermeneutics to be identified with postmodernism remains moot, however the issues regarding a traditional reading of a text and a current (re)interpretation are relevant to both.

Kočí suggests that there are moments, specifically epistemological crises, in which the traditional reading of a text encounters a paradigm shift, and an updated interpretation is

then accepted (2014, p.229). Within Elim, some epistemological crises are discussed in detail by Frestadius (as noted in chapter 2), who examines the response and briefly considers the implications with regard to hermeneutics (2018). I would suggest that the issue of women in ministry presented Elim with a hermeneutical challenge similar to an epistemological crisis. Specifically, the epistemology related to this topic, refers to the way in which Elim could know what God was saying, (therefore, epistemology here relates directly to hermeneutics). Yet, despite an ongoing crisis, this, on many occasions, did not lead to a paradigm shift. My work tracing the history of this topic within Elim (2016; 2018a; 2018b) not only demonstrates the longevity of the crisis, but also presents a certain amount of closure. I mean by this, that Elim eventually did decide to ordain women (in 1998) and did change the constitution to, in principle, accept women onto the National Leadership Team (in 2013). However, there has been no broad-sweeping paradigm shift that has occurred across the grassroots of Elim, with, as I have shown, lay leaders still having diverse opinions on this topic. To use the language of the Four Voices (as introduced in chapter 2), the *espoused* voice changed (women are allowed to minister at all levels), but often the *operant* voice is divergent (where at grassroots in some churches, women are not allowed to minister).

Rather than this broad-sweeping paradigm shift, what we can see is more focussed or narrow-sweeping paradigm shifts occurring in localised Elim settings. For instance, in Larry's example (in FG2), some form of paradigm shift occurred in that Church Session, enabling a consensual way forward. I will later be suggesting that a paradigm shift is still required within Elim if women are to experience the same acceptance in ministry as men. Such a shift will need to be based upon a robust Pentecostal hermeneutic, which I will also offer. Before I get to this constructive proposal, I will briefly consider some other areas that have been discussed.

### 9.2.2. Experience as part of Pentecostal hermeneutics

I stated in chapter 2, and throughout, that one of Smith's five key aspects of a Pentecostal worldview was an "affective, narrative epistemology" (2010, p.43). Through emotions and narratives, experience and knowledge can be transmitted. Experience plays a key role in Pentecostal practice and hermeneutics. I have shown how criticisms of subjectivism are mitigated through recourse to more than experience in the hermeneutical process.

Smith's suggestion (or contention) was corroborated through the research. In particular, in chapter 8, I talk about the experienced-infused interpretation that is presented in the data. Direct and indirect experience are clear informants for the hermeneutics of Elim lay leaders. Experience, however, does not fall neatly into one category of the triad, rather, it is evident in each. Most naturally, experience is part of the community aspect, particularly in the ways in which people learn from what they see and hear from others in their church (for instance). Experience is also closely linked to the way in which the Spirit works in the hermeneut, and the hermeneut responds to the Spirit. Less obviously, and linked with these two aspects, the Scriptural texts are read within the scope of the experience of the hermeneut. For instance, as quoted in chapter 7, regarding biblical interpretation: "I think about/reflect upon it, drawing upon all that God has taught/revealed to me over the past 50 or so years" (Respondent 24, e-survey).

If experience is an aspect that influences the Pentecostal hermeneut, then the criticisms levelled at subjectivism are brought into effect. Harrington and Patten argue that a subjective approach, for instance where the Holy Spirit is the only mediator between the text and the reader, is not assessable (1994, p.113). They go on to offer textual analysis as a control on subjectivity (1994, p.113). In chapter 6, I show evidence of how personal experience was brought into the process of biblical hermeneutics where a text is hard to understand. Yet, on the whole the Bible was seen as central to providing answers to such texts (for instance through localised, Pauline, Bible-wide contextual hermeneutics, along with non-specific Scriptural hermeneutics). Subjectivism was also briefly mentioned in chapter 8, in particular how it is mitigated through the community. Echoing Smith's affective aspect of a Pentecostal worldview (2010, p.43), a number of Pentecostal scholars have discussed the way in which emotions, which they want to keep central to the process, can be balanced with the mitigation of the dangers of subjectivism in a Pentecostal hermeneutic (Johns and Johns, 1992; Archer, 1996; Ellington, 1996; Pinnock, 2009; Davies, 2009b; Moore, 2013; Baker, 2013; Waddell, 2013; L.R. Martin, 2013a). On the whole, the role of the Spirit and community were argued as key mitigating factors, as I explored in chapter 4 and 5.

What we have seen however, is not a hermeneutic that is driven by experience, rather, experience is one of the layers that continues to inform, challenge and direct the Pentecostal hermeneut. The quote from Respondent 24 above, is also framed with



reference to the influence of the Holy Spirit and “checking”, indicating a more critical hermeneutic. The triad of the Scripture, Spirit and Community remains an essential part of Pentecostal hermeneutics. Through the triad, subjectivity is given mitigating parameters, and the place of experience, emotion and individual encounter, which were referred to by some of my respondents and participants, can find a meaningful place.

### 9.2.3. Biblical hermeneutics

Scripture, as one of the triad, is given theoretical prominence by those who argue for a Pentecostal hermeneutic, for instance, as seen with Archer’s account (Archer, 2004a). Where Archer utilises the historical practices of Pentecostals, Grey’s empirical research is more ethnographic in its approach, and equally highlights the centrality and authority of the Bible (Grey, 2011). My approach builds upon Archer’s theoretical claims and Grey’s empirical, supplementing their work through empirical research within a different context. When Elim Pentecostals address a topic, there is little surprise that the Bible remains central to their Pentecostal hermeneutics. Specifically, within biblical hermeneutics, there are many aspects that I will now draw together that my research has introduced, challenged and reinforced.

One of the issues of biblical hermeneutics that was frequently discussed and researched by Pentecostal scholars, is the topic of inerrancy. Some scholars highlighted that early Pentecostals were opposed to the idea of inerrancy (Hollenweger, 2000, p.10), some felt that it should not be that central an issue (Ellington, 1996, p.37), and others warned that it was too much of an Evangelical stance (Noel, 2010, p.226). Yet, just as the connection between North American Pentecostals and Evangelicals was made, so the connection between Elim and Evangelicals was formed. Amongst the many areas of influence this had (which can be argued as positives or negatives), the inerrancy of the Bible is inferred by Elim’s Foundational Truths (see chapter 4).

As I explained in chapter 6, most respondents, when asked to choose from a statement regarding their views of the Bible, opted for the statement which is best expressed as inerrant. Other responses within the e-survey of those who chose the statement that expresses literalism demonstrated that they generally practised an approach that is not necessarily literal. I would suggest that for Elim lay leaders, these distinctions in terminology are not as important as the way in which hermeneutics are actually practised in reference to the Bible. The Bible is held highly and considered as significantly

authoritative. As with *Figure 1* above though, where there is a tension, further aspects of biblical hermeneutics can be (and generally are) employed.

On a few occasions participants used the term “black and white” to propose both a clarity of the text and an authority. For some, this meant that a text (for instance, restrictive of women in ministry) was clarifying and should simply be accepted, whilst for others this introduced a tension with their experience, biblical hermeneutics and sense of the Spirit. An appeal to Scripture alone did not always provide a clear enough resolution for solving disputes, largely due to the differing views they each had regarding women in ministry. As previously mentioned, Keener describes a situation where two people hold opposing views and yet both claim that God has spoken to them (2016, p.106). He uses this and other examples as a springboard for asserting the important and primary role of the canon. Describing the process as a “hermeneutical circle” (2016, p.116), he explains how Scripture is read in the light of present circumstances, and how revelation is measured according to Scripture. The two go hand in hand. Within my empirical findings, Larry said: “Well for us...we felt Scripture had to be the basis, had to be the starting point and ultimately the destination point...” (FG2). Scripture, although not isolated, remained the measuring stick. As we saw in Larry’s example, Scripture was a necessary authority for their decision making, but in their case, was not sufficient “Scripture alone wasn’t going to win the argument” (Larry, FG2). Prayer and the guidance of the Holy Spirit, along with communal exploration and a desire for unity, enabled them as a church to agree to women ministers.

Another key aspect that we encountered in Pentecostal biblical hermeneutics was the appropriation of historical-grammatical approaches.<sup>106</sup> In my presentation of the academic writings concerning such approaches in chapter 4, I demonstrate the engagement Pentecostal academics have with them; for instance Martin (2013b) and Cartledge (2013). Within my focus groups (FGs) particularly, I was able to witness various uses of the historical-grammatical approach in dealing with the tensions experienced by the texts provided. Although there were differing levels of certainty about particular claims, references to Jewish and Greek culture, for instance, were employed in presenting hermeneutical options. Other approaches including context-specific, Pauline-specific and Bible-wide hermeneutics were used in ways that demonstrate both the importance of the

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<sup>106</sup> As I explain in chapter 4, I am using this term to encapsulate “Historical-cultural Analysis, Contextual Analysis, Lexical-syntactical analysis, Theological Analysis, and Literary Analysis”.

Bible, and the different ways in which tensions can be resolved. Historical-cultural and literary analyses were employed in discussions within the FGs, with Oliver saying: “I agree with Paul the apostle, but I think we need to situate this in the context, you know, Paul was all about trying to address some problem, some cultural problem, without being prescriptive” (FG3). The tension in the text they were discussing (1 Corinthians 14) was, for him and others in that group, alleviated through reference to an historical-cultural approach.

The use of such critical approaches was a means by which some participants and respondents were able to move beyond the tension they perceived in the text. However, for others, they only had some sense of an answer, for instance, in response to the 1 Timothy passage, one respondent said:

This is tricky but I think it’s more of how women were seen in society at the time. They were subservient to men and their place was considered in the home and raising the family. My belief this is one of those “human errors”.  
(Respondent 19, e-survey)

Other responses also indicated varying degrees of certainty, where the respondents felt that they had a handle on some understanding of the text. Where this was the case, they either preferred (or included) an alternative hermeneutical route. One such prominent hermeneutical ‘route’ included the work of the Holy Spirit.

#### 9.2.4. Role of the Spirit

Perceived tensions in texts and topics were often first addressed through some form of biblical hermeneutics. However, my research also demonstrates a frequent and compelling case for a Pentecostal hermeneutic that made reference to the role of the Spirit. This affirms Smith’s statement, that “pentecostal communities emphasize the continued ministry of the Spirit, including continuing revelation” (2010, p.38). Within the FGs and e-survey there were times when aspects that could be associated with the Spirit were prioritised, for instance a sense of calling. At other times the Spirit was only referenced when a biblical hermeneutic had not provided a way forward.

It was made clear that there is an expectation that the Holy Spirit will help the Pentecostal hermeneut to find a way forward when considering a text or topic. Although, as I will summarise below, the means by which the Holy Spirit enabled the hermeneuts to move forward differed. It is also worth noting that some respondents and participants were still working out their view regarding the topic of women in ministry (Respondent 9, e-survey). Whilst others felt that a recourse to the Spirit was not sufficient in their hermeneutic, with

Claire voicing this (as quoted in chapter 7): “it’s quite hard then to just say that the Holy Spirit makes me feel very at rest about certain opinions I have” (Claire, PFG).

Whether or not the tension from the text or topic was currently resolved for the Pentecostal hermeneuts, the role of the Spirit was still significant in the journey (which relates to my understanding of a Pentecostal methodology – see below and chapter 2). The presence of the Spirit in a changing or evolving situation gave hope and encouragement to the respondents and participants; with respondent 24 explaining how he drew upon “the past 50 years or so” of his walk with God (e-survey).

One clear way in which the Holy Spirit was involved in the hermeneutical process, was through prayer. Pentecostal academics who have largely looked at *prescribing* a Pentecostal hermeneutic have provided less detail in the way in which the Spirit is actually involved. For instance, Archer’s presentation of the way in which the Spirit’s voice is heard is intrinsically linked with the community, and he only briefly lists “prayer” as one of a list of communal activities (2004a, p.248). Likewise, Yong seems to actively avoid the word “prayer”, only occasionally using it. The closest reference he makes to prayer as an act of pneumatological hermeneutics, is when he quotes from other scholars (O’Collins and Kendall, 1997): “interpretation should be undertaken with prayer” (2002, p.313), which he then summarises as “suggestive of the pneumatic moment of biblical interpretation (2002, p.314). However, Grey, who presents a *description* of Pentecostal hermeneutics does say: “Pentecostal theology does not limit the encounter with God to reading biblical texts but allows for dynamic encounter with God through alternative vehicles such as prophetic words, **prayer** and creation” (my emphasis) (2011, p.51). Larry’s account of the way in which prayer was both individual and corporate in their situation, and how that formed a central part of their hermeneutical process, is good evidence of how Pentecostal communities can involve the Spirit in their hermeneutics (FG2).

Beyond prayer, the Spirit was invoked in the hermeneutical process, through such terms as “calling” and “gifting”. For some this was an indirect connection, where the gift of a particular woman to minister had been evidenced, for others this was a direct connection, where they as a woman, felt gifted and called to minister. As I demonstrated in chapter 7, the role of the Spirit in Pentecostal hermeneutics includes a more explicit involvement in the hermeneutical process (e.g. “willing to let the Spirit teach me” (Respondent 30, e-

survey)), and a less explicit involvement (for instance, where “calling” and “gifting” are referenced). Although these two aspects of the Spirit’s role are different, both are evidenced as influential in the hermeneutical practice of my participants and respondents.

“Calling” is also discussed by Grey as a central feature of Pentecostal experience, and something that encouraged her participants (2011, p.74). However, in her work, the link with Pentecostal hermeneutics is not evident. It is likely that the specific topic, women in ministry, used in my research, gave rise to the possibility of “calling” and “gifting” being avenues used in their hermeneutics. Likewise, the sense of being called, or used by God, is not explicitly made by Smith in his five aspects of a Pentecostal worldview (2010). Although it is possible to find room for it under the aspect of a “radical openness to God”, or even an “eschatological orientation to mission and justice”, I would suggest that the Pentecostal experience and expectation of being used by God is a significant aspect on its own, and evidenced in my research.

Apart from these experiential accounts of the Spirit’s role, there is also a pneumatological framework that some respondents indicated. As I explained in chapter 7, an approach to biblical hermeneutics can preference accounts of the Spirit’s activity. For instance, the inclusivity of the Acts and Galatians passages (as used in the e-survey and FGs) provided some respondents with an approach for dealing with the seemingly more restrictive passages (of 1 Corinthians and 1 Timothy). Their hermeneutics prioritised the Spirit (hence, pneumatological), and that framed their approach to other passages.

Elim Pentecostal lay leaders accept the historic activity of the Holy Spirit whilst also expecting ongoing present encounters. There is clear evidence that one of the ongoing roles of the Spirit is in the hermeneutical process. I have already suggested, and will later expand, that the Spirit envelopes all activities and is not (or should not be) seen in the restrictive light of simply one aspect of a hermeneutical triad.

#### 9.2.5. Role of the Community

As the final aspect of the triad to be considered, I should restate that there remains an interrelatedness across the various aspects already discussed when evidencing a Pentecostal hermeneutic. For many, the Scripture remains the first point of call for addressing a text or topic, and where there is a tension, then the Spirit and the community are more consciously engaged with. Yet, for some, the community is the first place in which

their hermeneutics are practised. For example, it is in the community of the local church where many are taught (through a sermon), or engage with others (through testimony or group Bible studies).

Thomas (1994) proposed the importance of the community in the Pentecostal hermeneutical process, this was further developed by Yong (2002), Archer (2004a) and Cartledge (2013) (to name a few), as they continued the discussion. Within my research, different aspects of community have been voiced in ways that help to flesh-out (or nuance) the larger triadic sphere of Community.

The relational aspect of local church influences the hermeneutical approach that some Elim lay leaders have. For Larry, he explains how it was within the community of the Church Session itself that the tension regarding women in ministry was resolved (whilst referencing the Scripture and the Spirit) (FG2). When talking about a group Bible study, Claire explained how she felt that in the ongoing process of her formation as a Christian, “people’s opinions sometimes actually add to that” (Claire, PFG). The community, in both its more formal (e.g. an organised group Bible study) and informal (e.g. chatting to someone else in a church meeting) settings, provide a place where there is a cross-examination and cross-germination of thoughts, ideas and interpretation. I suggest that the community is also a place where incorrect (heretical) interpretations are tempered and restrained. As Purdy says: “Community is guardian of the metanarrative that creates identity and as such protects against inappropriate individual interpretations” (2015, p.139). So, we find that here too, the danger of subjectivity (see also section 9.22 above) is mitigated.

In some settings the community will contain a “trained leader” (Purdy, 2015, ix), which in most Elim churches will include the Pastor (and may also include other members of the congregation). Such a trained leader will provide regular biblical teaching that may well cover contentious texts and topics. This was the exact case with one participant (Ken, FG2), who had preached on the 1 Corinthians 14 passage the week prior to the FG. The trained leader themselves will refer to a broader community (for instance commentaries) in the preparation of their message. Ken had done just that, discerning between study notes, choosing those that he was “happier with” (FG2). However in other examples from the research, there was more of an ambivalence towards the voice of the Pastor. Imogen issued caution responding to those who say “‘ahh it’s the Pastor, he speaks no wrong’, and

I think well he's a man" (FG1). The voice of the Pastor was generally accepted as having some authority, but that authority was by no means one of top-down or dictatorial proclamation. The "Pentecostal magisterium"<sup>107</sup> revolves around the Spirit (as I later argue).

I have also explored the place of an "experience-infused interpretation" in chapter 8, which helps reflect the importance of embodiment (where "bodies matter" (Smith, 2010, p.82)). It appears that experiences within the local church impact upon hermeneutics. Even within the constructed FGs, the body language and non-verbal cues were indicative of embodied people in relation to others. There was a respect for differing opinions (e.g. vocalising a disagreement whilst cautiously leaning back), as well as embodied affirmation of shared opinions (e.g. laughing, smiling, leaning forward). Beyond my own observations of embodied engagement, there were many descriptions of learning from one another in the meaningful place of relationship: the local church. This suggests that relationships (i.e. communities) do play a key role in Elim Pentecostal hermeneutics. Yet, one limiting factor of the FG's was the mixed-groups approach, where lay leaders from different churches interacted. I hypothesise that the new and tentative relationships within the FGs provided a place where disagreements were accepted more readily. I say this with two considerations in mind, firstly, the participants knew that they would end the discussion within one hour, so did not have the sense of responsibility to really work through any disagreements. Secondly, and related to the first, *some* of the disagreements were evidenced with a politeness that reflected this new relationship. Despite this, their narratives reinforced the role of relationships and embodiment from their own experiences. Both these dimensions (new relationships within the FGs, and narratives of existing relationships in the local church) add to the limited research that *describes* Pentecostal hermeneutics.<sup>108</sup>

Church Sessions work towards making decisions. For a number of participants, this was voiced as "unity" or "consensus". The challenge within a localised community is to continue to find a way forward where there may be disagreement over a particular topic. The testimonies of tension given, regarding the topic of women in ministry, was a good example of this. Some Sessions could not agree, and so either passively or actively no

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<sup>107</sup> A term used by Cartledge (2013, p.142) and Keener (2016, p.9) as they both make different points.

<sup>108</sup> In particular (Grey, 2011).

longer considered the topic; other Sessions found ways to agree, even if there was a dissatisfied unity. We will see in the next section how pragmatism was invoked in a way to move forward.

Once again, the FGs and e-survey have provided a rich source of data that has developed the triadic category of Community, and expressed a variety of ways in which Pentecostal hermeneutics are practised by individuals within a corporate body of faith. This *description* is not exhaustive, but indicative of a wide range of ways in which Elim lay leaders say and do their hermeneutics in relation to community.

#### 9.2.6. Pragmatism

In order to provide a unified account of the way in which Elim lay leaders talk about and practise their hermeneutics, I move beyond the triadic categories, to a description of how they relate to one another. Pragmatism is a key part to this process. Historically Elim has overcome tensions (or as Frestadius borrows: “epistemological crises” (2018, p.91)) through an adoption of “Pentecostal biblical pragmatism” (Frestadius, 2018, p.91). This historical account enables Frestadius to make theoretical claims regarding Elim and pragmatism, calling for further empirical research (2018, p.345). Although different to Frestadius’ focus, my research has demonstrated a variety of pragmatism in the practised hermeneutics of Elim lay leaders.

The most detailed account of what could be termed “Pentecostal pragmatism” or “Spirit-led pragmatism” was seen within Larry’s account of his Church Session process to accept women in ministry. As I detailed in chapter 7, Larry explains how those who had been opposed to women in ministry felt that the Spirit had released them to go with the acceptance of women in ministry. On the one hand, they had not changed their view of specific verses in the Bible; whilst on the other hand, they felt that the Spirit wanted them to move together in consensus. A pragmatic approach would find a way forward, a Spirit-led pragmatism found a way forward *because of* a sense of the Spirit’s leading. Their united decision was possible because they were open to the Spirit whilst desiring to find an outcome that would resolve the decision.

So far in this chapter I have summarised what has been learnt about Pentecostal hermeneutics from academic writings (chapters 4-5) and as a description of the way in which Elim lay leaders talk about and practise their hermeneutics (chapters 6-8). Whilst the



triad of Scripture, Spirit and Community have remained as specific areas in which Pentecostal hermeneutics operate, I have described the ways in which they are inter-related, as witnessed from my data. Specifically, I refer to emotions, experience and pragmatism. With this in mind, in the next section, I will set out a constructive proposal for Pentecostal hermeneutics.

### **9.3. A constructive proposal for Pentecostal hermeneutics**

Having now summarised the key findings of my thesis, in which a Pentecostal hermeneutic is set out, I want to present constructive proposals for developing such Pentecostal hermeneutics. I will do this firstly by engaging with the, by now well-known triad, then considering the role of pragmatism and Pentecostal methodology. Having provided this construction, I will then *pragmatically* suggest some ways forward.

As mentioned in chapter 2, according to Smith, no enquiry on the world is possible without a form of confessional theology, this he calls “theology<sup>1</sup>”. By this he means that everyone has a worldview, a header category, through which all reflections on the world are made (2004, p.177). It is my contention that the theology<sup>1</sup> for any activity of a Christian (not just a Pentecostal, although Pentecostals may verbalise this more openly) occurs within the realm or sphere of the Holy Spirit. As I mentioned in chapter 2 this is the case of my own research activity (e.g. Pentecostal methodology), and as seen with the respondents and participants, the Spirit was involved in their participation and their hermeneutics. So, I would argue that Pentecostal hermeneutics, which does not need to be limited to Pentecostals, is both open to and directed by the Spirit. This openness to the Spirit, or acceptance of His sphere of influence then informs every aspect of decision making (which I suggest is a “Pentecostal magisterium”). I would suggest that Pentecostals should be specifically open to the leading and guiding of influence of the Spirit, and as such I have included that graphically in *figure 1*, where the Spirit is not simply one option of hermeneutics, but also has an influence across the whole area of hermeneutics (and indeed life).

Similar to my discussion of Yong’s (2011, p.4) use of a redemptive and soteriological framework to help express Pentecostal hermeneutics (see Chapter 7), I would argue that Pentecostal hermeneutics needs to be faithful to a Holy Spirit framework that both inherently acknowledges freedom and is relational. I would firstly suggest that a Pentecostal hermeneutic needs to reflect the freedom and fluidity that is descriptive of the Holy Spirit and His activity in Scripture. For instance, the verse I quoted in chapter 3: “Now

the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom" (2 Corinthians 3:17), along with: "The wind blows where it wishes, and you hear its sound, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit" (John 3:8), provide a clear indication that freedom and fluidity is a concept integral to the working of the Spirit. Along with that understanding, the Baptism of the Spirit in Acts 2 demonstrates an inclusivity, an emancipation, liberation or freedom, that is experienced across ages, genders and social status. This freedom, as central to the Spirit's working, and central to the Baptism of the Spirit, should, I argue, be a framework in which Pentecostal hermeneutics operates.

Further discussion and exploration could be had in constructing the limitations to the understanding of the term 'freedom'. As Paul says in Galatians 5:13, "For you were called to freedom, brothers. Only do not use your freedom as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another." The concept of freedom is therefore constrained within its own framework, in accordance, I suggest, with the holiness and will of God. This relates to constructing a Pentecostal hermeneutics in so far as there is not a limitless freedom to interpret, rather, a framework within which interpretation should be contained. This would be safeguarded, to most extents, through recourse to the triad. Imogen, for instance, said that within church leadership you "can't have a free-for-all" (FG1), recognising that there have to be boundaries and structures. Similarly, Respondent 9 said that she was both "free" and under authority (e-survey). In these two cases we see a bounded understanding of freedom, rather than a limitless unrestricted freedom. I therefore argue that the bounded freedom, as seen in the responses, provides a similar bounded freedom to Pentecostal hermeneutics.

The interplay between Spirit (implicit or explicit, e.g. general openness or specific prayerful activity), Scripture and Community remain at the core of a balanced Pentecostal hermeneutic. My observation is that the nature of the interaction with the triad depends on the perceived tension of the text or topic. Yet despite this, I would argue that Pentecostals should regularly engage with all three aspects of the triad even when there is no perceived tension. Restricting the hermeneutical process to one or two of the triad will leave the hermeneut more open to error (for instance subjectivity) than engagement with all three. This brings in my second suggestion, that a Pentecostal hermeneutic should be relational. As onerous as this may sound, the Christian journey is fundamentally relational,

and I would suggest that all parties in that relationship would benefit from regular sharing of hermeneutical engagement. Esther explained this by saying: “I need to listen to other people, I need other people to pray and help me to understand this, that’s how I see it practically” (PFG). For many this would be in a small group discussion, Claire said, “I like when we are together doing Bible Study and people give me a different perspective” (PFG). I propose that Pentecostal hermeneutics is done *best* when done in relationship, relationships that include me-Spirit<sup>109</sup> and us-us<sup>110</sup> and us-Spirit.

Pentecostal Pragmatism as mentioned above, connects meaningfully with both areas of freedom and relationality. Firstly, freedom offers a scope in which a pragmatism can operate. Secondly, it is in relationship that pragmatism has been witnessed. The liberty and freedom that the Spirit brings to Pentecostal hermeneutics provides space in which pragmatism can be considered and practised. The: “it has seemed good to the Holy Spirit and to us” (Acts 15:28) along with Larry’s description of: “the Spirit has released me to go with this perspective” (FG2), demonstrates a Biblical precedent and a current practice of Pentecostal pragmatism. It is the Holy Spirit, along with the freedom He brings, that encourages Pentecostal to be *radically open*. In particular, I argue, to be open to hearing the voice of the Spirit in a fresh way when considering a topic or text. Yet, and this expands on my second point, the Spirit is essentially relational, and that too encourages a pragmatism. Relationships are built on mutuality and compromise. Those who are in relationship, and want to continue in relationship, when encountering a topic or text of tension, must find a way forward. Therefore pragmatism becomes a considerable practical means in which that relationship can progress. One example was given in the e-survey (and quoted in chapter 8), in which a relationship was maintained but in a different way:

Personally, this issue caused a family in a past church to leave us. Unable to reconcile past teaching and strong masculine views on leadership with my own or even Elim’s views. We parted well, still brothers in Christ just attending different Churches. (Respondent 30, e-survey)

In this example, there is a pragmatic solution to their theological impasse, the family move to another church. This contrasts those who, in Larry’s example, found a pragmatic

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<sup>109</sup> The relationship of God to Christians (and vice-versa) is predicated on our ontology (as created by God, whose being is different from ours). This ontology refers back to my observations in chapter 4, of Radical Orthodoxy as presented by Smith (2004).

<sup>110</sup> I would also suggest that the us-us relationship is not limited to Pentecostals, but finds value in the wider ecumenical community. Claire gave an example of her sister and brother-in-law who were both vicars (possibly Church of England, but she did not say); her example elicited many ‘wows’ from the others in the FG (PFG).

approach whilst remaining in the same church (FG2). Relationships that are centred on the Spirit could incorporate what I term as *Spirit-pragmatism*. This is a sense in which a way forward is provided through the guiding of the Holy Spirit.

As much as I am proposing that these areas of freedom and relationality are key to Pentecostal hermeneutics, these proposals were also evidenced in my research. Whilst relationality is implied within the Community aspect of the triad, freedom is seldom discussed in the literature,<sup>111</sup> although Smith's "radical openness" applies here (2010). My focus on these two as aspects of a Holy Spirit framework provide evidenced (descriptive accounts from my research) and proposed areas in which Pentecostal hermeneutics should be constructed and developed.

#### **9.4. Ways forward**

##### **9.4.1. Academically**

There are certain areas that this research has touched upon that require further academic consideration and research. For instance, my description of Pentecostal methodology (in chapter 2) suggests an openness to the Spirit that affects Pentecostal researchers as well as Pentecostal research.<sup>112</sup> My own journey in this research has been one of openness to the Holy Spirit; from the initial promptings of the Spirit to engage with the research journey, to my ongoing sense of the Spirit's presence each step of the way. Furthermore, there has been evidence of the Spirit's involvement in even arranging the FG's (see my testimony describing this in chapter 3). Yet, as much as I have been aware of the Pentecostal methodology during my research, and as much as I hope to continue to outline this further in other publications, I appreciate that there will be some uncertainty in the academy regarding such a methodology. There will both be natural concerns regarding subjectivism and concerns regarding the claims of the ongoing and present involvement of God. The second concern would be of no particular surprise to Pentecostal academics, whilst the first concern is equally relatable to the charge of subjectivism that Pentecostal hermeneutics has already engaged with (see section on experience above). I expect that Pentecostal methodology, which is implicit in Pentecostal empirical research presently, will become more explicit and discussed following this and subsequent research.

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<sup>111</sup> Clark touches on it briefly, saying that more exploration should be done in this area (1997, p.178)

<sup>112</sup> I am currently in the process of writing a paper on this, having interviewed other Pentecostal academics.

I would also suggest that further empirical research should be carried out on the ways in which freedom and relationality are practised in Pentecostal hermeneutics. Despite a number of theories on pneumatological and Spirit hermeneutics, the areas of freedom and relationality are not really covered. Empirical research looking at the way in which the Spirit is engaged with and invoked by Pentecostals in their hermeneutics, individually and corporately, would further enhance my suggestions above. This would not only enable a greater academic discourse on the role of the Spirit, but could help grassroots Pentecostal hermeneutics find a voice and find validation.

#### 9.4.2. For Elim / Pentecostals

This thesis has related to a variety of writings that reflect classical Pentecostalism across the globe. However, primarily the study was rooted within the Elim Pentecostal movement in the UK. As such the findings relate both globally and locally. My own understanding of Elim's national position regarding women in ministry still demonstrates variance with its grassroots (or at least lay leader) practice. Fundamentally this remains an issue of hermeneutics, although it is also an issue of training, communication and relational engagement. As such, there may be opportunities to share my findings, perhaps even having regional workshops on hermeneutics, examining practice and possibilities (based on *Figure 1*).

Thinking back to Kočí's paradigm shift that, through a crisis, provided the impetus for a new way forward to be explored. I suggest that Elim still needs a paradigm shift in its local churches. This shift needs to be based upon such a form of Pentecostal hermeneutics as I have presented here. The crisis of inequality that women faced within Elim came to a head less than 20 years ago (when women were finally accepted for ordination), however there are still too many individual crises that cry out for a paradigm shift. As this continues, my hope is that there will be a paradigm shift enabled by the paraclete! Elim therefore, must engage with the challenges of a hermeneutic that accepts the inclusive sphere of the Holy Spirit, especially probing the freedom of the Spirit, the role of relationality and the place of Spirit-pragmatism. The practical challenge, for Elim, will be to engage the local churches in this process.

#### 9.4.3. What this means for women

Elim is a movement that engages with Scripture, is open to the Holy Spirit, and has a sense of community. In particular I sense that there is a desire for greater freedom of the Spirit in

the movement. I argue that the freedom that we allow each person to operate in their gift and calling, and this particularly relates to women, can restrict or release the freedom of the Spirit in other areas. As Davies says: “freedom must not be restricted to one limited context - the universal Spirit brings a universal freedom” (2011, p.59). I call upon Elim leaders (from the National leaders to lay leaders) to consider their views on women in light of Pentecostal hermeneutics.

The freedom of the Spirit should entail the freedom for women to minister according to God’s calling and gifting. A restrictive hermeneutical approach regarding a few texts needs the light of the Spirit to illuminate all the various facets of a Pentecostal hermeneutic as described in this thesis. If such a Pentecostal hermeneutic was adopted, then women would not face the limitations that they still often do. Whilst I have no doubt that many who oppose women in ministry within Elim Pentecostalism do so from a genuine love of the Bible, I call upon them to consider also other aspects of Pentecostal hermeneutics, in particular the relationality and freedom offered through the Spirit and the Community.

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## **APPENDICES**

### **11.1. Appendix 1**

#### **11.1.1. Electronic Survey**



## Church Session hermeneutics survey

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### Page 1: Women in ministry

You are being invited to participate in a research study titled Elim Church Sessions : Women in Ministry and Biblical Interpretation. This study is being done by Elim Minister Jamys Carter from the University of Leeds.

The purpose of this research study is to see if there is any disparity between Elim's official position on women in ministry (ordained) and the views of local Church Session members. In particular I am interested in discovering the way that individuals and Church Sessions come to a decision regarding women in ministry, and how the Bible is used in that process. I am using the term "women in ministry" to refer to ordained ministry, therefore women Pastors (including Assistant Ministers, Associate Ministers and Ministers in Training).

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary.

The more detail you can give, the more helpful it will be to this research. Most questions require an answer. This survey will take approximately 20 minutes.

We believe there are no known risks associated with this research study; however, as with any online related activity the risk of a breach is always possible. To the best of our ability your participation in this study will remain confidential, and only anonymised data will be published. Further information is available with the information sheet supplied with the link to this survey. If you require a copy of that and for any other information, please contact me : [prjic@leeds.ac.uk](mailto:prjic@leeds.ac.uk)

Please be as honest as you can with each answer.

These questions are in reference to the Elim church in which you currently serve.

Thanks for your time, be blessed.

1. Are there any women Pastors (ordained or Ministers in Training) in your church currently? \* *Required*

- Yes
- No

2. Has there ever been a female Pastor in your church? (Tick all that apply) \* *Required*

- No
- Yes - MIT / Assistant
- Yes - Associate
- Yes - Senior Pastor

3. Would you welcome a female Pastor in your church? (Tick all that apply) \* *Required*

- No
- Yes - as an MIT / Assistant
- Yes - as an Associate
- Yes - as the Senior Pastor

4. Do you think there should be a woman on the NLT (National Leadership Team)? \* *Required*



- Yes
- No

4.a. Please add any comments to support your answer: \* Required

5. Is it Scriptural for a woman to hold a leadership role in the church? \* Required

- Yes – any leadership position
- Yes – almost any leadership position, other than senior pastor
- No - no leadership positions
- Other

5.a. If you selected Other, please explain:

6. What kind of literature have you read regarding women in ministry? (tick all that apply) \* Required

- Magazine articles
- Academic journal articles
- Books
- Other

6.a. Give examples:

6.b. If you selected Other, please specify:

## Page 2: Church Session

7. Has your Church Session previously declined accepting a woman minister? (Either by not interviewing them or by not giving them the position). \* *Required*

- No
- Yes
- Don't know

7.a. If yes, please give some reasons for this decision

8. Regarding the views of women in ministry within your Session: To what extent do you find yourself in agreement / disagreement with other members of the church session? \* *Required*

8.a. Optional comments:

8.b. If you selected Other, please specify:

9. As a Session, when you come to make any decision, rate the order of importance that you think is being considered: (With "1" being the most important, and "6" being the least important.) \* *Required*

|   | 1                        | 2                        | 3                        | 4                        | 5                        | 6                        |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| The voice of the Pastor                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| The voice of Scripture                    | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| The voice of the past                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| The voice of the Spirit                   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| The voice of other members of the Session | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Other                                     | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

9.a. If "other" please explain:

10. Does your Church have a written policy regarding the scope of ministry open to women? *Optional*

Yes  
 No

### Page 3: Biblical Interpretation

11. Here are four statements about the Bible, which is closest to your own view? \*  
Required

- The Bible is God's Word, and is meant to be taken literally, word for word.
- The Bible is God's Word, and all it says is true, but not all of it is meant to be taken literally.
- The Bible was written by people, inspired by God, but contains some human errors.
- The Bible is a good book because it was written by wise people, but God had nothing to do with it.

12. Consider the following verse: "I do not permit a woman to teach or have authority over a man, she must be silent" (1 Timothy 2:12 NIV) Considering the issue of women in ordained ministry, what does this verse mean to you? \* Required

12.a. How important is this verse to you in deciding what you think about women in ministry? (On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 indicates high importance and 5 low importance).  
\* Required

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

Please select at least 1 answer(s).

|                    | 1                        | 2                        | 3                        | 4                        | 5                        |                   |
|--------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| High<br>importance | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Low<br>importance |

13. Consider the following verse: "In the last days, God says, I will pour out my Spirit on all people. Your sons and daughters will prophesy, your young men will see visions, your old men will dream dreams. Even on my servants, both men and women, I will pour out my Spirit in those days, and they will prophesy." (Acts 2:17-18 NIV) Considering the issue of women in ordained ministry, what does this verse mean to you? \* Required

13.a. How important is this verse to you in deciding what you think about women in ministry? (On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 indicates high importance and 5 low importance). \* Required

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

Please select at least 1 answer(s).

|                    | 1                        | 2                        | 3                        | 4                        | 5                        |                   |
|--------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|
| High<br>importance | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Low<br>importance |

14. Consider the following verse: "Women should remain silent in the churches. They are not allowed to speak, but must be in submission, as the law says. If they want to enquire about something, they should ask their own husbands at home; for it is disgraceful for a woman to speak in the church." (1 Cor 14:34-35 NIV) Considering the issue of women in ordained ministry, what does this verse mean to you? \* Required

14.a. How important is this verse to you in deciding what you think about women in ministry? (On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 indicates high importance and 5 low importance).

\* Required

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

Please select at least 1 answer(s).

|                 | 1                        | 2                        | 3                        | 4                        | 5                        |                |
|-----------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| High importance | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Low importance |

15. Consider the following verse: "There is neither Jew nor Gentile, neither slave nor free, nor is there male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus." (Gal 3:28 NIV) Considering the issue of women in ordained ministry, what does this verse mean to you?

\* Required

15.a. How important is this verse to you in deciding what you think about women in ministry? (On a scale of 1 to 5, where 1 indicates high importance and 5 low importance).

\* Required

Please don't select more than 1 answer(s) per row.

Please select at least 1 answer(s).

|                 | 1                        | 2                        | 3                        | 4                        | 5                        |                |
|-----------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|----------------|
| High importance | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | Low importance |

16. Are there any other passages that you consider important when considering the issue of women in ministry? *Optional*

17. Please try to explain how you interpret any Biblical passage: \* *Required*

18. Please use this space for any comments you wish to make on issues raised or relevant to the topic of this survey:



## Page 4: General Information

19. Do you live in Britain? \* Required

- Yes
- No

20. D2) In which Region is your Church? \* Required

- Scotland
- Wales and South West Midlands
- Southern
- North Midlands and North West
- Metropolitan East
- North East
- Midlands
- London City
- Metropolitan West
- Prefer not to say

21. What role do you have in a Church Session? \* Required

- Elder
- Deacon
- Other
- Prefer not to say

21.a. If you selected Other, please specify:

22. Age? \* Required

- 18-30
- 31-40
- 41-50
- 51-60
- 61-70
- 71-80
- 81+
- Prefer not to say

23. Gender? \* Required

- Female
- Male
- Prefer not to say

24. Do you have any academic theological training?

- No
- Yes
- Prefer not to say

24.a. If 'Yes' please explain:

25. What is your ethnic group? (Choose one option that best describes your ethnic group or background) (*This question is optional*)

See below

25.a. White:

- 1. English / Welsh / Scottish / Northern Irish / British
- 2. Irish
- 3. Gypsy or Irish Traveller
- 4. Any other White background, please describe

25.a.i. More description: *Optional*

25.b. Mixed / Multiple ethnic groups:

- 5. White and Black Caribbean
- 6. White and Black African
- 7. White and Asian
- 8. Any other Mixed / Multiple ethnic background, please describe

25.b.i. More description: *Optional*

**25.c.** Asian / Asian British :

- 9. Indian
- 10. Pakistani
- 11. Bangladeshi
- 12. Chinese
- 13. Any other Asian background, please describe

**25.c.i.** More description: *Optional***25.d.** Black / African / Caribbean / Black British :

- Black / African / Caribbean / Black British
- 14. African
- 15. Caribbean
- 16. Any other Black / African / Caribbean background, please describe

**25.d.i.** More description: *Optional***25.e.** Other ethnic group:

- 17. Arab
- 18. Any other ethnic group, please describe

**25.e.i.** More description: *Optional*



## Page 5: Finally

If you are willing to be considered to take part in a Focus Group with other Elim Deacons and Elders (or equivalent), exploring issues raised from this survey and related topics, to be held during the Elim Leadership Summit of 2018, please click on this link to go to a separate form:

<https://leeds.onlinesurveys.ac.uk/focus-group-response>

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

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## Key for selection options

**8 - Regarding the views of women in ministry within your Session: To what extent do you find yourself in agreement / disagreement with other members of the church session?**

We all agree

There is a mixture of opinions

There is one voice that disagrees with the rest

Other

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**11.2. Appendix 2****11.2.1. Survey to indicate a desire to participate in a Focus Group**

## PhD survey (focus group response)

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### Page 1: Focus Group contact information

1. Please enter an email address, phone number and name if you are willing to be considered to take part in a Focus Group with other Elim Deacons and Elders (or equivalent), exploring issues raised from this survey and related topics. This is expected to be held at the Elim Leadership Summit of 2018.

[+ More info](#)

Page 2: End

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.

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### 11.3. Appendix 3

#### 11.3.1. Outline of questions used in Focus Groups

*The Focus Groups were semi-structured. The questions below are given as a sample of ones I asked, they are taken directly from the transcripts of the focus group discussions.*

**Jamys:** Have you ever been present in a church session meeting when the discussion on women in ministry came up at all? And when I talk about women in ministry I mean ordained ministry rather than lay ministry.

**Jamys:** let's have a look at a passage now, what I've done is put the key verses in bold.....Acts 2, read...What I want us to consider, is particularly vs 17-18 do they inform, should they be used, do they help the whole area of whether or not women should be in ordained ministry. So if this was to come up as a discussion in a Bible study in your church, then put in your thoughts.

**Jamys:** Great, well, anyone want to add anything more to that before we move on to another passage?

Ok. ....Have a read of that, thinking again how this is related to women in ministry.

[Timothy passage]

**Jamys:** How do we resolve those tensions? What's the voice of authority? Is it the voice of the Pastor? Is it the voice of Scripture, which we have seen the tension between Scriptures. Voice of the Spirit? Voice of the Church? Voice of Elim? Where would you say...how would you use those different areas of authority to help resolve such topics?

**Jamys:** [clarifying] It was more 'how do we resolve the tension in our churches?', if someone saying women should and someone saying women shouldn't. What carries the most authority to convince the argument? [*silence*]

What role does the Holy Spirit have to play in that?

**Jamys:** Let's wrap it up...one final thought each