

Editorial: Engaging Global Pentecostal Scholarship

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This year marks the 22nd anniversary of the *Australasian Pentecostal Studies*. The journal was birthed out of a meeting in 1997 at Southern Cross College, Australia (now Alphacrucis College) of around 150 scholars, pastors and students at the inaugural Barrett Lectures for the Promotion of Pentecostal Scholarship and Spirituality. The meeting espoused the three-fold goal of being interdisciplinary, integrative and highly contextualised.¹ Yet, even in the very first *APS* issue, published in 1998, the editors recognised the challenges for maintaining a regional focus in a globalising world. That is, to value (g)local, cultural and denominational distinctives while holding in tension the recognition and importance of ecumenical, interdisciplinary and intercultural factors and influences.² While over the years the journal has (rightly) tended to focus on regional scholars and issues, this particular issue marks a slight re-alignment of this focus to also engage global perspectives of pentecostalism. While remaining consistent with its stated purpose of promoting pentecostal scholars and scholarship from the regions of Asia, Pacific and Australia, this approach recognises that pentecostalism is a global phenomenon and must be engaged as such. In this issue, there are scholars represented from almost all inhabited continents. Yet, the issues they raise are important not only for their own locations but also for Australasian contexts.

This year also marks the 20th anniversary of the publication of Amos Yong's first major work, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions*. The influence and contribution of Amos Yong to pentecostal theology cannot be underestimated. Arguably the premier pentecostal theologian and certainly one of the most prolific,³ Yong has been a significant voice in moving pentecostalism from the scholarly theatre wings to the centre stage. As a Malaysian (Chinese)-American scholar, it should be no surprise that Yong's writings find resonance across global pentecostalism. In one sense, the writer and his work embody the goals of this journal: to be ecumenical, interdisciplinary and intercultural. It is fitting then that the celebration of the anniversary of Yong's first volume be the focus of the opening section of this *APS* issue.

The roundtable discussion with Amos Yong featured in this issue originally began as a panel discussion of the Theology Interest Group intended to be presented at the 49th Annual Meeting of the Society for Pentecostal Studies (SPS) in March 2020. Due to the COVID-19 pandemic the actual SPS Meeting was cancelled (though the theme itself and many sessions have been postponed to 2021). However, the presentations intended for the conference panel discussion and 20th anniversary celebration were re-directed to this journal issue. For this reason, the essays tend to be more reflective and dialogical, indicating somewhat the

¹ Scott Stephens, "Editorial," *Australasian Pentecostal Studies* 1 (1998): 1.

² *ibid*

³ For a discussion on the publishing output of Yong, see Oliverio's article in this issue.

origins of this roundtable. My thanks to Crip Stephenson⁴ for initiating this roundtable in his role as the Theology Interest Group leader, and to each of the contributors: Bill Oliverio, Crip Stephenson and Drenda Butler. I am also thankful to Amos Yong for his generous and encouraging response.

Readers that are new to Yong's work will find in this roundtable some excellent summaries and an easy entrée⁵ to theological feast of Yongian writings. Those more familiar with Yong will also find some tasty morsels to chew. One of the common themes that emerges in the roundtable discussion is the significance of Yong's theological method(s), particularly his "pneumatological imagination" first developed in *Discerning the Spirit(s)*. This method is "a way of seeing God, self and world that is inspired by the Pentecostal-charismatic experience of the Spirit."⁶ This thinking is informed by the Day of Pentecost, acknowledging and valuing the many tongues and many cultures in dialogical engagement. Yet, it is also characterised by "epistemic fallibilism"—that is, while God's world can be known and truth claims made, any claims must be offered with great humility since all human knowledge is fallible.⁷ The pneumatological imagination then offers a way forward for pentecostals to navigate the pluralism of our contemporary context. Twenty years later, Yong's method continues to provide inspiration, "theo-logic,"⁸ and application for pentecostal scholarship.

One of the many advantages of Yong's pneumatological imagination is its explicit reliance on experience of the Spirit. It is an unashamedly pentecostal approach. This leads rather nicely, one could even say "serendipitously," to the first research essay. Jamys Carter challenges pentecostal scholars to acknowledge the working of the Spirit in their research, and to incorporate such recognition into their methodologies. Utilising semi-structured interviews, Carter explores how particular pentecostal scholars have experienced the leading of the Spirit in their research. Yet, he observes a disconnect in that these scholars have tended to not acknowledge this work of the Spirit within their methods and writings. Carter suggests this is because there is no current convention by which pentecostal scholars can acknowledge the role of the Spirit in their research. He raises a clarion call for this oversight to be re-dressed. Certainly I can attest to the leading and direction of the Spirit in editing this volume and the procurement of the various articles and essays.

The second research essay is a study of Isaiah 53 by Marius Nel in which he examines its use in both the NT and classical pentecostal churches in Southern Africa. It raises issues for both the pentecostal distinctive of healing in the atonement, and pentecostal hermeneutics. Nel begins his study by unpacking the Servant Song of Isaiah 53 (Isa 52:13-53:12). He then explores some of the history of interpretation of Isaiah 53, namely, New Testament readings followed by readings from the historic and contemporary pentecostal community in southern Africa. By presenting a study of everyday pentecostals reading the Old Testament, Nel

⁴ Christopher A. Stephenson has also recently edited *An Amos Yong Reader: The Pentecostal Spirit* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2020).

⁵ Note: within Australian (and British) culture generally the entrée is what our US friends call the Appetizer.

⁶ Amos Yong, *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2000), 102.

⁷ *An Amos Yong Reader*, 5.

⁸ Amos Yong, "The Pneumatological Imagination: The Logic of Pentecostal Theology," in *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology*, ed. W. Vondey (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 153.

contributes to the growing literature of grassroots hermeneutics.⁹ Consistent with the study of Australian grassroots readers, Nel observes that the historical context of the Old Testament text was flattened by contemporary southern African readers to prioritise a Christological reading.¹⁰ However, contrary to the findings of the historical and contemporary pentecostal grassroots readers, Nel claims that while there are diverse readings of Isaiah 53:4-6 within the New Testament however the New Testament does not apply Isaiah to healing in the context of the atonement brought by Christ's crucifixion. For Nel, the context of the Matthew 8:16-17 is Jesus's healing ministry and not his atoning work. In contrast, other pentecostal scholars, such as Keener, read the Matthean text in its broader context of the mission of Jesus. Keener writes, "Matthew cites Isaiah 53:4 to demonstrate that Jesus' mission of healing fulfills the character of the mission of the servant, who at the ultimate cost of his own life would reveal God's concern for a broken humanity."¹¹ Yet, Nel's claim is one with which biblical scholars and theologians alike must wrestle.

The final research essay addresses the context of Europe, yet has much resonance with the Australasian situation, particularly those nations that identify as more secular rather than religious. William Kay discusses the value of sociological theory to predict the probable behaviour of pentecostal groups. He asserts that pentecostalism, particularly in Europe (and I would argue also in Australia) function sociologically as denominations despite their tendency to retain the terminology of "movement." This is reflected in the increasing concern for and reflection of societal values. Kay suggests a corollary of this is that second generation pentecostals are more likely to evince a concern for issues that are reflect or mirror the broader social interests, such as issues of social justice. However, Kay notes that the flow can also ebb the other way; pentecostals may be able to influence their social contexts. The challenge for pentecostal communities in the various contexts including Australasia, is whether the benefits of assimilation to society will outweigh the benefits of standing as a counter-cultural entity. Or, if pentecostalism can navigate a course by which they provide a prophetic voice and what Kay calls a "biblical ethical mission" within the context of liberal democracy. Regardless, if pentecostalism does not continue to renew and reform, it will be replaced by new waves of renewal.

Yet, as the roundtable discussion demonstrates, there is hope that the seeds of renewal continue to be sown within pentecostalism. Yong's pneumatological imagination focuses the pentecostal community on the Acts narrative as central to the pentecostal narrative. It reminds us that the wind of the Spirit continues to blow, and that human beings continue to "meet" the divine wind and encounter anew the creative Spirit that renews the church and world.¹² It reminds us that we need to hear each other's voices and the of "many tongues" of global pentecostalism. This certainly gives me hope for the future of Australasian and global pentecostalism.

⁹ Jacqueline Grey, "Biblical Hermeneutics: Reading Scripture with the Spirit in Community," in *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology*, ed. W. Vondey (Abingdon: Routledge, 2020), 137. See also Esa Autero, *Reading the Bible Across Contexts: Luke's Gospel, Socio-Economic Marginality, and Latin American Biblical Hermeneutics* (Leiden: Brill, 2016).

¹⁰ Jacqueline Grey, *Three's a Crowd: Pentecostalism, Hermeneutics, and the Old Testament* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011), chapter 5.

¹¹ Craig S. Keener, *A Commentary on the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 273.

¹² Yong, "The Pneumatological Imagination," 156.