

Editorial: Re-Fashioning our Swords into Ploughshares

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They will beat their swords into ploughshares
and their spears into pruning hooks (Isaiah 2:4b)

The theme for this edition of *Australasian Pentecostal Studies* was precipitated by a meal. As sometimes occurs, sharing good food and robust conversation results in new endeavours. This particular meal was with a young couple, John and Hannah Griffiths, in Adelaide (Australia) in 2018. As a recent doctoral graduate in biblical studies, John was sharing his research interests and hopes. Hannah, a veterinarian doctor, was also sharing about her future work and aspirations. Both John and Hannah talked passionately about environmental issues. Hannah asked: “Why aren’t pentecostals talking more about this?” I responded that while there were a few pentecostal scholars writing on this topic, there are so many topics to cover in theology that each are often only given small attention. “But this is important” Hannah responded. She is right. The human imprint on our planet is pervasive. So should also be our responsibility as stewards of creation to ensure the well-being of our planet and all its inhabitants.¹ It sounds simple. As believers in Christ, it is imperative that we love our neighbour, which refers to people but arguably includes the animals, plants, and environment in which we live. Yet, such a simple declaration of commitment towards the flourishing of creation can cause division and angst. The discussion of the environment and its care has become politicised.

The politicisation of this topic became very obvious to me as I began to consider the title for this special edition of the journal. Should the title include: “climate change”? “environmental issues”? “eco-theology”? or, “stewardship”? Each option seemed rife with contention and political baggage. Each of these titles are suggestive of a political orientation and would potentially result in the alienation groups of readers. When really, my desire is for readers of all political persuasions to pause, lay down our weapons of political posturing, and consider the lands created by God in which we live. In pausing, my hope is that we consider our shared commitment to, and responsibility for, the stewardship and nurture of creation, as outlined in Genesis 1:28. So, in the attempt to invite as many readers as possible to join this discussion I have opted for the title “creation care.” Its still not neutral, but hopefully neutral enough that those on both sides of the political spectrum can re-fashion their swords into plowshares to till the fertile soil of theological reflection on the environment.

¹ Bruce C. Birch, et al, *Bible and Ethics in the Christian Life: A New Conversation* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2018), pp.10-1.

Yet, even if the creation mandate for stewardship in Genesis is not enough motivation, then perhaps the call for relevancy by our young people will cause us to heed this issue. That is, as noted, creation care is a topic of great importance to the young people in our communities. Pentecostalism is, in general, a movement of young people² —and those of us young at heart. Yet the young people within our pentecostal communities, like Hannah and John, express fear for the future of our planet and frustration of the lack of concern by older generations. Rather than dismiss these fears, current pentecostal leaders need to take seriously the voices of our future leaders. Importantly, we need to provide an adequate response to their concerns and provide them with hope for the future. Yet such a response requires us to engage deeply with Scripture and draw from the wells of our own theological resources. That is exactly the purpose of this special issue of the journal.

This collection of articles, commissioned to explore the theme of pentecostalism and the environment, is a small step towards advancing the contribution of pentecostal scholars to this important issue of creation care. The issue is introduced by Anita Davis, who provides an overview of current pentecostal contributions to a theology of ecology. This includes not only scholars contributing explicitly to the topic of creation care, but also those whose theological contributions have implications for this topic. Utilising the pentecostal distinctive of the five-fold “full gospel” as the organising principle, Davis explores how the Spirit works to transform and restore all creation, not just personal lives of believers. She also considers how this distinctive provides resources for practical application of creation care in global contexts.

The focus then turns to Scripture, as three biblical scholars explore creation care from a biblical and hermeneutical perspective. In the first of these, Rick Wadholm Jr provides a study from the Old Testament/Hebrew Bible as he considers the “good news” of Deuteronomy for all creation. He highlights the role of creation as prophetic witness to the covenant between God and ancient Israel, a covenant that God’s people to oppose practices of pollution and destruction, protect the poor, and work towards the flourishing of community—which included its environment.

For pentecostals, two of the most formative books from the New Testament (and arguably the whole bible) for our faith and practice are Acts and Revelation. John Griffiths, now part of the faculty of Alphacrucis College in Adelaide, re-considers the Day of Pentecost as a temple inauguration theophany. This connects the Acts event as part of the meta-narrative of creation: If God created the world as a temple to inhabit (Genesis 1) and Pentecost parallels this temple-inauguration, then the Spirit poured at Pentecost arguably parallels the Spirit’s

² See <https://www.ncls.org.au/news/ageing-church>. The NCLS data on Australian churches highlights, “Pentecostal churches have the highest proportion of young attenders, with 24% aged between 15 and 29 (while Australian churches on average have 13% of their attenders aged 15-29).” The survey data also notes that “Pentecostal churches are the only denomination who match the broader Australian population age profile for younger people (24% of Australian population are aged 15-29**).”

activity at creation. The Spirit-baptised creation at Pentecost then is also a prophetic witness through its cosmic imagery pointing to the inbreaking of God's presence. This emphasises, once again, that Spirit baptism is envisioned more broadly as communal rather than individualistically. Similarly, John Christopher Thomas explores the creation language in the Apocalypse. This is essential, as interpretations of Revelation have been at the centre of controversies of pentecostal eschatology. Thomas's reflections provide some important and timely insights into this much misunderstood book.

These explorations then move into more hermeneutical and theological territory. Jeffrey Lamp and A.J. Swoboda have both been at the forefront of pentecostal approaches to the environment. Lamp reviews the rise of ecological hermeneutics, looking particularly at the identification of ecologically difficult texts highlighted by Australian scholar, Norman Habel. Lamp then connects Habel's work to pentecostal hermeneutics by engagement with Chris Green's *Sanctifying Interpretation*. Green provides a model to wrestle with difficult texts of Scripture by allowing God's Word to discomfort and wound us, and being wounded by it, alter us. Reconciliation is a key theme of the article by A.J. Swoboda. He observes in the eco-crisis that "things are not what they ought to be." There is systemic suffering in the created order. Swoboda then envisions the Spirit as eschatological Healer, who awakens our ecological imagination, and who works towards reconciliation, *shalom*, and how "things should be."

Finally, the special issue is concluded by a powerful challenge from Michael J. Frost for pentecostals to resist the type of prosperity gospel that promotes a materialism and of unbridled consumerism. Instead, he suggests an approach to the prosperity gospel that emphasises "the flourishing of persons, communities and creation." Frost cuts to the heart of the problem: human greed and self-interest.

Alongside the articles for this special issue is one general article, also by Rick Wadholm Jr and Andrew Ray Williams. It may seem an odd addition, however the article examines John 9 through a pentecostal theological reading. It is the text where Jesus heals man born blind. This text is noted in some of the articles in the above special issue, so it seemed appropriate to include this exploration of John 9 as a supplement to the topic of creation care.

Overall, there are several common themes that emerge from this issue: the importance of Spirit baptism as communal rather than individual; creation as prophetic witness to God's work; the creation mandate for stewardship; the eschatological hope for the coming kingdom of God; the need for Christ's followers to participate in God's work of reconciliation and renewal of all things; the prophetic challenge to pursue blessing divorced from materialism. My prayer is that each reader from the pentecostal community will find in this journal the resources to be instruments of peace and flourishing and witness our hope to their wider community. My prayer is also that readers from outside the pentecostal community may have greater understanding of our theological distinctives and our care for the healing of creation.