

Pentecostals and Ecumenism

To borrow a phrase from Robert Frost, we are going to take “the road less travelled¹” in this edition and go where many Pentecostals have traditionally feared to tread. The term “ecumenism” raises many concerns, most of them legitimate, for many Pentecostals. But the question must be raised—Is the divisiveness that has been a part of Christianity for most of its history consistent with Jesus’ call for unity in John 17:11, 21? From where I sit, Christ’s fractured Church, which includes the Pentecostal/Charismatic movements, is not pleasing to God.

While western Pentecostals have been traditionally resistant to ecumenical discussions, the pendulum has begun to swing in the other direction, without denying that significant issues remain. Even my own denomination, the Assemblies of God (USA), has softened its position on the ecumenical movement and we at the *AJPS* believe that this is a discussion that more Pentecostals need to be having in light of Jesus’ call for unity.

I would like to express my sincere thanks to Drs. Cecil M. Robeck of the United States and Jean-Daniel Plüss of Zurich, Switzerland, who helped me connect with potential authors and then reviewing the articles sent. These men have been outstanding Pentecostal leaders in ecumenical dialogues for many years. As always, the views expressed in these articles are those of the authors, not necessarily that of Drs. Robeck and Plüss, the *AJPS*, or our parent organization, the Asia Pacific Theological Seminary.

Most of the articles presented here were originally presented as papers at various dialogues in which Pentecostal scholars have been engaged with other Christian traditions over the last several years, a couple of which were hosted on our Baguio campus, and have been edited for a written format. In doing so, however, we have temporarily departed from our normal policy of having a mix of western and Asian authors. This is not to say that the issue is not relevant to Asia, where

¹<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44272/the-road-not-taken> (accessed November 29, 2019).

the Body of Christ is as deeply fractured and schismatic as anywhere else in the world, nor does it mean that there are no Asians writing on these issues. It simply means that we were not able to secure any articles from them, an omission for which I apologize.

Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen opens this edition with a two part article entitled *Catholicity, Full Gospel and Fullness of the Spirit: A Pentecostal Perspective on the Third Mark of the Church*. He asks if Pentecostals should or even could talk about Catholicity. In part 1, he clarifies relevant issues and explains his definition of significant terms, which is critical to answering his question. In part 2, he describes some key features that he sees is important for the way Pentecostals understand the term “Catholicity.”

Tania Harris follows with another two part article that explores where Pentecostals part ways with Evangelicals regarding revelatory experience and, perhaps surprisingly, may be closer to Roman Catholicism. Part 1 introduces both Evangelical and Pentecostal reaction to revelatory experiences. In part 2, she shows the problems that she feels Pentecostals have with Evangelical approaches to revelatory experience and why the Catholic approach may be a more appropriate framework for Pentecostal revelatory experience.

Then, Lisa Stephenson and her husband, Christopher, present separate articles on how Pentecostals should understand the Virgin Mary. Both build on the work of Jerry Sandidge, a Pentecostal scholar of an earlier generation who interacted with the Mariology of the Catholic Church, proposing some points of agreement and divergence.

Lisa goes first, explaining why Pentecostals have been reticent to embrace Catholic Mariology without endorsing the Pentecostal misunderstandings of Catholic teaching. Then, she uses Sandidge’s points of agreement, grounding his theological claims in historic resources and explaining how Pentecostals’ positive view of Mary has not been completely muted.

Christopher Stephenson then details part of the history of the discussion on Mary that took place during the second phase of the International Catholic-Pentecostal Dialogue from 1977-1982. Jerry Sandidge later presented a landmark paper that helped contribute to the Pentecostals’ reflection on Mary. After discussing these items, he moves to give greater attention to the Synoptics’ presentation of Mary and concludes by giving some considerations for Pentecostals who want to have a better understanding of Catholic Mariology.

Van Johnson then takes us in a different direction, reflecting on the Pentecostals' view of eschatology in comparison with the view from the Reformed tradition, which he builds around not only the concepts of eschatology, but also of mission. He then follows this up with a discussion on the relevance of apocalyptic eschatology.

Mel Robeck then concludes this edition with a Pentecostal perspective on the gifts of prophecy, dealing both with the biblical prophets and the gifts of prophecy in the modern Pentecostal/Charismatic Movements. But he doesn't stop there. He quotes Hans Reudi-Weber, who lamented on the lack of reflection on prophecy in the ecumenical movement, and asked if their might be more positive criteria in the New Testament texts on prophecy. Robeck then notes that the International Catholic-Pentecostal dialogue chose to work on that issue and he proceeds to details the issues relevant to that discussion.

I hope you will join us on the "road less travelled." We might discover, along with Frost, that this road "makes all the difference." As usual, you may contact me directly through our website, www.aptspress.org and share your thoughts with me. Thanks for reading.

Your fellow pilgrim on the road less travelled,

Dave Johnson, DMiss
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