

Amos Yong, ed. *The Spirit Renews the Face of the Earth: Pentecostal Forays in Science and Theology of Creation* (Eugene: Pickwick, 2009), xxiii pp, +240 pp, ISBN: 978-1-60608-196-9. \$ 30.00 USD

### Opening Remarks

This anthology of articles by Pentecostal scholars on topics related to science and creation theology began life at the 2008 Society for Pentecostal Studies meeting at Duke University. The contributors are diverse in academic expertise, geography, and Pentecostal traditions. The book begins with an introduction by the editor, Amos Yong, followed by twelve articles divided into four categories, i.e., biblical interpretations, historical elaborations, theological explications, and contextual and disciplinary applications. I will proceed by commenting on the chapters seriatim.

#### **Introduction: Poured Out on All Creation!? Searching for the Spirit in the Pentecostal Encounter with Science, xi-xxiii, by Amos Yong.**

Yong provides a brief survey of the dichotomous relationship between Pentecostals and science in which he juxtaposes the alacrity with which Pentecostals have employed technology evangelistically and their anti-intellectualism which explains the iceberg evolution of Pentecostal colleges into universities. Nonetheless, Yong points out that the emergence of science majors at these universities has created a situation in which Pentecostals can no longer delay the science/faith dialogue. Yong goes on to explain the historical predominance of a conflict model for Pentecostal engagement with science, and he articulates the convergence, mutuality, complementary, and separate domain paradigms which have more recently been adopted by some Pentecostals. The introductory chapter sets up the context for the chapters which follow insofar as the need for a dialogue is established. However, it was disappointing that Yong introduced very interesting topics like the aforementioned Pentecostal embrace of communications technology and the notion that science itself is a cultural phenomenon not unlike religion, yet the contributors leave these areas unaddressed in the ensuing chapters.

**The Face of God as His Creating Spirit: The Interplay of Yahweh's *panim* and *ruach* in Psalm 104:29-30, 3-16, by Scott A. Ellington.**

Ellington argues that the *panim* (face or presence) of God is more closely associated with creation in the Hebrew Bible than the Spirit of God. The Spirit more often has to do with empowerment; nonetheless, the Holy Spirit is sometimes depicted as an agent of creation and re-creation, e.g., in the Psalms. In the end, Ellington suggests that both the Spirit and the *panim* of God act creatively in continuous fashion. Consequently, creation itself cannot be limited to primordial events, but rather it happens around us and in us everyday. Therefore, as Pentecostals, we should understand creation theology not only in terms of reconstructing God's past acts but also as encountering him and participating with him in his present and on-going creative acts.

**Created for Shalom: Human Agency and Responsibility in the World, 17-29, by R. Jerome Boone.**

In his article, Boone sketches a corrective to dominion theology in which he avers that God has appointed human beings to be his agents whom he has created to care for creation. This care takes the form of mimicking the divine creative act which he defines as the transformation of chaos into shalom. From this foundation, Boone articulates human creative responsibility in terms of transforming social chaos defined as abuse, disease, war, poverty, etc. into shalom by doing God's will. He develops this further to conclude that material prosperity, prototypically in terms of God's blessing in the land, has the purpose of empowering shalom creating activity. He further detects the same motif in the NT in Jesus' declaration of the year of the Lord's favor, the community of goods described in Acts, the Pauline collection, and the book of James.

His approach is certainly provocative; however, some may be uneasy with the tenuous connection between the chaos of the primordial universe and social ills. More disturbing may be the implicit prosperity bent of this article. Boone does, however, attempt to sidestep this problem, albeit awkwardly and unconvincingly, by observing that sin often perverts shalom—making it self-centered. Finally, Boone's attempt to find his shalom/chaos substructure behind NT thought on poverty lacks persuasive argumentation. He seems to assume an obvious corollary which may not be obvious to all.

**Revelation and the (New) Creation: A Prolegomenon on the Apocalypse, Science, and Creation, 30-50, by Robby Waddell.**

Recognizing that our eschatology often hinders Pentecostal environmental concern, Waddell calls for a fresh reading of Revelation. In his new reading, Waddell seeks to correct mistaken notions about the end of the present creation in a fireball followed by its replacement with a brand new creation. He suggests that a more accurate reading creates an image of world renewal rather than world destruction. The basis for his understanding of renewal reposes mostly on his appeal to Jesus as the prototype of resurrection/recreation. Since the NT makes the Lord our pattern of bodily resurrection, Waddell by analogy concludes that the resurrection of the earth will be after the same pattern. Therefore, it will not explode and be replaced, but rather God will renew it. Beyond this theological argument, Waddell marshals a scientific proof based on chaos theory which suggests that all phenomena are related to their environments. Thus, physics suggests a necessary relationship between the first and the second creation.

While interesting, Waddell's approach raises a few issues with which the reader will have to wrestle. Firstly, the linguistic and exegetical basis for his understanding of the texts in Revelation is not unequivocal, and the other NT texts which rather clearly suggest the fiery end of the world were not adequately dealt with. One wonders, for instance, if John really meant renewal, why he did not use a form of *avnakai,nwsij* or *paliggenesi,a*. Further, if we grant that resurrection is the pattern of recreation, the obvious question becomes, what is world death? The pattern of Christ does not eliminate world death; it, rather, demands it. Finally, the scientific argument seems out of place. A hermeneutic that uses science to validate readings needs to be justified before it is employed.

**Cautious Co-Belligerence?: The Late Nineteenth-Century American Divine Healing Movement and the Promise of Medical Science, 53-73, by Bernie A. Van De Walle.**

Van De Walle examines the divine healing movement *vis à vis* the rapid medical advances at the time of its emergence. Interestingly, most of those in the divine healing movement recognized the role of medicine as a gift from God. However, they often saw medicine as deficient in that it could not deal with the root problem of sickness, namely, sin. He includes an account of Charles Cullis who had homes

for people with incurable diseases. Cullis focused on getting people saved, and then he prayed for divine healing. Most of his patients died, but he nonetheless considered his ministry a success because the root cause of sickness had been dealt with through salvation. Van De Walle also includes an account of John Alexander Dowie who was a radical opponent of medicine, but Van De Walle contextualizes his vitriolic rhetoric against a backdrop in which medicine was an incipient discipline and many of its practitioners were incompetent and others were con-men. His conclusion is essentially that both doctors and faith healers did not much care for one another in those early years, but that the faith healers were at least willing to give medicine a modicum of respect.

**Creation Revealed: An Early Pentecostal Hermeneutic, 74-92, by David S. Norris.**

Pentecostals were latecomers to the debate about origins. Norris explains that the typical Pentecostal perspective on the issue of evolution was: “The Bible is true. Evolution is wrong. End of discussion” (74). However, there were exceptions, and G. T. Haywood is the exception around whom this chapter revolves. He was a oneness Pentecostal who was conversant with the scientific theories of his time and used direct revelation from the Holy Spirit to solve issues related to the origins of man. Ultimately, his solution did not please science or conservatives. And he either knew nothing of or cared nothing for hermeneutical principles. Yet Norris believes that Haywood’s significance lies in his belief in the Bible as a source of absolute scientific truth and his attempt to appropriate that truth under both dispensational and Pentecostal influences.

**Evolving Paradigms: Creationism as Pentecostal Variation on a Fundamentalist Theme, 93-114, by Gerald W. King.**

King charts the progress of Pentecostals from their near un-involvement in the Scopes trial to their alliance with fundamentalism forged through the evolution issue. Early on evolution was a non-issue for most Pentecostals. They did not have modernist preachers with dangerous ideas about higher criticism, evolution, and anti-supernaturalism in their churches. In the beginning, evolution was spoken of by way of warning the faithful not to depart the right path. King argues that the Pentecostals, especially those in the Assemblies of

God, became concerned with evolution when they began to be successful in the cities; then they relied on fundamentalist scholars for help. This resulted in Pentecostals being more closely associated with fundamentalism.

**Preaching the “full Gospel” in the Context of Global Environmental Crises, 117-134, by Shane Clifton.**

Beginning with the observation that Pentecostals are generally not concerned with the environment, Clifton charts a course to correct this oversight by dealing with their “inadequate and underdeveloped” theology of creation (119). He organizes his discussion around the four-fold gospel of Christ as savior, baptizer, healer, and coming king. First he demonstrates how in current Pentecostal experience each of these four areas has anti-environmental baggage. Salvation involves the soul but not the physical world. Spirit baptism separates the believer from the world presumably by making him spiritually rather than physically orientated. Healing does not usually involve the environment, and Pentecostal eschatology often has ecologically destructive effects.

Clifton then argues for a reframing of the four-fold gospel so as to make it earth-friendly. He ties salvation to the concept of creation as an on-going process so that the saving of the soul is part of the same process of creation/recreation which is happening all around us. Clifton suggests that Spirit baptism involves being empowered by the Spirit for the work of the Spirit, i.e., breathing life into creation. Therefore, Spirit baptism should inspire earth-keeping activity. In his reframing, Clifton extends healing to include the sick environment. And he reframes eschatology along the same lines that Waddell did in his chapter in terms of earth-renewal. Interestingly, Clifton also suggests that prosperity theology (which is inherently eco-destructive based on its “get all you can” ethos) may be reformed along these same lines into a theology of “flourishing” (133).

Clifton is to be praised for his attempt to foster environmental consciousness among Pentecostals, and for his insightful observation that nothing within the Pentecostal tradition demands that we alienate ourselves from creation. However, his criticism that our idea of baptism separates Pentecostals from the world seems forced. Moreover, one has to keep in mind that otherworldliness is essential to NT theology; we should, therefore, be cautious about excising it from our theology. With regard to the prosperity gospel, Clifton purposefully avoids the

theological issues involved with the result that his suggested correction becomes a bit like painting a house built on a foundation of sand.

**Pentecostal Ecology: A Theological Paradigm for Pentecostal Environmentalism, 135-154, by Matthew Tallman.**

Like Clifton, Tallman frames his discussion around the four-fold gospel. One of his more interesting suggestions is that environmentalism so resonates with the post-modern 21<sup>st</sup> century world that Pentecostals will have to embrace it to remain effective in evangelism. He also provides a thought provoking personal example of his own effective use of the message of the re-cycling God. Aside from evangelism, he also roots earth-keeping in God's glory which is in some way diminishes as his creation dies. However, readers may have some difficulty with the role of human beings in saving the earth. The analogy does not work well. If our sin kills the earth, how can we save it when we could not even save ourselves.

**Implications of the Kenosis of the Spirit for a Creational Eschatology: A Pentecostal Engagement with Jürgen Moltmann, 155-172, by Peter Althouse.**

In his contribution, Althouse adopts Moltmann's notion of the panentheistic Spirit of God who empties himself in the incarnation. In Moltmann's theology, kenosis represents a Trinitarian event in which all the members of the godhead lose something through the incarnation. At the end of the chapter, Althouse suggests that understanding the spirit from this kenotic perspective could lead Pentecostals to missional service to the creation as well as to God and others. Althouse does have a creative approach to the subject matter, but the points of contact between creation and science were underdeveloped. Probably too much time was spent on Moltmann's kenotic approach. It would have been helpful if the environmental/creational implications of this spirit kenosis had been more fully articulated.

**God's Laws of Productivity: Creation in African Pentecostal Hermeneutics, 175-190, by Kwabena Asamoah-Gyadu.**

Asamoah-Gyadu asserts that African Pentecostals do not dichotomize faith and science. For this characteristic, he credits the

traditional African beliefs which focus on God as creator, provider, and sustainer. In his essay, Asamoah-Gyadu evaluates the sermons of two popular African pastors, *viz.*, Pastor Matthew Ahimolowo and Pastor Mensa Otabil. In looking at their sermons, he concludes that there is little interest in debating about evolution, but a strong commitment, which Asamoah-Gyadu describes as a hermeneutic, to emphasize Jesus' ability to control the natural order. The essay provides an interesting glimpse into the issues of science and faith in an African Pentecostal context. Nonetheless, I do wonder about Asamoah-Gyadu's claim to be able to know the tendencies of Pentecostals across a continent when the data presented is rather localized.

**Meaning-Making and Religious Experience: A Cognitive Appraisal Model of Pentecostal Experiences of the Holy Spirit, 191-209, by Edward E. Decker, Jr.**

In Decker's contribution, he undertakes an investigation into one's stated experience of the Holy Spirit and one's response to the same using the concept of individual cognitive processes. Decker chiefly concerns himself with the factors which influence the appraisal process after a spiritual experience. Interestingly, the method he employs derives from military research into how different soldiers respond to similar combat situations. In the essay four stages of appraisal give structure to the approach, *i.e.*, primary appraisal, secondary appraisal, attributions, and reappraisal. After a case study, Decker suggests that his method might be used to further investigate how a Pentecostal background influences one's appraisal of a spiritual experience. This type of approach raises many questions about the helpfulness of such investigations, and it raises concerns about explaining spiritual things in humanistic ways. In saying this, I do not criticize Decker's essay, but rather I am highlighting the need for more theological reflection about the method.

**Teaching Origins to Pentecostal Students, 210-231, by Michael Tenneson and Steve Badger.**

This chapter provides suggestions for Bible College and Seminary instructors to help them facilitate discussions on origins. Their contribution is genuinely helpful, and as someone who studied origins under Dr. Badger at Central Bible College, I can say from experience that this method works well. However, I do question the implicit

assumption that guiding students into a consistent commitment to one of the three orthodox approaches (young earth creationism, old earth creationism, theistic evolution) to origins is desirable. I suspect that if I were to take their test, my answers would be inconsistent since I take a rather agnostic stand on the subject—being personally unconvinced by the evidence of all three approaches. Nonetheless, the suggestions made will surely help instructors focus origins discussions and avoid emotionalism in their classrooms.

### Concluding Thoughts

Overall, the collection of essays in this volume is presented for the readers to ponder. Some are insightful and helpful but other claims are unsubstantiated. The studies explored by the contributors are presently relevant, critically executed, ecologically appropriated and culturally sensitive. However, much research should be done on the topics examined. This volume is a welcome contribution of the Pentecostal understanding of the world where we live. It is encouraging to note that the studies in *The Spirit Renews the Face of the Earth: Pentecostal Forays in Science and Theology of Creation* are becoming a part of Pentecostal reflection.

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