

## The Holy Spirit: A Helper in Pentecostal Research Endeavours

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### Abstract

Pentecostals acknowledge the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit in all areas of their lives, often narrating this in forms of testimonies. Pentecostal academics likewise experience the leading of the Holy Spirit both towards the research endeavour and during the actual research. Whilst narrative and testimony have been commonly used by such academics, the specific acknowledgment of the role of the Holy Spirit in the research process has generally not been made evident. This paper uses semi-structured interviews to explore the experiences of Pentecostal academics regarding the leading of the Holy Spirit towards and during their research, as well as the lack of published acknowledgment of that leading. This paper argues for making explicit a Pentecostal approach that acknowledges the role of the Holy Spirit in Pentecostal research.

**Keywords:** Research, Pentecostal, Charismatic, Pneumatology

### Introduction

To claim that the Holy Spirit does, or should, play a central role in the life of a Pentecostal, is non-contentious. According to Smith, one aspect of a Pentecostal worldview, is a radical openness to God.<sup>1</sup> This distinctive, whilst not limited to Pentecostalism, should be evident within Pentecostal academic research. Pentecostals believe in the ongoing involvement of the Holy Spirit in their life. As such, it would be reasonable to expect that Pentecostal academics likewise desire the Holy Spirit to guide them and be involved in their academic pursuits. This paper contends for a Pentecostal approach to research, which emphasises: 1) The way the Holy Spirit leads the researcher *towards* a research endeavour, and, 2) The way the Holy Spirit leads the researcher *during* a research endeavour, and 3) The need to acknowledge, through explicit writing in academic publications, that leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit. This paper will provide some empirical research that evidences these points, whilst also seeking to encourage discussion and refinement from continued academic engagement.

In recent decades there have been attempts to challenge the disinterested or objective approaches to research which were based upon modernistic methodologies. Many Pentecostal scholars can be included in this move away from a modernist worldview to embrace new approaches.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> James K.A. Smith, *Thinking in Tongues: Pentecostal Contributions to Christian Philosophy.*, Pentecostal Manifestos (Grand Rapids, Mich: William B. Eerdmans Pub. Co, 2010), 12.

<sup>2</sup> See Scott Ellington, "Pentecostalism and the Authority of Scripture," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 4, no. 9 (1 October 1996): 16–38; Veli-Matti Karkkainen, "Pentecostal Hermeneutics in the Making: On the Way from Fundamentalism to Postmodernism," *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological*

Within my own journey, as I sought to acknowledge an impassioned position in my research, I found some academic justification in Feminist Standpoint theory. This theory values “locatedness,”<sup>3</sup> acknowledging individual perspectives, arguing that activities and experiences are epistemically valuable.<sup>4</sup> My awareness of this theory enabled me, academically, to justify my own approach as a Pentecostal<sup>5</sup> who found value in an epistemology that incorporated experience. The experience of ‘Pentecost’ highlights the biblical description of the “day of Pentecost” (Acts 2) and the subsequent experiences of the Spirit as central in the formation of contemporary Pentecostal spirituality and theology, rather than adherence to any specific Pentecostal movement.<sup>6</sup>

Within Pentecostal practices (including academic writings),<sup>7</sup> experience is often related through testimonies and narratives.<sup>8</sup> Smith also suggests that another aspect of a Pentecostal worldview is: “Affective, narrative epistemology,”<sup>9</sup> in which he argues that part of Pentecostal knowledge creation is through shared experiences and stories. These acknowledgments of the way in which experiences of God (locatedness and narrative) are discussed and used in academic writings have yet to take a more self-reflective step. By this, I mean that Pentecostal scholars rarely *acknowledge* the leading of the Spirit *towards* and *during* their actual research journey.

My own testimony highlights an historic and continuing sense in which the Holy Spirit has guided me, even to write this paper. Initial conversations with one of my PhD supervisors a couple of years ago opened my awareness to the leading and working of the Holy Spirit not just in pursuing research, but in the act of researching itself. This led

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*Association* 18, no. 1 (April 1998): 76–115; Jacqueline Grey, *Three’s a Crowd: Pentecostalism, Hermeneutics, and the Old Testament*. (Eugene, Or: Pickwick Publications, 2011), 50; Lee Roy Martin, “Introduction to Pentecostal Biblical Hermeneutics,” in Lee ROy Martin (ed) *Pentecostal Hermeneutics: A Reader* (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 1–9; Jackie D. Johns, “Pentecostalism and the Postmodern Worldview,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 3, no. 7 (1995): 73–96; James K. A. Smith, *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy: Mapping a Post-Secular Theology*. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2004), 95.

<sup>3</sup> Joey Sprague, *Feminist Methodologies for Critical Researchers: Bridging Differences*. (Walnut Creek, CA; Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), 41.

<sup>4</sup> Susan Hekman, “Truth and Method: Feminist Standpoint Theory Revisited,” *Signs* 22, no. 2 (1997): 341–65.

<sup>5</sup> Being both an ordained minister within the Elim Pentecostal movement in the UK, and a researcher of the same movement: Jamys J. Carter, “A Critical Analysis of the Pentecostal Hermeneutics Used by Elim Local Church Leadership Teams in Relation to the Topic of Women in Ministry” (Leeds, UK, University of Leeds, 2019); Jamys J. Carter, “An Historical Overview of Women in Ministry within the Elim Pentecostal Church in the First Half of the Twentieth Century,” *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association*, 23 August 2018, 1–14; Jamys J. Carter, “An Historical Overview of Women in Ministry within the Elim Pentecostal Church in the Second Half of the Twentieth Century (Part 2),” *Journal of the European Pentecostal Theological Association*, 30 October 2018, 1–14; Jamys J. Carter, “Women in Ministry within the Elim Foursquare Gospel Alliance,” (MA by Research thesis, University of Leeds, 2016).

<sup>6</sup> Although I use the term “Pentecostal,” I am quite willing to accept “pneumatological” or “Holy Spirit” methodology in its place.

<sup>7</sup> Frank D. Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit: A Global Pentecostal Theology*. (Grand Rapids, Mich: Zondervan, 2006); Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions*. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000).

<sup>8</sup> Smith, *Thinking in Tongues*, 50–51.

<sup>9</sup> Smith, 43.

me to dedicating a section of my PhD thesis to Pentecostal methodology.<sup>10</sup> On completion of the thesis, I continued to explore these initial thoughts, and interviewed a few Pentecostal academics to hear their own thoughts and practices regarding the leading of the Spirit in their research. I believe that the Holy Spirit led and inspired initial conversations with my supervisor and has continued to prod me towards writing this paper.

As an academic researcher and as a Pentecostal, my experience testifies to the ongoing involvement of the Spirit in the selection and process of researching. Although my Pentecostal colleagues have testified to their calling to research, they do not provide explicit mention of the way in which the Spirit was leading, directing or inspiring their current research.<sup>11</sup> Their testimonies implicitly suggest that the Spirit was leading, and, if asked, they would acknowledge this experience; however, generally no explicit written space had been given to the role of the Spirit, nor discussion of *how* the Spirit worked in their research activity.

I will now consider the extent in which the Holy Spirit is acknowledged in the selection of the research topic and acknowledged in the ongoing activity of that research. In order to do this, I will refer first to the publications of Pentecostal academics, then I will draw upon data from some interviews with Pentecostal academics. These will highlight my contention that the written acknowledgment of the role of the Holy Spirit thus far has generally been limited to, at most, the leading towards a particular research endeavour.

### ***Literary Study of Pentecostal Approaches to Research***

This call for an explicit Pentecostal approach to research comes at a time when, in my estimation, Pentecostal scholarship has been sufficiently established. Yet, despite this, the development of Pentecostal scholarship is still relatively new.<sup>12</sup> It was important for the pioneers of Pentecostal scholarship to establish themselves (and Pentecostal scholarship) as academically viable. Clark suggests the challenge of the 1970s-80s for Pentecostal study was: 'how to incorporate their new-found experiential dimension of Christianity into the theological frameworks of their traditions.'<sup>13</sup> This challenge was part of the view that Pentecostal faith was anti-intellectual.<sup>14</sup> It is reasonable to believe that the process by which Pentecostal academics were accepted was to adopt recognised current methodologies, and prove their worth with these. McKay talks about his own faith journey within the academy and indicates the tension he experienced with

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<sup>10</sup> "A Critical Analysis of the Pentecostal Hermeneutics Used by Elim Local Church Leadership Teams in Relation to the Topic of Women in Ministry" (Leeds, UK, University of Leeds, 2019), 21.

<sup>11</sup> Some scholars do talk about being led towards specific research topics, for instance: William Foster, "Doing Ethnographic Ecclesiology: Findings and Reflexive Considerations on a 6-Year Study" (Ecclesiology and Ethnography Conference, Durham, UK, 2018).

<sup>12</sup> A. Yong, "Pentecostalism and the Theological Academy," *Theology Today* 64, no. 2 (1 July 2007): 244–50.

<sup>13</sup> Mathew Clark, "What Is Distinctive about Pentecostal Theology? 22 Years Later," (GloPent Conference, Birmingham, UK, 2009), 1.

<sup>14</sup> Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody, Mass: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 194; Marius Nel, "Rather Spirit-Filled than Learned! Pentecostalism's Tradition of Anti-Intellectualism and Pentecostal Theological Scholarship," *Verbum et Ecclesia* 37, no. 1 (25 May 2016): 3.

his own sense of the Spirit's leading, saying how he was: "unhappy about the sort of dispassionate, uncommitted theology one frequently encounters in an academic setting."<sup>15</sup> He goes on in more detail:

The academic task requires that one stand, as it were, offstage, like a critic or reviewer, so that one can observe the drama with the more objective eye of scholarship, whereas the Holy Spirit draws one on stage with the actors...Ideally, I suppose, it ought to be possible to do both...but in the critical atmosphere of academic theology the tension is considerable, often even unbearable.<sup>16</sup>

McKay's struggle with the tension of his new-found Spirit-led faith and the recognised methodological practices of academic theological scholarship, eventually led him to continue his career with a more "prophetic" focus.<sup>17</sup> Had there been a Pentecostal methodology openly discussed within the academy, then perhaps McKay would have found it less "unbearable." As Hollenweger later suggested: "we might discover that it is possible to speak in tongues and be a critical scholar."<sup>18</sup> Yet, while Pentecostal scholarship is established, the question regarding the extent in which Pentecostal scholars have cultivated and acknowledged the role of the Holy Spirit in the academic process needs to be considered.

In reviewing the published works of Pentecostal scholars, my goal was to look for *acknowledgment* of the working of the Holy Spirit in the research process, which I term "Pentecostal approach."<sup>19</sup> Within current publications of Pentecostal academics, the primary form of acknowledging the activity of the Holy Spirit has tended to be through the use of testimonies, such as exemplified in the work of Amos Yong<sup>20</sup> and Frank Macchia.<sup>21</sup> There has only been one book dedicated to the testimonies of Pentecostal academics, where 10 academics take a chapter each to write a testimony of their call.<sup>22</sup> While primarily focused on spiritual and vocational expression, some do touch on Pentecostal approaches to research: the ways in which Pentecostals are led by the Spirit in their research. For instance, Thomas describes some challenges he had with the current 'methodological approaches,' and mentions how he would discuss different

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<sup>15</sup> John McKay, "When the Veil Is Taken Away: The Impact of Prophetic Experience on Biblical Interpretation," *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 2, no. 5 (1994): 17–40.

<sup>16</sup> McKay, 35.

<sup>17</sup> McKay, 28.

<sup>18</sup> Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism*, 199.

<sup>19</sup> I considered the use of "Pentecostal methodology" as used in my PhD thesis, however this did not fully encapsulate the holistic role of the Holy Spirit in the whole research process of the Pentecostal academic.

<sup>20</sup> Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*. See also Gordon Fee, *Listening to the Spirit in the Text* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), and Craig S. Keener, *Gift & Giver: The Holy Spirit for Today* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2001).

<sup>21</sup> Macchia, *Baptized in the Spirit*.

<sup>22</sup> Steven M. Fettke and Robby Waddell, eds., *Pentecostals in the Academy: Testimonies of Call*. (Cleveland, Tenn: CPT Press, 2012).

options that Pentecostals could have in approaching biblical studies.<sup>23</sup> He later goes on to explain how he has experienced “divine leading” in particular research projects.<sup>24</sup> From the study of Pentecostal academic literature, one of the clearest expressions of the involvement of the Spirit in the academic pursuits of Pentecostals comes from Marius Nel, who says: “The Holy Spirit speaks as well in the scholarly pursuits where embodiment seeks the expressions of Charismatic life. The Pentecostal scholar is not an objective observer only; she or he always actively and passionately participates in the research.”<sup>25</sup> Here he acknowledges the activity of the Spirit towards scholars, as well as the faith-infused research of the Pentecostal scholar. These statements again highlight the clear view that Pentecostal scholars bring their faith to their research. Despite these brief mentions, what is generally lacking in current publications is an explicit expression of a Pentecostal approach.

Therefore, having established that there is little written acknowledgment of the explicit way in which the Holy Spirit is active in Pentecostal research endeavours, I will now look at some interviews with Pentecostal academics in which I explore their own experiences and writings.

### ***Qualitative Study of Pentecostal Researchers***

Considering the dearth of written material on the role of the Holy Spirit in the activity of Pentecostal researchers, this following section analyses a number of interviews I conducted with Pentecostal scholars to explore their experience of the Holy Spirit within their research journey. I interviewed three academics (Jacqueline Grey,<sup>26</sup> Simo Frestadius<sup>27</sup> and Caleb Nyanni<sup>28</sup>), all who were known to me personally. Whilst looking for a sense of qualitative saturation in their responses, I also felt the Spirit’s involvement in this small-scale survey. I will split the remainder of this section into the three parts of inquiry used in the semi-structured interviews, which also reflects the three themes that emerged, of identifying and acknowledging the working of the Holy Spirit before, during and after the research activity.

Within the interviews, all three participants expressed that they believed the Holy Spirit had inspired them to undertake their research and to develop their calling as a researcher. Nyanni described his PhD research as: “born out of a prompting of the Holy Spirit” (Interview, CN). Frestadius was more cautious in approaching the topic, casing his answer in a framework of “theistic,” “Christian” and “Pentecostal,” finally saying: “the

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<sup>23</sup> John Christopher Thomas, “In My Life,” in Steven M. Fettke and Robby Waddell (ed) *Pentecostals in the Academy: Testimonies of Call* (Cleveland, TN: CPT Press, 2012), 165.

<sup>24</sup> Thomas, 170.

<sup>25</sup> Nel, “Rather Spirit-Filled than Learned! Pentecostalism’s Tradition of Anti-Intellectualism and Pentecostal Theological Scholarship,” 6.

<sup>26</sup> Jacqui is Dean of Theology and Associate Professor of Biblical Studies at Alphacrucis college, Australia. She is a member and past president (2017) of the Society for Pentecostal Studies and is co-chair of Biblical Ethics section (2018-2020) of the Society of Biblical Literature. Jacqui is also a Research Fellow in the Department of Biblical and Ancient Studies, University of South Africa.

<sup>27</sup> Simo is the Academic Dean of Undergraduate Studies at Regents Theological College, UK. He is currently the Chair of the European Pentecostal Theological Association.

<sup>28</sup> Caleb is a senior lecturer and Director of Studies at the Birmingham Christian College, UK. He also leads a Pentecostal church in Sparkbrook, Birmingham.

Spirit, as far as I interpret from my worldview perspective, inspired me to do my research” (Interview, SF). Grey talked about the ways in which the Spirit prompts and leads her generally. She explained that the leading of the Spirit for academic pursuits was not outside of the normal leading of the Spirit.

### ***The Leading of the Holy Spirit towards Research Activity***

Grey mentioned a number of features that she identifies in the Spirit’s leading. First (although there is no sense of hierarchy), she mentioned having “*a general passion and excitement [for] a topic*” (Interview, JG). Frestadius also linked his interests and his research, and saw them in terms “not just for personal benefit, but also for the greater benefit of the church” (Interview, SF). The implication here is that the Holy Spirit will either use someone to research an area that they are interested in, or, that the interests a person have are placed by the Spirit and used for the research ideas.

Secondly, Grey identified the Spirit’s involvement in her life in research through timing, saying: “that there’s a sense that there’s *a right thing and the right time to do it*” (Interview, JG). One example she gave, was of reading a book and a spark or an interest ignites in a “serendipitous” way. The content and timing come together and provide a leading, all of which she would see as Spirit orchestrated. Nyanni talked about the conversations he was having with disillusioned youth, and how eventually he felt the Spirit saying to his heart: “you cannot just talk and do nothing about it” (Interview, CN). Such Holy Spirit promptings provide an indication that the time to undertake a research project (for instance) may be imminent.

Thirdly, Grey mentioned “*doors and opportunities that open.*” Similar to timing, this aspect allows for the Spirit’s leading through a multiplicity of moments. Frestadius said:

research ends up taking roots and directions from interactions you have, random conversations you have with people you bump into that gives you an idea...so I think there would be many of those elements in my research journey that hugely dictated the direction of my research. And again you could, I guess, interpret them naturalistically. But, I guess I would interpret them in terms of divine providence. (Interview, SF)

Within the context of the Spirit’s leading towards academic research, doors, opportunities and providence are accepted as part of the process. Whilst it could be argued that not every door or opportunity is an invitation from the Holy Spirit, Grey makes the point that if “the Spirit is calling, then the Spirit will...provide the opportunities or provide the...resources or connections that are needed, and even the opportunities in terms of where to present the research as well” (Interview, JG).

Finally, Grey also adds “*prayerful consideration*” to these various ways in which the Spirit may lead her towards an academic project. She says how she asks for guidance in prayer: “trusting that God will give it to me in that part of the process” (Interview, JG). She goes on to describe the kind of prayer that she may use in these circumstances: “Lord I lay this before you...I think this is where you are directing me, and so I submit it to you” (Interview, JG). Here, she is describing a submission of her plans, trusting that God will direct according to His will. She goes on to explain how this kind of submissive prayer links in with her view of timing. Rather than simply praying and pressing on, she says

how: “often I just sit on it, and just sort of wait, and if it’s still there in 6 months’ time then I’ll pursue it...in a sense allow the percolation process, and the Spirit to be active within that percolation process” (Interview, JG).

The normal growth and development of ideas for an academic project are, in this instance, viewed through a pneumatological percolation filter. Prayerfully and patiently, the ideas having been submitted to God, a length of time is given to test the principle of God’s desire for Grey to pursue this project. Nyanni’s prompting of the Spirit to “go and do it,” were also not a one-off moment, but part of his “prayers” (plural). Frestadius also described how in his “devotional times” (plural) he would pray about his research and explained how: “it was more of the quiet leading of the Spirit in those moments” (Interview, SF).

What is clear in all of these testimonies, is that there is a real acknowledgment that God has, through His Spirit, led these academics *towards* certain research areas or opportunities. I then asked each of them how the Spirit impacted them *during* their actual research.

### ***The involvement of the Holy Spirit during the Research Activity***

Having established that the Spirit has led these Pentecostal academics *towards* specific research endeavours through their passions, timings, opportunities and continued devotions, the interviews also revealed that the Spirit helped the researchers *during* their research through inspiration, revelation, being present, and providing a critical role in mitigating subjectivity. In my PhD I give an example of one woman who found out about the focus groups that I was running one hour beforehand. Our meeting and conversation she later described as “God ordained.”<sup>29</sup> I also give other examples of the way in which involvement in the focus groups shaped the decisions that another participant would make in the subsequent months, attesting again to God’s involvement.<sup>30</sup> I attempt to give explicit accounts of the Spirit’s involvement during my empirical research. At the time, such examples encouraged me that God was wanting to be involved in my academic endeavours as much as He wants to be involved in other areas of my life. Their inclusion in my writing was intentional, foregrounding the ongoing involvement of the Spirit in the research activity. For this paper, during the interviews, each interviewee echoed the involvement of God’s Spirit in their research, affirming my expectation; I will now pick out a variety of themes that arose.

Frestadius was aware of his own limitations, particularly in light of the task of researching and producing a PhD, he explained how he felt *God helped him*: “I’ve often felt that I would not have managed to do it in my own strength” (Interview, SF). Here, he vocalises what may be common with many Pentecostal academics, that God helps them to accomplish, continue and get through their research. In the acknowledgments of his thesis, Nyanni reflects this posture by writing: “Finally, all praise and thanks to

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<sup>29</sup> Carter, ‘A Critical Analysis of the Pentecostal Hermeneutics Used by Elim Local Church Leadership Teams in Relation to the Topic of Women in Ministry’, 56.

<sup>30</sup> Carter, 58.

God; my strength, my love and my fortress for bringing me this far.”<sup>31</sup> Here, Nyanni explicitly agrees with what Frestadius’ experienced in research, that God was a strength to him. By mentioning this in the acknowledgments, it seems that there is an intention to honour God for the help given during life and study.

When I interviewed Nyanni, he gave a testimony about a practical occasion when he was very busy with his empirical research. On that particular day he had been teaching at Bible College, then led a prayer meeting at his church, then set out to drive from Birmingham to London to do some observations and interviews. He described how the Holy Spirit “kept [him] through that journey” (Interview, CN). During this late drive, whilst extremely tired, he described how he saw a dove near the motorway. As he continued to drive, he kept seeing the dove. He even stopped for a short sleep, and as he carried on, again he saw the dove nearby. The dove remained visible all the way to London. He said: “That experience made me realise that, yes I was stupid driving so tired, but sort of that, the Holy Spirit is with me in this journey” (Interview, CN). Whilst other explanations could be offered, the analysis by Nyanni is important. This event, along with others, was a reminder to him that the Holy Spirit was present and interested in him, and in his research.

Grey spoke of the way in which the *Holy Spirit provided revelation* for her during her research:

I remember one time, it was quite a bit more revelatory, when actually I was doing my PhD thesis...I really just wanted...three words to use that would help the churches and the students that I worked with...I was looking and thinking of different words and brainstorming it with a whole lot of different people and then one night I went to bed and I woke up and it just was just bang, it was: “them, us and me” that’s what I’ve got to use. And it really did feel like it was just the Spirit dropping something into my heart...for me there was a sense of this was a gift from God...there’s a sort of “aha!” moment that we associate with revelation of the Spirit...that you know that it’s not just you. (Interview, JG)

This specific example demonstrates one of the ways in which Grey felt that the Holy Spirit was actively involved in her research. Here, she believes that the Spirit inspired her to come up with the three words that she was looking for. She indicates very clearly that this inspiration was from God, whilst also on the back of discussions and brainstorming. This perhaps shows how Pentecostal academics are not expecting God to do the work for them, rather they hope that God will be involved in the process of their hard work.

Another example that Grey gave of the Spirit’s involvement in her research, concerned the analysis of her empirical data. She described how she would be “really prayerful about how I’m interpreting things” (Interview, JG). She explained how it was not always easy to distinguish between her own thought processes and the voice of the Spirit. However, her choice was to be prayerful in the analysis. In particular, she described her hope that the Spirit would have a “prophetic role” in highlighting times when she was

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<sup>31</sup> Caleb Nyanni, “The Spirits and Transition: The Second Generation and the Church of Pentecost-UK” (PhD, Birmingham, UK, University of Birmingham, 2018).



imposing her own thoughts or pre-conceptions on the data. In some way, for her, *the Spirit has a role in mitigating subjectivity*. This concept to non-Pentecostals (cessationists<sup>32</sup> or non-Christians in particular) may sound rather bizarre; it could be argued that any sense of the working of the Holy Spirit is simply a subjective hope or desire. Yet the account of Pentecostals is to highlight the Holy Spirit in a way that critiques the self, as Martin says: “I become the object of critique to the voice of God.”<sup>33</sup> The voice of the Spirit is therefore considered far less of an issue of subjectivity. These accounts suggest that positively the Spirit is both critiquing and inspirational.

It is clear from the interviews that these academics not only felt the leading of the Holy Spirit *towards* a research endeavour, but also in numerous ways *during* the research. We will now consider the ways in which the interviewees acknowledged the participation of the Holy Spirit in their work.

### ***Acknowledging the Spirit***

In my own PhD thesis I made the point of acknowledging God first, saying: “I want to first thank God, who has led me and enabled me to complete this research.”<sup>34</sup> As mentioned above, I also wrote about some of the ways that the Spirit had been active *during* the research itself. For this paper, I therefore asked each interviewee if and how they had acknowledged the help of the Holy Spirit in their written academic work. Whereas each of them had been able to give a narrative account of the ways in which they felt the Holy Spirit had been involved in their academic journey, none of them had explicitly written about that involvement.

In the interviews, each had mentioned their faith and their Pentecostalism, for instance Frestadius said: “So I think I acknowledge my own Pentecostalism, but I don’t think in that work I acknowledged various...leading of the Spirit in various sections. No, I don’t think I did that explicitly” (Interview, SF). My interview with Nyanni sparked a contrite reaction: “I should have...mentioned...the leading of the Spirit in the research. I think I got caught up in a lot of the sociological side of it” (Interview, CN). Equally, Grey acknowledged that she had not written about the way the Spirit had led her during her research, saying “it’s not because I wouldn’t” (Interview, JG), rather she hadn’t. To be fair to them, in the interviews each of these academic openly acknowledge that the Spirit has been involved in their work, the fact that they had not written about the Spirit’s involvement, is, I suggest because there is no current convention of *acknowledging* the Spirit.

Frestadius raises an important point, describing how he writes with an audience in mind: “I guess it’s because of the audience you are writing to in an academic writing...I suppose you want to contextualise your approach and your methodology to make it acceptable as possible without compromising your own Pentecostal spirituality” (Interview, SF). The audience may well dictate the content to some extent, I suggest that the challenge for

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<sup>32</sup> Those who hold the view that the Holy Spirit is no longer active in such prophetic or charismatic ways.

<sup>33</sup> Lee Roy Martin, ‘Hearing the Voice of God: Pentecostal Hermeneutics and the Book of Judges.’, in *Pentecostal Hermeneutics: A Reader*, ed. Lee Roy Martin (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 205–32.

<sup>34</sup> Carter, ‘A Critical Analysis of the Pentecostal Hermeneutics Used by Elim Local Church Leadership Teams in Relation to the Topic of Women in Ministry’, 3.

Pentecostal academics is to find appropriate ways to acknowledge publicly what is being acknowledged privately: that the Holy Spirit gives us leading, guidance, help, opportunities, revelation. Mentioning the Spirit or ascribing inspiration to the Spirit in an Abstract or acknowledgment section would appear deeply strange to some readers (and publishers), and so needs careful consideration. I remember presenting some of the PhD work midway through my thesis to a number of fellow postgraduate students and staff (I don't think any would have described themselves as Christian). At the end of my presentation, one sociologist staff member said that, in her whole life she had not heard "God" mentioned as much as I had managed in 15 minutes! Nyanni offered:

empirical research methods have made us all think that we have to have something visibly quantifiable, you know, to prove that: "okay I saw ABC and so that led me to do the research." Whereas in our case, it would be "I was praying, I was concerned and I felt the leading of the Spirit," how do you quantify that? So I think we should be bold enough. (Interview, CN)

Traditional approaches, and perhaps the desire to be accepted and taken seriously, may be seen as dissuaders to acknowledging the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit. Yet I contend that Pentecostal scholarship is at a point when such acknowledgments should become normal. As stated earlier, narratives and testimony are more common in Pentecostal writing, with Amos Yong and James K.A Smith using them as part of their theological tools.<sup>35</sup> However, beyond the preface, acknowledging the ongoing involvement of the Spirit is rare. Smith, whilst discussing Radical Orthodoxy, coins the term "theology" to depict a header category through which all our "theoretical reflection on our being in the world" can be located.<sup>36</sup> In the next section I set out a proposal for a Pentecostal approach to research that would see the Holy Spirit not only as a lens of theoretical reflection, but a Person actively involved.

### **A proposal for a Pentecostal Approach to Research**

So far all the evidence suggests that these Pentecostal academics express that the Holy Spirit was involved in leading them *towards* a particular research endeavour, and that they equally felt that the Holy Spirit helped them *during* that research. What I have found however, and what they admitted, was a lack of written account or *acknowledgement* of the Spirit's activity in their published research. So how can this recognition of the experience of the Holy Spirit in their research activity be cultivated by Pentecostal academics?

I propose that a Pentecostal approach is one which should consider three aspects: First, recognising and acknowledging the leading of the Holy Spirit *towards* the research; secondly, recognising and acknowledging the leading of the Holy Spirit *during* the research process; and thirdly, *acknowledging* the Holy Spirit in the writing of the finished product. I use the word "consider" deliberately; for instance, whilst I expect the Spirit to be involved prior to and during the research of a Pentecostal academic, it may be that their final output is unsuited for such explicit claims. Having said that, the lack of *acknowledgement* of the way in which the Spirit has been involved is what I am particularly seeking to address in this paper.

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<sup>35</sup> Smith, *Thinking in Tongues*; Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s)*.

<sup>36</sup> *Introducing Radical Orthodoxy*, 177.

Whilst there are differences in particular theological methodologies, as I discuss below, the leading *towards* a piece of research by the Holy Spirit may not differ greatly. I anticipate that the biblical theologian and practical theologian will still find the Spirit engage with them through passions and opportunities, and help them through timings and revelation. I propose that a Pentecostal approach to research is one that acknowledges the guidance, leading or unction of the Spirit in the process that led *towards* the research. The explicit mention of this leading towards may simply be part of the acknowledgements or included as a narrative testimony.

Equally, as I have demonstrated above, I contend that Pentecostal academics are led by the Spirit *during* the research process, whatever form of theology is being undertaken. A Pentecostal approach would seek to give prominence to the ways in which the Holy Spirit is involved in the research journey itself. If the Holy Spirit has been involved in the leading *towards*, the hope would be that He would be involved *during* the research. As with my interviewees, there are different ways in which this is manifest. The research journey itself has multiple stages, and the Spirit's involvement may be clearer in some of those stages than others. Opportunities that arise in the research, and are seen as Spirit led, can radically shift and transform the direction of the research. These may well be seen as pivotal moments, and internally reflected as Spirit-led by the researcher. As Frestadius said: "I think our Pentecostal theological methodology should be shaped by our Pentecostal spirituality, and if it's not then I think it's questionable to what extent we are being Pentecostal theologians" (Interview, SF). I contend, in my third point, that both points one and two should be acknowledged as such.

Thirdly, and finally, the specific and unique aspect of this paper is to propose that Pentecostal researchers *acknowledge* their Pentecostal approach in the writing of the finished product. There are multitudes of methodologies that are used and borrowed from various fields (for instance sociology), whilst such methodologies have their place and value in Pentecostal research, they are only a part of the approach of the Pentecostal researcher. As with my PhD and this paper, a qualitative approach utilising semi-structured interviews or focus-groups can allow space for the directive of the Holy Spirit. If a participant acknowledges their own sense of the Spirit's leading, then that is relatively easy to include as a valuable piece of research. Other methodologies, for instance biblical exegesis, provide less obvious examples. Yet, the Pentecostal researcher may still experience the leading of the Spirit in revelation or opportunity. Written acknowledgment of the researcher's own sense of leading by the Spirit however, is not straightforward. Publishers may feel that the inclusion of such testimonies demonstrate a lack of academic rigour. I contend that academic rigour and a reflexivity that involves the Holy Spirit are not mutually exclusive. All 'new' approaches, such as postmodernism or Feminist Standpoint theory, have gained a level of academic acceptance that should inspire the Pentecostal to find ways to acknowledge their own standpoint, in particular the ongoing involvement of the Holy Spirit in the research and researcher.

Fundamentally the Pentecostal researcher is subject to the leading and guiding of the Holy Spirit *towards* and *during* the research, and will find ongoing *acknowledgements* of their approach as liberating for future Pentecostal researchers. The issue of the Spirit's

involvement is not contentious, however, the written acknowledgment of the ways in which the Spirit is involved, is not currently practised. Whilst broad comments involving directives from the Spirit received in prayer or conversations would be valuable, more detailed explanations and examples of specific ways in which the Spirit was involved would be instructive.

### Conclusion

It is now less uncommon to find academic writings that acknowledge a personal position, place or standpoint in the approach to the research. Pentecostals have a distinct acceptance of the ongoing work of the Holy Spirit in all areas of their lives, including their research. Whilst those I interviewed have given clear examples of the ways in which the Holy Spirit has guided and led them *towards* and *during* the research journey, they have not *acknowledged* such guidance, nor expressed the way in which their Pentecostal experience has informed their approach.

I have here suggested that Pentecostal academics take their stand, acknowledging and writing about the specific ways in which the Holy Spirit has been involved in their research processes. As such, I too trust that the Holy Spirit has inspired, guided and enabled this paper to be written; especially, for instance, leading me to the right interviewees and the right publisher. I submit this proposal as a catalyst for further debate and discussion on the role of the Holy Spirit in the work of Pentecostal researchers.

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