

INTRODUCTION

A robustly theological hermeneutic is one that aims at interpreting the totality of human experience – and that includes God and God’s relationships with human selves and the world as a whole – from a perspective that is specifically and explicitly grounded in faith.

– Amos Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community* (2002)¹

Offering an account of the development of Pentecostal theological hermeneutics presupposes an understanding of what constitutes Pentecostalism. It also requires an understanding of what it means for theology to be Pentecostal theology, as well as an understanding of theological hermeneutics. The purpose of this introduction is to explain my use of each of these terms as well as provide additional background information that will clarify the orientation of this project.

The typology that will be used in what follows is analogous to Henry May’s account of the forms the Enlightenment took in America in his *The Enlightenment in America*. May argues that the Enlightenment in America is better seen not as a single set of events but as four sets of events, as four intellectual movements which integrated themselves into American intellectual, religious, political and social life. Of these four movements, May claims: “Such categories are not, of course, immutable and final, they are organizing devices to be pragmatically tested...I hope that these four may make it easier to think about a large and complex portion of American intellectual history.”² By recognizing that he is offering tentative categories for approaching a particular subject in intellectual history, May is acknowledging that they are not completely determinative. He is making the more modest claim that they are good and generally helpful categories for engaging a complex matter. It is my hope to do a similar thing for Pentecostal theological hermeneutics. Rather than assuming that all Pentecostal approaches to hermeneutics fit into one broad category, I will provide

¹ Amos Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective* (Aldershot, UK and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2002), 6.

² Henry May, *The Enlightenment in America* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1976), xvi.

categories for understanding what Pentecostal hermeneutics, as theological hermeneutics, has been, and for what it is becoming. I will follow this typology with a brief constructive proposal that suggests a direction for the future of Pentecostal theological hermeneutics along the contours of hermeneutical realism. That I approach Pentecostal theology using the framework of theological *hermeneutics*, that doing theology is an act of interpreting one's world, implies that understanding and discourse are, by nature, hermeneutical. The typology used in this project exhibits this understanding of theology as I seek to account for how each major Pentecostal hermeneutical type has arisen and developed.

1. *Theological Hermeneutics, Paradigms and Interdependence*

Throughout this project I make the important assumption that any given set of hermeneutical habits, strategies or principles is in a relationship of mutual dependence with other beliefs about reality, including theological or doctrinal, as well as anthropological, metaphysical and epistemological affirmations. I hold that these affirmations mutually inform and reinforce one another within different theological paradigms. In fact, the types of Pentecostal theological hermeneutics that will be discussed in this project can be viewed as distinct theological paradigms. In making this assumption, I am also claiming that the set of epistemic principles guiding the forms of belief for a given theological paradigm, and the ontology which sustains the paradigm, are interdependent. This strongly resists the modern epistemological project's claim that it is *the* first philosophy, although it still recognizes the primacy that belief forming habits can have at any given moment. Rather, the quest to know which claims to truth are trustworthy and which are not go hand-in-hand with a pre-understanding of what is true and what is not. Thus, I will be operating with a view that while epistemic structure guides us into how to discern what is true from what is not, these structures are sustained and informed by layers of beliefs leading all the way back to an understanding of what is, ultimately, real, an assumed ontology. And so I hold that epistemology is based on our *pistis*, on what we have found to be faithfully real and true. Together, our pre-understandings and epistemic habits form paradigms from which we interpret reality – they become our hermeneutics. Like all of life, paradigms or hermeneutics are dynamic. And when these paradigms shift – when they develop to the point where core beliefs, habits or strategies are changed – they require new