

## Book Reviews



Mather, Hannah R.K. (2020) *The Interpreting Spirit: Spirit, Scripture, and Interpretation in the Renewal Tradition*.

Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications. 262 pages, \$55, ISBN: 9781725273191

The roots of modern Pentecostalism can be traced to the turn of the twentieth century. From the beginning, Pentecostals have been known to stress personal encounters with God through the Holy Spirit, and they are quick to turn to the Scriptures to make sense of, explain, and give direction to such experiences. However, despite describing themselves as being “people of the book,” Pentecostals only began to engage with earnest academic discussions about the process of interpreting Scripture fifty years ago. Since then, scholars from inside and outside the Pentecostal community have explored questions related to Pentecostal hermeneutics.

Still, an important question remains to be settled: “How does the Holy Spirit work to communicate with us as we engage with Scripture?” Hannah R.K. Mather offers an insightful work with this query in mind. Mather brings the contemporary reader up to speed on a conversation that has been ongoing since 1970 between partners connected to the “renewal tradition,” a term that describes global charismatic movements and scholars, not all of whom identify as Pentecostal in an ecclesial sense. In charting the historical progression of this conversation surrounding the Spirit’s role in interpreting Scripture, Mather identifies common and unifying features. The basic uniting emphasis is an intimate relationship with God, which forms us through affects (loves/desires), ethics (actions), and cognition (beliefs) as we interpret Scripture. What makes Mather’s book unique, however, is that it is not simply an evaluation of different interpretive methods, but truly seeks to focus on the Spirit’s role in scriptural interpretation.

After articulating the project’s scope in chapter one, Mather’s next four chapters examine different time spans that contain specific developments in the conversation at hand. The first span is from 1970 to 1989. Here, Mather consults a variety of Evangelical (Arthur Pink), Charismatic (James Jones, Francis Martin), Roman Catholic (Hans Urs von Balthasar), and Pentecostal (Gordon Fee, William Menzies, Howard Ervin, Rickie Moore) scholars in turn. The primary theme from this era is that pneumatic interpretation is holistic, engaging the mind while also requiring intimacy with God.

The next time span is from 1990 to 1999. During these years, “Pentecostal Hermeneutic” became the predominant term for discussion. Perhaps because of this shift, Evangelicals and Charismatics did not continue on with the same vigor as did Pentecostals. Key writers in this phase include Steven Land, Jürgen Moltmann, Kevin Vanhoozer, Jackie David Johns, Cheryl Bridges Johns, and John Christopher Thomas. Through exploring the Spirit’s relationship with Scripture, intimate engagement with Scripture, and the incoming influence of postmodernism on cognitive frameworks, this era’s primary theme is how the Spirit reaches through Scripture and interprets us even as we seek the Spirit’s guidance in interpreting Scripture.

It was between 2000 and 2009 that full-length studies really emerged. According to Mather, the ongoing pursuit of a Pentecostal hermeneutic began to hinder discussions of the Spirit’s role in interpreting Scripture by focusing on cognitive frameworks for interpretation. Evaluating the work of Lee Roy Martin, Kenneth Archer, Frank Machia, Amos Yong, Francis Martin, and others, Mather highlights the continued stress on personal intimacy with God, which is then connected to the impact



upon the community in interpreting Scripture: The Spirit simultaneously communicates through Scripture in a personal and communal fashion.

Further full-length efforts were produced between 2010 and 2018, including works by Chris Green, Jacqueline Grey, Craig Keener, and Jack Levison. This period also yielded collections and colloquies on the subject. Mather presents two dominant schools of thought from this era, the first of which she labels the Regent School, which includes the work of Mark Boda, Jacqueline Grey, Craig Keener, Jack Levison, Kevin Spawn, and Archie Wright. This school of thought is connected to the Regent University School of Divinity in Virginia Beach. The second is the Cleveland School of Thought, named by James K.A. Smith. This thought school includes Cheryl Bridges Johns, Chris Green, Lee Roy Martin, Rickie Moore, John Christopher Thomas, and Robert Wall.

The Regent School gives more consideration to the original location of the text, while also discussing the influence of ethical conduct and pneumatic hindrance on our ability to interpret Scripture. Conversely, the Cleveland School focuses on the contemporary context of the interpreter and the early Pentecostal community, while also engaging the affective and ethical aspects of interpretation. Because of Mather's emphasis on uniting factors across different works, common ground is found between these two schools of thought in their focus on affective and ethical components, the need for an intimate relationship with God, and the development of thought on pneumatic appropriation and pneumatic hindrance. The final chapter serves as a substantial summary and evaluation of the entire conversation from 1970 to the present. Mather testifies to how her own understanding of the Spirit's role in interpreting Scripture gradually progressed throughout the project, predicting that it would continue to unfold beyond its completion.

Mather's work is a wonderful celebration of Pentecostal and Charismatic thought on the Spirit's role in scriptural interpretation, and almost functions as a graduate seminar on the subject. It is rich with footnotes and evaluations of the subject's major works from the past five decades. Undergraduate students who are just beginning to grasp concepts of hermeneutics and scriptural interpretation may find the sheer volume of works discussed in this book, as well as many of the concepts, to be overwhelming. Pastors too may find the academic discussions disengaging. However, this is a valuable resource for those who want to become better acquainted with discussions surrounding the Spirit's role in interpreting Scripture.

**Reviewed By:**

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