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Pentecostals, LGBTIQ+ people and the Bible: An alternative Pentecostal hermeneutical perspective

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Abstract

The Bible seemingly confronts the issue of LGBTIQ+ people and/as believers. However, these texts can be interpreted at least in two ways, in terms of temporal orientation or of temporary orientation. The question whether LGBTIQ+ people should be allowed as members of the faith community and serve in ministry can be answered by viewing the relevant biblical texts as culturally and temporary determined ethical pronouncements that are valid only for the original readers of (or listeners to) the texts or as permanent, everlasting and perpetual principles valid for believers of all ages and normative for contemporary times across cultural divides. It is argued that Pentecostal hermeneutics establishes a third way to read the texts, by reversing the movement from text to situation and to allow the faith community's experience of their encounters with God through the Spirit to determine their tolerance or non-tolerance of LGBTIQ+ people. The principle is demonstrated at the hand of the issue of women in ministry before being applied to the faith community and LGBTIQ+ people.

Keywords

LGBTIQ+ people; LGBTIQ+ issue; hermeneutics; Pentecostalism; temporal orientation; temporary orientation

Significance of work

From a Pentecostal hermeneutical point of view, it is observed that the LGBTIQ+ issue can be interpreted in an alternative way that unlocks the deadlock experienced by many churches. Traditionally, relevant texts are interpreted as temporally oriented (and hence, normative) or temporary oriented (and explained away for historical reasons). Pentecostal hermeneutics moves from experience with the Spirit to the Bible; their experience of the Spirit revealing the love of God for all people appreciates the presence of and fellowship with fellow Christians who happen to be gay and lesbian.

1. Introduction

Pentecostals changed their stance regarding several issues over time. For instance, prior to the Second World War most Pentecostals were pacifists pledged to nonviolence, declaring that in accordance with Scripture and Jesus's example they could not participate in war and armed resistance which involved the destruction of lives.[1] Because Jesus teaches his disciples to turn the other cheek, they would not retaliate wrongs done to them but would try to love their enemies. However, during and after the Second World War many Pentecostal denominations changed their stance and supported patriotism and nationalism, and dedicating pastors to serve as army chaplains. Another example can be found in the ministry of women. The Pentecostal movement since its inception recognised the ministry of women as legitimate and equal with that of men, based on the perception that experience illustrated that the Spirit anointed and used women in all ministries. Women were treated as equals to men because ministry was derived from the anointing and gifts of the Spirit and the Spirit endowed many women with leadership and ministry gifts. Then the perspective changed so that since the 1940s, women in most instances were disqualified from the teaching and preaching ministry, except to children, other women and prison inmates.[2]

It is contended that these changes were due to a change in the hermeneutical perspective of Pentecostals, as the result of their new alliance and cooperation with Evangelicals in an attempt to become acceptable to other established churches, society and government. In accepting a new hermeneutics, the involvement of the laity and their democratic participation in worship services and ministry was sacrificed for the establishment of a professional pastorate and orderly worship services in accordance with evangelical practices.[3] Pentecostalism also shed its early restorationist and premillennialist-dispensationalist fervour and became more like longer-established denominations,[4] all because

1 Robeck, "Assemblies of God and Ecumenical Cooperation," 107–50; see Nel, *Pacifism and Pentecostals*.

2 Robeck, *Azusa Street Mission and Revival*, 25.

3 Clark, "Contemporary Pentecostal Leadership," 16.

4 Blumhofer, *Assemblies of God,* 15.

many Pentecostals now accepted the evangelical viewpoint of the verbal inerrancy and propositional infallibility of Scriptures, aligning themselves to some extent with the fundamentalist use of the Bible, and creating a hybrid between evangelicalism and fundamentalism,[5] with a particular Pentecostal flavour. Now they also emphasise the importance of what God has said in God's Word, as the ultimate authority.[6] They are interested in the interpretation of authoritative texts and synthesising their analysis of these texts in a one-way direction from the text to the current reader.

From the 1970s, several Pentecostal pastors qualified in theological institutions, leading to a new emphasis on proper theological training and the establishment of theological colleges, later called seminaries.[7] Many Pentecostals now accepted that their leaders and pastors should be trained sufficiently to lead believers in a responsible manner, leading to an integrated, Pentecostal liberal education[8] and a pastorate consisting of full-time professional pastors.[9] Eventually theological training was made compulsory for anyone considering to enter the ordained ministry, and as a result the gap between the "clergy" and "laity" broadened.[10] A result of this development is that some Pentecostal theologians reviewed their Evangelical hermeneutics and designed a new hermeneutics based on what they perceived to be the distinctives of Pentecostalism, and that stands to a certain degree in continuation with the way early Pentecostals read and interpreted the Bible.

Two important differences between Pentecostals and many Evangelicals flow from Pentecostal hermeneutics' emphasis on the Spirit's involvement in explicating Scripture. Pentecostals emphasise an immediate and experiential meaning for Scripture that does not necessarily exactly equate with a historical-critical or grammatical-historical analysis of the text; and they believe that the Spirit can say more than Scripture, although never

5 Oliverio, *Theological Hermeneutics*, 85.

6 Fortson and Grams, *Unchanging Witness*, 3.

7 See, e.g., Reddy, "Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa".

8 See Turnage, "Early Church and the Axis," 4–29, especially 21.

9 Burger and Nel, *Fire Falls in Africa,* 393.

10 Goff, *Measuring the Clergy/Laity Gap*, 91.

in contradiction to Scripture.[11] A hermeneutics that focuses only on what the original author meant (if it is possible to determine it) does not satisfy Pentecostal sentiments, which asserts that the spiritual and extraordinary supernatural experiences of biblical characters are to be replicated for contemporary believers. Pentecostal hermeneutics will always consider the role of the Spirit and the impact of personal experience. For instance, as a result of their new hermeneutics Pentecostals again allowed women to enter ministry on the same level as their male counterparts because they interpret the Bible through a theological lens provided by Acts 2 and their own personal experience of Pentecost.[12] Their experience became the hermeneutical lens through which they read the Bible. New emphasis was also laid on the involvement of all believers in the worship service and ministry. However, despite positive developments the majority of Pentecostal pastors and members continue to use a biblicist-literalist way of interpreting the Bible, as demonstrated by the widespread preference for using the King James Version (and among Afrikaans speaking Pentecostals, the 1933/1953 Afrikaanse Vertaling).

This article proposes to read biblical texts concerned with LGBTIQ+ from the perspective of this new hermeneutics functioning within some Pentecostal circles and represented by theologians like Amos Yong, L. William Oliverio jnr., Kenneth J. Archer, Bradley Noel, Craig S. Keener and others. No Pentecostal hermeneutical scholar has as yet written about the sensitive LGBTIQ+ issue from this new hermeneutical perspective.

2. A Pentecostal hermeneutical perspective on the Bible

The new Pentecostal hermeneutics emphasises its continuity with some sentiments of early Pentecostals. Oliverio[13] argues that the ethos of early Pentecostalism rests on four core interpretive assumptions that explain its orientation. The first is that Protestant Scripture, excluding the deuterocanonical books in the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox traditions, served as the sole ultimate authority for Christian belief and

11 Fogarty, "Toward a Pentecostal Hermeneutic," 5–6.

12 Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics,* 8.

13 *Theological Hermeneutics,* 231–4.

living which functioned dialogically with the religious and general experiences of early Pentecostals to form a theological understanding of their world and circumstances. Second is their restorationist beliefs, centring on the narrative of God's plan for humankind coming to pass with the outpouring of the Spirit in the latter rain. Third is the four- or fivefold "Full Gospel" that served as the doctrinal grid that oriented Pentecostal beliefs and living and as doctrinal hypotheses which explained Scripture and spiritual experiences. And lastly, a pragmatic naive realism formed early Pentecostal rationality, integrated with an understanding of the primacy and ongoing revelation of the supernatural.[14]

It was important for them to read the Bible as literally as possible,[15] taking it at face value.[16] In the process, the distance between the original context of Scripture and the context of the reader was collapsed.[17] They searched the Bible for all Scripture references to a particular subject and then synthesized those references into a theological statement in a harmonizing and deductive method.[18]

What was important was not necessarily to find a lot of information about God in the Bible; they read (and seriously studied) the Bible with the expectation that they would experience and encounter God in the same terms and ways as described by biblical witnesses. Believers also learnt how to verbalize their experience of encounters with God in the language of the biblical witnesses in order to testify to the Pentecostal truth.[19]

Jesus at the centre of Pentecostal theology was the theological grid that provided a firm interpretive lens for the fluid Pentecostal community and

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14 The tacit realism that presupposes direct correspondence between early Pentecostals' theological views and the realities to which these articulations pointed, led to an absolutism, which resulted in the splintering of the movement into many groups and denominations in the decades following the Azusa Street Revival (Oliverio, *Theological Hermeneutics,* 32).

15 Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic,* 65. To read the Bible literally implies that "it means what it says" (Boone, *Bible Tells Them So,* 13).

16 Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic,* 66.

17 Martin, "Introduction to Pentecostal Biblical Hermeneutics," 3; Carson, *Exegetical Fallacies,* 127.

18 Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic,* 102.

19 Plüss, "Azusa and Other Myths," 191; Ellington, "Pentecostalism and the Authority of Scriptures," 162.

their reading of Scripture.[20] However, they did not interpret the Bible in fundamentalist manner[21] because they did not ascribe authority to the Bible due to its inerrancy or infallibility, but to its utility of showing the way to a personal encounter with God.[22] Scripture forms an important voice in a congregational context where it exerts its power conversationally and not unilaterally.[23] Cox defines Pentecostalism as an emphasis on a general worldview over systematic comprehension and rightness of logic with moral and emotional values alongside cognitive matters.[24] Pentecostal theology flourishes in the context of spirituality with song, prayer, sermon and testimony, and not in the format of lengthy treatises or the development of complicated doctrines.

Early Pentecostals did not look at the Bible from the outside but they "entered" the world of the Bible, and the world of the Bible shaped their world and metanarrative.[25] It is in the nature of narratives that they have the potential to engage and change readers; biblical narratives engaged Pentecostals to look for similar encounters with God. Their daily charismatic experiences altered their epistemology, giving them existential awareness of the miraculous in the biblical worldview and appreciating the influence of the Spirit.[26] Their own experiences of the supernatural affirmed and supported the truthfulness of the supernatural components of the biblical story and suggested a broader approach to knowing the truth because the Spirit who had inspired the Bible moved in them to reveal the meaning of Scripture as well.[27] Narratives were understood literally, taken to be repeatable and expected, and the experience of biblical characters were seen as to be emulated.[28]

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20 Archer, *Pentecostal Hermeneutic,* 137.

21 Hollenweger, "From Azusa Street to Toronto Phenomenon"; Lewis, "Reflections of a Hundred Years," 8.

22 Ellington, "Pentecostals and the Authority of Scriptures," 17; Yong, *Spirit-Word-Community,* 44.

23 Long, "Living with the Bible", 72.

24 *Fire from Heaven*, 201.

25 Pinnock, "Work of the Holy Spirit," 246.

26 Ervin, "Hermeneutics: A Pentecostal Option," 24.

27 Their view of "illumination" goes beyond the Reformed concept to allow an element of divine revelation (Waddell, *The Spirit of the Book of Revelation,* 127).

28 Nel, "Pentecostals' Reading of the Old Testament," 527.

Although the Bible served for them as the standard to define faith and practice,[29] their angle to define doctrine was on the basis of their experiences with the God who utilized the Bible to reveal Godself through God's Spirit. Pentecostals understood and utilised doctrine in a fundamentally different way from most other traditions which are grounded in rationalist models of considering the question of the authority of Scripture. For Pentecostals, doctrine was not essentially *generative* in function; it was rather descriptive because they utilised doctrine to describe and verbalise lived experience. Formal deductive doctrinal statements were for Pentecostals an attempt to organize and understand described experience and not an attempt to serve as proof for those things which lie completely outside the realm of experience.[30] Pentecostals based their faith first on the God that they had met, and only then did they attempt to articulate their experiences in normative, doctrinal ways. Doctrine was defined experientially in terms of the Bible. Canonical texts were "measuring sticks" and not texts to be exploited for ideological agendas.[31]

By way of conclusion, early Pentecostal hermeneutics can be characterised as oral, charismatic, largely ahistorical and minimally contextual, literal in its interpretations, morally and spiritually absolutizing, pragmatic and pastoral.

The new Pentecostal hermeneutics consists of a multifaceted scholarship and emphasises three interconnected elements: The interrelationship between the *Holy Spirit* as the One animating *Scriptures* and empowering the *believing community*. The communal interweaving of individual narratives told, shared and reflected upon as response to the Word in the gathered *koinonia* establishes the community as *ekklesia*.[32] For them, the experience of an encounter with God through God's Spirit is imperative, and interpretation of the information contained in the Bible is determined by their praxis of such encounters. They focus primarily on their own context, letting existential concerns co-determine what they read in the Bible. Their interpretation is theologically coloured by their Christological "Full

29 See Nel, "Pentecostal Movement's View of the Continuity."

30 Ellington, "Pentecostalism and the Authority of Scriptures," 150.

31 Keener, *Spirit Hermeneutics,* 107–8.

32 Rollefson, "Church and Same-Sex Relationships", 447.

Gospel" pre-understanding (*Vorverständnis*), which to a certain degree is consistent with evangelical Christianity in general. Their doctrinal scopus and ethos produce stable and limited dimensions of meaning. The "Full Gospel" proclamation is also more than a catechism to be memorized; rather, it is a narrative way of life to be experienced and a metanarrative used to interpret what happens in life.[33] And this experiential narrative journey results in a transformation of the believer who comes to experience and know Jesus as saviour, sanctifier, Spirit-baptizer, healer, and coming king. The essence of the movement is the emphasis upon the supernatural, with the omnipotent God breaking into the everyday life of the believer as in biblical times. Their continuationism or non-cessationism sees in the reappearance of the *charismata* a sign of the restoration of the apostolic era and the early church, as proof that the latter rain before the end of the age would herald the second coming of Christ. Because they believe that Christ might return at any moment, they attempt urgently to reach the ends of the earth with their Pentecostal message.[34]

Pentecostals use the argument that their hermeneutics reflects the way the Old Testament was interpreted in the time when the New Testament originated. The argument is explained before coming to Pentecostals' change in stance on several issues, which will be demonstrated at the hand of one theme, namely women in ministry, before a hermeneutical perspective will be developed on texts related to LGBTIQ, an even more controversial matter.

3. A Pentecostal perspective on Bible reading practices in the New Testament

Pentecostal hermeneutics argues that its hermeneutical emphases can be found in the way the New Testament interprets the Hebrew Bible of the day. It cannot be doubted that Jesus like the Jews of his day regarded Scripture as inspired and authoritative. However, that does not imply that he considered every text as equally binding and relevant. For instance, according to Luke 4:18–19, a quotation from Isaiah 61:1–2, Jesus omits the

33 Thomas, "What the Spirit is Saying to the Church," 116.

34 Byrd, "Paul Ricoeur's Hermeneutical Theory," 209–11.

portion of the text that mentions any divine wrath because he knows the will of God in this matter and at this time, argues Pinnock.[35] Jesus blends the original prophetic word with its current significance for his hearers. In Matthew 5:38, he fulfils the "tooth for a tooth" maxim in order to state that his disciples are called to a higher level of ethical behaviour. He does not deny that the text had been the word of God for previous times, but he changes its meaning to a radical injunction, to forgive one's enemies because one decides to love them. The conclusion can be made that Jesus took some liberties when it came to the quotation and interpretation of texts, distinguishing between the original meaning and what the text means in the light of his incarnation. He also cancelled the distinction between clean and unclean foods, disallowed divorce when Moses allowed it under certain conditions, and discouraged the use of oaths that were permissible in his day. He did not see all texts as being on the same level or as having the same authority. It can be argued that he did not diminish Scripture but set it free to function in new ways as the word of God for the changing circumstances of his day.[36]

Pentecostals argue that the church did the same in Acts, setting aside a significant part and element of the Old Testament *Torah*. In Acts 10:13–16, Peter had to learn that what God has made clean, no one must call profane, changing the meaning of what is clean and unclean. The Hebrew Bible had prescribed circumcision for God's people but the early church in Acts 15:28–29 decided that it did not include non-Jewish believers. Jesus and the disciples were alive to the dynamic of their texts.[37] Thomas[38] develops a model of the interaction between the faith community and the Spirit in the interpretation of Scripture by means of a close reading of Acts 15. The missionary church of the first century discussed the critical issue of the validity of the *Torah* for the institution of life of the heathen part of the church. Only after listening to various testimonies of God's activity in accepting non-Jewish believers apart from circumcision did they appeal to Scripture. James in Acts 15:13–18 quotes from Amos 9 in support of

35 "Work of the Holy Spirit," 235.

36 Pinnock, "Work of the Holy Spirit," 234.

37 Pinnock, "Work of the Holy Spirit," 236.

38 Thomas, "Reading the Bible," 109.

his argument, and in doing so he makes sense in light of Luke's already well-established interest in demonstrating from the Scriptures that God had fulfilled God's promises to David in Jesus and that those promises are therefore concerned with the nature of the church. From the reading of Acts 15, Thomas then identifies three primary components: Scripture, the interpretive community of faith, and the Holy Spirit who prepares and equips the community to read the Bible (as explained already). These three elements operate in concert as argued already. The faith community is the place of the Spirit's activity; they testify to the Spirit's activity in supplying them with the necessary insights to interpret the Bible and discuss and discern the Spirit's work in the forming of meaning of the Bible. The interpretive community model facilitates the uniting of a myriad of contrasting individualised, contextualized applications of meaning in an arena of mutual coherence and significance.[39] It is important to note that the emphasis is on the community of interpreters, to avoid the subjectivising that might occur when one person on her/his own interpret Scriptures. At the same time, the Bible is not static in terms of its significance, but dynamic. The Spirit's role in interpretation is not reduced to some vague talk of illumination of the cerebral facilities of the Christian reader; in Pentecostal understanding, the Spirit creates the context for interpretation through the Spirit's actions and, as a result, guides the church in the determination of which texts are most relevant in a particular situation and clarifies how they might best be approached.[40] Since the church's experience is judged in relation to the Bible, Pentecostal hermeneutics prioritizes the authority of the Bible as guideline and criterion.

From the same triadic negotiation of Scripture, church, and Spirit, Archer[41] posits a text-centred, reader-oriented approach that prioritizes Scripture, yet leaves the door open for the pneumatological convictions of the Pentecostal church based on their experiences with the Spirit. Yong[42] adds that the continuous interplay of Spirit, Word, and community serves

39 Clines, "World Established on Water," 174.

40 Thomas, "Reading the Bible," 119.

41 *Pentecostal Hermeneutic.* See also Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality,* 28–34; Thomas, "Women, Pentecostalism and the Bible," 49–56.

42 *Spirit-Word-Community,* 7.

not only to clarify the hermeneutical activity of theological interpretation but also to locate the sources of theological inquiry. This trinitarian relationship of Spirit, Word, and community is also a movement, a hermeneutical trialectic, and such movement is sustained insofar as it proceeds from a pneumatological starting-point in the methodology employed by Yong.[43] The pneumatological framework is dependent upon a pneumatic intuition; pneumatology refers to the second-order discourse about what Christians experience as the Holy Spirit, and the experience itself can be understood in terms of a (hopefully ongoing) series of pneumatic encounters. Pentecostal hermeneutics rests on and is dependent upon such pre-theoretical encounters with and experiences of the Spirit of God. Yong's theological approach is fallibilistic, multiperspectival, self-critical and dialogical while it is also pneumatologically orientated and Christologically focused.[44] Archer emphasises that the Spirit's voice in the interpretive task is both in community discernment and in undergirding the clarity of Scripture, implying the dynamic presence and activity of the Spirit in both Scriptures and the faith community. Although the Spirit may have more to say than what is stated in Scripture, it will always be scripturally-based and determined by the spirit of biblical injunctions. In order to counteract the subjectivist nature of interpreting the Bible in a spiritual reading, the community must discern the signs and sound of the Spirit among them in dialogical relationship with the Bible.[45] "Dialogical" (or dialectical) refers to the experience of the Spirit shaping the community's reading of the Bible while the Bible at the same time provides the lens through which the community perceives the Spirit's work. Theology is best undertaken *en conjuncto,* that is "together" or "with others."[46] Castelo refers to John Donne's phrase, "No man is an island," that should include that the interpreter of the Bible should be genuinely and truly "involved" in

43 *Spirit-Word-Community.*

44 Cartledge, "Pentecostal Theology," 261.

45 Archer, *Gospel Revisited*, 132.

46 Castelo, "*Diakrisis* Always *En Conjunto,*" 203.

humankind.[47] The faith community exists as a communitarian dynamic[48] because the Spirit has created a new community, making it one body, equipped to grow to the full stature of Christ.[49]

By exalting the text as authoritative, one can choose the letter above the Spirit and give the text too much respect. Then God is made a prisoner of the Bible. Fact is that the word that was good for people in one situation may become destructive for people at other times. Scripture is a dynamic authority, a living guide standing in life-transforming interaction with readers through the Spirit.

4. A Pentecostal hermeneutic perspective on women in ministry

Pentecostals realise that when one moves from the Bible to experience, it is difficult to justify the notion of women in ministry theologically. While Paul refers to a woman who is prominent among the apostles (Junia, Rom 16:7), he explicitly prohibits that women may partake in ministry, at least in the worship service (1 Cor 14:34; 1 Tim 2:9–10; 5:14; 1 Pet 3:5).[50] However, when the direction of the movement changes from present-day experience to the Bible it resolves the confusion and conflict related to the issue of women in the ministry. What is necessary in Pentecostal hermeneutics is that experience be critically analysed by way of reason and Pentecostal communal tradition in order to decide which experiences are normative in terms of the Spirit's revelation of God's plan of salvation for humankind. Pentecostals experience the Spirit who empowers them to live out the implications of that experience, and to interpret the Bible through the lens of that revelation.

From the practice of the contemporary church, Pentecostals derive that the Spirit anoints women in the same manner as men (and children as well as old people) to minister to one another. In fact, they find that Paul's

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47 This is contrasted to many western exegetes' Lone Ranger approach with its survivalist and success-related connotations combined to a "sacred" individualism (Castelo, "*Diakrisis* Always *En Conjunto,*" 203–204).

48 González, *Manana*, 28–30.

49 Castelo, "*Diakrisis* Always *En Conjunto,*" 205.

50 Robeck, *Azusa Street Mission and Revival*, 25.

injunction in 1 Corinthians 12:7 is shown to be true in their experience, that each believer (including women) is given the ability to manifest the Spirit for the common good of all. All Spirit-filled believers are equipped with different gifts in order to uplift, encourage and comfort fellow-believers in the faith community. No gender distinctions are made when the Spirit imparts diverse gifts to individuals.

It is recognised that Pentecostals' support of non-discrimination on the basis of gender and age by allowing women to minister should not rest on the modern culture of human rights, but on the egalitarian impulse that characterised the early Pentecostal movement (as well as its predecessors, the holiness and divine healing movements, and by implication in the perception of Pentecostals, also the early church). The Spirit will lead them to respect all anointed people and they will find confirmation for their behaviour in Scriptures when they read it from their perception of the way the Spirit guides them.

5. A Pentecostal hermeneutic perspective on LGBTIQ+ people

In the main it can be argued that there are two ways of interpreting biblical texts related to same sex orientation, by reading it in terms of temporal orientation or of temporary orientation. Therefore, the question whether LGBTIQ+[51] can be allowed as members of the faith community and to serve as ministers (or deacons and elders) in the light of 1 Corinthians 11:4–5, 13–15 is answered in two ways. The one way (emic approach) is to see the biblical texts as time-directed and temporary words related to a specific historical and social context and only applicable to that context.[52] Several

51 L (lesbian, referring to someone who identifies as female and is attracted to others who identify as female), G (gay, referring to someone who identifies as male and is attracted to others who identify as male), B (bisexual, used to describe someone who is attracted to others of the same gender and those of different gender), T (transgender, transsexual, transitioning, transman, transwoman, referring to people who find themselves uneasy with the gender to which they have been assigned, who are sexually and/or bodily diverse), I (intersex, referring to people who are born with some indeterminacy in their bodily sexual makeup), Q (queer, that calls into question gender binaries, gender roles, the implication of gender in social divisions of power and the whole idea of a fixed self)+; [Online]. Available: http://www.abc.net.au/religion/articles/2017/09/14/4734308.htm [Accessed: 2018-06-26]; [Online]. Available: http://www.uqu.com.au/blog-view/what-does-lgbtiq-mean-29 [Accessed: 2018-09-10].

52 Coetzee, De Klerk and Floor, "Hermeneuse van die Skrif", 17.

attempts have been made to sketch such a historical and social context that supports the notion that these texts are not relevant for contemporary believers. For instance, the references in Leviticus (18:22; 20:13) are interpreted as part of a list of sexual sins such as incest, bestiality, sexual intercourse with a menstruating woman and children who are sacrificed to Molech. These acts threatened Israel's exclusive seed and implied wastage of semen while the Priestly author prohibits any practices that counteracts procreation by means of sexual laws that circumscribe life through multiple layers of boundaries.[53] The biblical view of sex and semen determines what is said about sexuality. The exclusive purpose of sex is procreation and male semen is necessary for conception. It is critical that no semen is wasted because of its importance in the perpetuation of the Israelite nation. Same-sex sexual acts were frowned upon because it did not serve purposes of procreation and implied a wastage of semen. However, in an age and day when contemporary people view sexuality in totally other terms and a possible population explosion aggravating the crisis of climate change, these arguments are not valid anymore.[54] The prescriptions begin and end with the assignment to Israel not to defile themselves in any of these ways, for by all these practices the nations YHWH is casting out before them have defiled themselves (Lev 18:3, 24–29); it seems that sexual relations between the same sexes were foreign to Israel while it had "idolatrous" meaning for the original inhabitants of Canaan.[55] In this way the prohibition for males not to lie with a male as with a woman is explained in terms of a specific socio-historical environment and worldview.

Apart from the influence of the historical context of idolatry that determines the interpretation of the ethical injunctions, the influence should be discounted that patriarchy as a defining theme within the Bible plays. The patriarchal system defines the role of women as possessions of the fathers and/or brothers and when they marry, of their husbands, without any legal recourse or rights of their own. Patriarchy determines the sexual ethics found in the Bible, including the prohibition of the mixing of things that do not belong together in the opinion of the authors. The result was that man-

53 Mohrmann, "Making sense of sex", 75.

54 Human, "Homoseksualiteit", 635

55 Eilberg-Schwarz, *God's phallus and other problems,* 93.

to-man sexual relations would have been frowned upon for the same reason as sexual relations between human beings and animals were forbidden.

The specific and unambiguous rejection of sexual intercourse between members of the same sex found in the New Testament (Rom 1:18–32; 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10) is explained by some in terms of what the author(s) reject in Hellenistic culture and that offend Judaic sentiments because it also refers to sexual intercourse with the same sex in the context of idolatrous practices. It is argued that for the author, any sexual activity that does not imply the possibility of procreation is unnatural and unacceptable.[56] At the same time, such practices are also connected to a civilization that was extinguished because of its sexual relations between males in the service of idolatry, as implied in Genesis 19:1–29. The implication is that these texts do not prescribe a specific kind of morality even though they might show a structural resonance with contemporary views of hetero- and homosexuality among some Christian believers.[57]

To state, however, that the argument in Paul's letters is not loaded against same-sex sexual behaviour is to do injustice to the texts involved. It is clear that the apostle thinks that such behaviour is unbecoming for the Christian believer. The author utilises perspectives of the Old Testament on procreation as the exclusive purpose of human sexuality and the purpose of marriage in the two traditions in Genesis 1–2 to formulate a sexual ethics that is consistent with orthodox Jewish thinking as it developed in the inter-testamental period.

A part of the problem is that no decisive external evidence can be provided that supports any of these suggestions, that specific cultural contexts underlie the biblical texts and co-determine their meaning. Another problem is concerned with the difficulty to distinguish between texts that are temporary-oriented with its meaning limited to a historical situation, and other texts that are timeless in its normative value. In reading Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:24–27 and 1 Timothy 1:10 at face value, as most Pentecostals prefer, it becomes difficult not to see it as a prohibition of any

56 Davies, "New Testament ethics and ours", 328.

57 Snyman, "Homoseksualiteit en tydgerigtheid," 733.

same-sex orientated practices.[58] This represents the ethical or temporal approach that views the texts not in terms of the historical situation only but also in terms of theories and models developed in contemporary times on the basis of data and phenomena in contemporary societies.[59] For instance, the Apostolic Faith Mission of South Africa in July 2017 concurs with this perspective and published their view of "homosexuality" and the Bible as follows:[60]

> As a church that accepts the authority of Scripture, the AFM … (cannot) rely on the guidance of theologians focussed on deconstructing a Biblical text they neither believe in nor venerate. For this reason, we affirm our belief in the Bible as God's written Word, inerrant, infallible and inspired … It must be noted here that both the Old and the New Testament evaluate homosexuality in the same way … It is the calling of the church to declare and affirm the Bible's position on this matter: that marriage, as the relational norm, is an exclusive, binding, affectionate union between one man and one woman … that functions as God's natural and created context for sexual relations and procreation. Sexual relationships that deviate from this ideal can be neither holy nor Biblical … The AFM affirms its position that all sexual immorality, whether heterosexual or homosexual, are unambiguously and unconditionally forbidden by God's Word.[61]

The supposition is that God created sexuality exclusively for the permanent relationship between man and woman in the marriage, implying that a sexual relationship between people of the same gender is not a part of God's will. People who persevere in the practice of same-gender sex is committing a serious sin.[62] Marriage outside heterosexual boundaries is not acknowledged; all same-sex sexual relations, including that of committed

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58 Du Rand, J., 2016, "Kom om ons gaan kyk weer", 183.

59 Van Rensburg, "Die tydgerigtheid van die Bybel", 759.

60 The AFM of SA is the largest classical Pentecostal denomination in South Africa with 1,4 million members.

61 [Online]. Available: http://afm-ags.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/HOMOSEXUALITY-2018.pdf [Accessed: 2018-08-27]. The viewpoint is based on *inter alia* Nel, "Kom ons gaan kyk na die Ou-Testamentiese getuienis", 75–129.

62 Van Rensburg, "Die tydgerigtheid van die Bybel", 749.

couples, are therefore sinful. Van Rensburg states unequivocally that the prohibition of sexual practices of LGBTIQ+ people is repeated continuously, unchanged and undiluted throughout the Bible without any indication that the calls in this regard are cultural-historical and it should be distinguished from other prohibitions and commands that are not repeated or that are adapted in the Bible.[63] While a homosexual orientation in the same way as a predisposition to alcohol addiction is not sinful per se, the practice of the orientation becomes sinful.[64]

The question that needs to be answered in terms of these hermeneutical considerations is, are these texts culturally and temporary determined ethical pronouncements that are valid only for the original readers of (or listeners to) the texts or are they permanent, everlasting and perpetual principles valid for believers of all ages?

However, it is contended that Pentecostal hermeneutics leaves room for engaging a third avenue to address this issue. As Pentecostals realise that when one moves from the Bible to experience, it is difficult to justify the notion of women in ministry theologically, it is argued that the principle can (and should) also be applied to Pentecostals' attitude toward LGBTIQ+ people and their acceptance as fellow-believers and co-ministers in the faith community. When one moves from the Bible to experience, it is difficult to justify the notion of accepting LGBTIQ+ people for theological reasons. However, when Pentecostals' experience of the Spirit revealing the love of God for all people (John 3:16), the God that is love (1 Jn 4:7–8), is considered, they understand the importance of a "hermeneutical ecology" that is created by the presence of and fellowship with fellow Christians who happen to be gay and lesbian.[65] Their presence helps the charismatic community to sharpen the acuity of their listening for God's word, a liberating word that challenges all forms and enslavement to the powers that be and continues to shape our theological anthropology by keeping us in "Spirit-ed" conversation with God's living Word.[66] This requires of Pentecostals to resist the homophobic elements in their culture because

63 "Die tydgerigtheid van die Bybel", 757, 760.

64 Van Rensburg, "Die tydgerigtheid van die Bybel", 763–4.

65 Rollefson, "Church and Same-Sex Relationships", 440.

66 Rollefson, "Church and Same-Sex Relationships", 440.

they comprehend that it is not the task of the church to convict of sin or judge sinners; it is the task of the Spirit to convict of sin ("he will prove the world wrong about sin", in the NRSV translation of Jn 16:8–12), *if* the practice of same-sex orientation is a sin.

It is submitted that what is critical is that the church escapes the "we-they" thinking and discourse demonstrated by black-and-white thinking that represents a significant part of popular opinion, recognising that all are in the same need of grace, that one sin is not worse than another[67] and that the dignity of all people based on their being created in the image of God is accepted. When gays and lesbians are accepted as fellow members of the household of faith, the church of the living God, which is the pillar and foundation of the truth (1 Tim 3:15), it fundamentally changes the nature of the debate about LGBTIQ+ people because it allows for the recovery of a people once repudiated and lost to the church, assigned to be the "others", who now bear the sign of God's presence.[68]

It is suggested that Pentecostals' treatment of LGBTIQ+ people should be informed by aspects of Jesus' teaching and ministry. One of the causes for homophobia among Pentecostals is their perception that "homosexuality", or at least the practices of homosexuality, is a sin. Jesus teaches his disciples not to judge others so that they may not be judged because they will be judged with the judgment they use. They should take care that their own lives are in order before they look for the speck in others' eyes (Mt 7:1–5).

Jesus' greatest critics were church leaders who complained that he spent his time with tax collectors and other disreputable sinners (Mt 9:10–13; 11:19; Mk 2:15–17; Lk 5:30–32; 7:34; 15:1–2). He sided with those rejected by society, the "others" who constituted the disenfranchised and marginalised, the poor and displaced, those without legal rights or representation and victims of faceless powers. His church will consequently also be found among people who are shifted to the margins of society; these are the people

67 See the allusion in 1 Cor 6:12–20 to sexual sin. It seems that many of the Corinthian Christians did not remember that their bodies are members of Christ and thought their sexual conduct with prostitutes had no connection to their relationship with Jesus. The author emphasises that when an individual Christian commits sexual immorality, it disgraces the entire body of Christ, linking the body of Christ to immorality (Guzik, *Commentaries,* 1 Co 6:15–17.

68 Jersild, *Spirit Ethics,* 134–5.

Spirit-filled believers love with the compassion of their Lord. They share their Lord's predilection for the "others", including victims of society's homophobia. Actually, when Jesus sided with the sinners, he explained that they are the people who will get into the kingdom of God before those who judge themselves righteous because sinners acknowledge their guilt and repent of their sins (Mt 21:31–32).

6. Synthesis

The issue of gender has become one of ideology, politics and competing versions of reality which generates a lot of emotion.[69] Some like Simone de Beauvoir view gender as a matter of patriarchal-repressive social construction and performance rather than essence. For many contemporary people, the way in which one's sex is experienced, perceived and connected with conventional gender roles is no longer granted and straightforward. In this manner, the World Health Organization defines gender as socially constructed and warns that failure to uphold the human rights of LGBTIQ+ people and protect them against abuses such as violence and discriminatory laws and practices, constitute serious violations of international human rights law and have a far-reaching impact on society, contributing to increased vulnerability to ill health including HIV infection, social and economic exclusion, putting strain on families and communities, and impacting negatively on economic growth and decent work opportunities.[70]

However, the church should not lag behind the secular human rights debate but should rather demonstrate the heart of God for victims of human rights abuses, as demonstrated by the incarnation of God's love for lost sinners. In applying Pentecostal hermeneutics, Pentecostals may start with their existential experience of God's love for all people by refusing to exclude any people from the communion of faith and its communion table, accepting LGBTIQ+ people unconditionally.[71]

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69 Cowdell, "Gender and identity".

70 [Online]. Available: http://www.who.int/reproductivehealth/publications/gender_rights/lgbti-un-statement/en/ [Accessed: 2018-09-10].

71 Méndez-Montoya, A.F., "Eucharistic imagination", 334–339.

When the important principles of a Pentecostal hermeneutic are applied to biblical references to same-sex sexual acts, it implies that these texts cannot be understood in an uninterpreted manner as valid for all times where a biblicistic, literalist manner of interpretation does not consider genre, social and historical context and the stratification of traditions. Rather, the texts are seen as temporary regulations determined by the author's intentions in writing them down and the socio-historical conditions in which it originated. This will do justice to the texts' intended meaning.

The hermeneutical principle states the importance that the horizons represented in biblical texts differ from the diverse horizons represented by contemporary readers. It should be kept in mind that the Bible does not use modern concepts such as "same-sex orientation", "same-sex sexual activities" or even "sexuality". When these terms are applied to biblical material, it is done in an anachronistic way.

Differences between a pre-modern, pre-industrialised society of ancient Israel and the Hellenistic world and contemporary times run so deep that the Bible should be read with great care. The concept of the hermeneutical circle explains that one cannot avoid two sets of assumptions in reading a text, the assumptions one brings to the text and the assumptions the writers were making when they wrote the text. The hermeneutical circle (or better: cycle) represents a never-ending process where readers never stop examining their assumptions nor assessing the text. Otherwise our tendency is to re-create the text (and God) to our own image, mirroring our own (unexamined) assumptions and false assumptions. This represents an "affective fallacy".

Contemporary charismatic believers read the Bible in the direction from the experience with the Spirit in their daily world to the biblical text, listening while reading the text to hear the voice of God and understand God's will for their lives. Their perspective and theological lens is determined by their understanding of the last part of salvation history, of the church in the world as portrayed by the book of Acts. The church exists to spread the message of the gospel (good news) that God wants to save all people. The church as ethics is a community that exists in gratitude for God's grace, doing good works to the glory of God. Believers' sexual ethics is also determined by their desire to honour God with their lives.

For that reason, believers accept all people, including the "others" such as LGBTIQ+ people, as fellow sinners in need of the grace of God. They expect God's Spirit to change all sinners who have turned to Christ to reflect the new life that shares in the resurrection of Christ, symbolised by the funeral and resurrection played out in baptism. The reborn believers are baptised in the Spirit and receive the necessary equipment to live their daily lives to the honour of God.

Pentecostals read the Bible in a sophisticated symbolic interaction of literalism and the dynamic of Spirit-experience, leading them to understand the heart of God in terms of God's words and acts as described in the Bible. I suggest that when they read the texts presumed to be about people with same-sex affections from their context of intimate knowledge about such people because they have met them and have interacted with them, then their reading of the Bible would sound different.

In the past, Pentecostals did not define doctrine at the hand of the Bible but used the Bible to formulate their expectations of what God still wanted to do for them and tell them at the hand of the experiences of biblical characters. When they needed to formulate doctrine, they started with their experience of their encounters with God and then used biblical language to formulate their theology in existential terms. In this way, the unconditional love and grace that they experienced in their encounter with God informed their reading of the Bible. Although they read the Bible and interpreted it as literally as credibility would stand, at face value, their expectation of a charismatic encounter through the text and the encounter with God co-informed their interpretation. In the process, their experience of God's love for all sinners is discounted in their encounter with the word of God while reading the Bible. Their fourfold full-gospel pre-understanding of Jesus as Saviour, Baptizer, Sanctifier and soon coming King or the fivefold gospel of Christ as Saviour, Healer, Sanctifier, Baptizer and coming King centres their charismatic life, helping them to understand God's heart for people in terms of the issues discussed by biblical authors.

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