Editorial


The Gospel of Luke contains a story in which an attorney attempts to test Jesus by asking how he may obtain eternal life. Jesus responds with his own set of questions: “What is written in the Law and how do you read it?” The lawyer replies, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.” According to Jesus, his answer was correct. He needed only to follow his own summary of the Law. “Who is my neighbor?”—the attorney’s follow up question—prompts Jesus to tell the parable of the Good Samaritan. Jesus’s response is evocative, even shocking to the Hebrew mind, a sense of shock that is lost on the contemporary reader. Neither the Pharisee nor the priest counted as a good neighbor, even though identifying them as such would have been an easy response from Jesus. It was the despised Samaritan who was more religious and worthy of eternal life.

The parable of the Good Samaritan can be interpreted in two complementary ways. On the one hand, Pentecostals and Evangelicals generally take the parable as a moral narrative to encourage them to participate in works of help and service. On the other hand, the parable can be read as an interreligious encounter with the other. The Jewish-Samaritan relationship is a complex one, full of tensions. Around the eighth century BCE, Samaria fell to the Assyrians, who settled the land and brought with them their own cultural and religious practices. This produced syncretism in which the Samaritans worship the One God but continued worshipping other deities as well. During the fourth century, the Persians allowed them to build their own temple on Mount Gerizim, which exacerbated the Samaritan-Jewish relationship with a competing center of worship, even though by this time the Samaritans had become fully monotheistic. The Samaritans saw themselves as the true Israelites: descendants of Jacob, devoted to the prophethood of Moses, committed to the Torah, and centered around the temple on Mount Gerizim. In the second century, the tensions and conflicts between the Samaritans and the Jews produced a final

1 Amos Yong, The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibilities of Global Pentecostalism (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2005), 241–244.
schism between the two peoples. By the time of Jesus’s ministry, the Samaritans were despised by the Jews. Telling the parable would have instilled anger. But Jesus is saying that the Samaritan is worthy of receiving eternal life.

How might one transpose this parable for the contemporary reader? In the parable the priest, who is the keeper of sacrificial worship at the temple in Jerusalem, and the rabbi, the teacher responsible for interpreting the Torah, failed to do that which was expected to receive eternal life. The despised Samaritan was the one who did the will of God. Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart insist that transposing the parable must produce a similar evocation that pricks the heart and distresses the hearer. In order to do this, Fee and Stuart recount the story in which a local bishop and the president of the local Kiwanis Club failed to be the good neighbor; rather, it was “an outspoken local atheist” who looked after the stranger and receives eternal life! One could evoke a similar twenty-first-century response by recounting that the Muslim, who has historical and theological resonances to Christianity in its monotheistic worship, is the good Samaritan, while the Christian minister/priest and evangelical professor failed to do God’s will and to be a good neighbor. The Muslim is worthy of salvation. This sets up an opportunity to explore Christian response to the stranger or other and possible venues for the interreligious encounter. The following articles address the neighbor, the other, the stranger in some form or another.

Antipas Harris recounts a startling encounter with James Cone at the 2012 American Academy of Religion conference in Chicago while attending a session on Pentecostalism. At the end of the presentations, Cone asked the question: What are Pentecostals doing about white supremacy? It is a poignant question that is even more relevant today given the resurgence of white supremacy. Blacks in America have been othered through a history of racial construction by a white majority, made into an unwelcome neighbor. In “Black Pentecostal Hermeneutics” Harris ponders what he sees as a misperception in Cone’s question that focuses too much on pentecostal doctrine and practice and not enough on what Harris sees as a synergy between black liberation theology and black Pentecostalism that is too easily overlooked. Cone identifies six sources for constructing black liberation theology: black experience, black history, black culture, revelation, Scripture, and tradition developed from the perspective of racial oppression. What is missing, according to Harris, and therefore needed in relation to black pentecostal theology is the Holy Spirit as a source for theological engagement. Christ is central in Cone’s theology, but the

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2 Gordon D. Fee and Douglas K. Stuart, How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2003), 166.
Holy Spirit is peripheral. Because of this, Cone does not appreciate how deeply black Pentecostals rely on the Spirit to free them from social depravity and support them in social struggles. Harris sees in the intersection of black liberation theology and black Pentecostalism the development of what Lyle Lovett saw as pneumatological liberation theology, a theology that might be able to answer Cone’s question: What are Pentecostals doing about white supremacy?

In “Christian Hospitality in the Celebration of ʿId al-Fitr” Florian Simatupang asks whether it is possible for Christians to discover hospitality and reconciliation in the Islamic feast of ʿId al-Fitr practiced in Indonesia. ʿId al-Fitr is a communal meal of joyful thanksgiving celebrated by Muslims at the end of the month of Ramadan. Halal-bi-halal means to make clean again and is the Muslim ritual of forgiving and seeking forgiveness from the other. Interestingly, ʿId al-Fitr is contextualized almost exclusively to Indonesia, a place where the majority religion is Muslim with Christians constituting only 10 percent of the population. Simatupang asks a number of important questions, including whether Christians can coexist with their neighbors in a manner that de-escalates tension, conflict, and hostilities prevalent in the global world. He also asks whether Christians should participate in the practice of forgiving and receiving forgiveness in the ritual interactions of halal-bi-halal. Simatupang answers with a resounding yes! To practice halal-bi-halal with their Muslim neighbors, when viewed through the Christian perspective of sacramentalism and a renewal lens that highlights the mediation of the Spirit’s presence, allows Christians to experience and proffer reconciliation. Christian participation also enjoins a missional impulse that sees Christ mediated in developing relationships with others, through which both parties are transformed.

Spiritual mapping is a practice in some charismatic circles to discern the spiritual forces that oppose God and the influence these forces have on the physical world, especially in the context of evangelism and revivalism. One of the passages used to support spiritual mapping is the Apostle Paul’s ministry in Athens found in Acts 17:16–34. In “Paul’s Attitude at Athens (Acts 17:16–34): Spiritual Mapping or Cultural Naiveté,” Reuben E. Duyia explores whether there is sufficient biblical support for spiritual mapping. Associated with such people as George Otis, C. Peter Wagner, and Gaiya D. Kari, spiritual mapping is a convoluted concept but assumes an enchanted world, that is, a spiritual realm exerts influence on the physical realm with territorial spirits or demons that oppose the reign of God and attempt to thwart God’s missionary purposes. In spiritual mapping Christians can discern the spiritual forces in order to subdue them during evangelistic efforts. Duyia analyzes Acts 17:16–34 in order to glean whether the apostle uses the strategies of spiritual mapping, how Paul views images and their relationship to spiritual forces, and to assess whether
Paul’s reactions are due to cultural differences or spiritual obstacles. In the end, Duyia argues that there not enough evidence to support the argument that Paul engaged in spiritual mapping.

Aimee Semple McPherson is a pentecostal figure who has sparked interest from scholars for decades. A woman at center stage, performer, media guru, fundamentalist defender of Christianity against modernism and Darwinism are some of the ways to frame this larger-than-life Pentecostal. In “Aimee Semple McPherson’s Pentecostalism, Darwinism, Eugenics, the Disenfranchised, and the Scope Monkey Trial,” Margaret English de Alminana reevaluates the context and reasons for the cultural war that McPherson waged against evolution. The issue, argues de Alminana, was not the science of evolution but popular social theories of Social Darwinism and eugenics that McPherson saw as an assault on the welfare of the poor, the disenfranchised, and racially oppressed that did not sit well with her Social Gospel background in the Salvation Army. In other words, Darwinism and Herbert Spenser’s Social Darwinism were deeply conflated, even though the latter was built on questionable social assumptions. Social Darwinism supported the eugenics ideology that sought to reduce these populations through institutionalization, sterilization, and other cultural and legal efforts. In Progressive Era America, eugenics laws were enacted in twenty-seven states and were supported by the Supreme Court. McPherson defied social barriers and class distinctions in her ministry, preaching to multiracial audiences against accepted norms. She saw the gospel as one that deeply cared for those in need and in defiance of the trend to move away from social concern for the needy. The welfare and support for those in need as well as the bridging of racial and class distinctions were important aspects of the gospel for MacPherson, and a way to be a good neighbor.

Steven Félix-Jäger explores how visual culture shapes the way Pentecostals visualize their existence in “Material Visions of the Good Life.” It is a preliminary study that argues that studying the visual culture of Pentecostals can identify the formational mechanisms of how visual stimuli support particular theological positions. Specifically, the materiality of visual culture influences religious aesthetics on equality, prosperity, and human flourishing in social contexts. Félix-Jäger’s interest in this regard is the theology of abundance that is often framed in pentecostal contexts as the prosperity gospel, but the theology is framed differently depending on differences in socioeconomic conditions. Visions of the good life are measured by the affluent standards of the West filtered to the often impoverished Global South through mass media technologies. The visual standards of affluency in the West form the barometer for prosperity. Pentecostalism appeals to communities that want to exchange their inferiority status for modernization, which becomes the vehi-
cle to become prosperous. Prosperity is tied to the globalization of capitalism and neoliberalism that entrench ideologies of independence, perseverance, self-determination, business techniques, and individualization. Félix-Jäger proposes that identifying and mapping formational mechanisms such as architecture, print media, audiovisual materials, visual art, styles, design, and so forth, is a lens into the religious imagination of differing religious groups through methodologies of iconographic evaluation and semiotic/hermeneutical analysis.

The global world is faced with difference, a difference that becomes more pronounced as distances collapse through migration and media technologies. Now more than ever the question of the good neighbor looms as an alternative to the othering of the stranger.

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