

# The Pentecostal and science promise

By [Thomas Jay Oord](#)

November 17, 2011

The Pentecostal tradition offers one of, if not *the*, most exciting conversation partners in the science-and-religion dialogue. Pentecostalism brings several assets to the conversation table.

I will be meeting friends Craig Boyd, Joshua Moritz, LeRon Shults, and Amos Yong to explore the work of Yong and Pentecostalism as it relates to science. Yong has written or edited several books on science and theology, and I consider him a creative theological epicenter for what is best about Pentecostals engaging the science-and-theology interface.

The Pentecostal tradition has the potential to turn the science-and-religion dialogue into a mutually transformative engagement. Such an endeavor could transform the way we think about and do science, and it could transform Pentecostalism and its theology.

Here are five reasons why Pentecostalism and Pentecostal theology can be game changers in a big way:

## **A Large "Membership" Base**

The sheer number of Pentecostal Christians makes Pentecostalism distinctive and potentially influential in the science-and-theology interface. An estimated 250-500 million Pentecostals live on planet earth.

In a world that increasingly seems to want democratic forms of government and decision-making, large numbers of people who have a shared vision have the potential for greater influence.

Many who work in the science and theology interface do so because they think the questions and possible solutions can affect the overall well-being of life on planet earth. They believe the common good is in some way at stake as we seek to find the most plausible answers to some question we ask about science and theology.

## **No Authoritative Tradition**

Pentecostals have no established canon of Pentecostal tomes and authoritative intellectuals. This may seem like a disadvantage. And in many ways it is. But I see it also as advantageous, because it allows scholars like Yong to draw from a diverse and rich set of resources when pursuing answers to questions raised by the science and theology interface.

Those who think carefully about issues in science and theology sometimes tire of appeals to authority. I can't tell you, for instance, how many times I've heard scholars quote Aquinas that grace perfects nature rather than destroys it!

Of course, appeals to authority have their proper place. None of us exists in a vacuum, and the science and religion fields have a number of authoritative voices from which it can draw. I happen to like some of what Aquinas says, for instance. And there are many scientific voices of authority we must heed.

But Pentecostals have greater freedom to think afresh about issues. Such fresh thinking is always needed in the complex field of work that reflects on the interface between science and theology. There's more to be said than what Aquinas thought 800 years ago!

## **God is Doing Something New**

Pentecostal theology emphasizes the surprising, unpredictable, and miraculous. Pentecostals often say "God is doing a new thing," and they expect to encounter the unexpected. Let's call this the "Pentecostal hermeneutic of surprise."

While science requires nature be in some ways consistent, science is, in principle, always open to discovery and surprise. The science-and-theology dialogue is complex enough to be always in need of some promising new proposals.

An obvious example here is those events Pentecostals call “miraculous.” The conversation about miracles might prompt scientists to think more carefully than David Hume about how to account for the extraordinary. And it might prompt Pentecostals to think more carefully about what they deem supernatural or interventionist.

## **The Spirit is Active in Creation**

Pentecostal theology stresses a pneumatology that says the Spirit is active in all creation. Because of this, pneumatology has the potential to capture the imaginations of Pentecostals.

Christians rightly reflect on the incarnation of Jesus Christ as central to faith. But they sometimes focus so much on Christology or visions of the Father God would create the universe long ago that they forget the Spirit is active and creating today. Pentecostals can help remind us of this important truth, and their theology may be especially instrumental in the reemphasis upon creatio continua.

## **Pentecostal Use of Technology**

Pentecostalism makes for an exciting conversation partner in the science-and-theology interface, because Pentecostals are often at the fore of using science and technology to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ.

The history of Christianity in the 20<sup>th</sup> and early 21<sup>st</sup> centuries reveals that Pentecostals often took the first steps – and often risky steps – to incorporate media technology in their evangelistic efforts. This includes the use of radio, television, internet, etc.

The reasons Pentecostals give for using the latest technology are often pragmatic in nature. Pragmatism can sometimes conflict with but

other times promote the theological presuppositions of Pentecostal theology.

A theology that rejects pragmatism *en toto* will likely to be blind to how the Spirit moves throughout all creation to call forth fruit. A theology that embraces pragmatism *en toto* will likely be blind to how what some call “fruit” does not fit well in the establishment and rationale of the Kingdom of God.

## **Sum**

I’m excited about the future contributions Pentecostals can make to the multi-faceted task of learning the revelation of God in creation. And I’m impressed with the work Amos Yong and other Pentecostal scholars are doing already.

*Originally posted at [For the Love of Wisdom and the Wisdom of Love](#).*