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es the *eradication* of [sinful] tendencies and proclivities *in* human hearts' [emphasis mine] (125). I find this vexing and can only imagine that Yong's renewalist commitment to the doctrine and experience of the baptism of the Holy Spirit and its connection to the grace of entire sanctification—which Yong correctly notes Wesley never affirmed and most Wesleyans have cast aside—in some sense requires him to return eradicationism in through the back door.

Admittedly, while I would consider

this inconsistency especially problematic because it connects to the core of my own work and interests, in the grand scheme of things this is a rather small problem in an otherwise wonderful book by a theologian who, once again, has demonstrated why he stands out as one of the most important theologians in Pentecostalism and a major voice to the theology discussions of the church catholic. I am grateful for this book, and look forward to many like it to flow from the mind and heart of Amos Yong.

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Trailblazer!

Thomas Jay Oord

Amos Yong's book, *Renewing Christian Theology: Systematic for a Global Christianity*, is simply an excellent book. I have high praise for it! Yong is among the leading Pentecostal theologians at work today, if not *the* leading Pentecostal theologian. The breadth and depth of his theological work is, as far as I know, unparalleled. In this book, Yong uses a broader identity, however, to capture the diverse spiritual fervour

and theological reflection often associated with Pentecostalism: 'renewal theology'.

Yong begins this large tome by placing his work in a global context. He reminds/informs readers of the diversity of faith and thought expressions across the planet. What unites this diversity is the quest for Christian renewal, says Yong, but renewal that itself should be open to further renewal.

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Although the book subtitle says it will be a 'systematics', the book does not offer a systematic theology in the sense of crafting a cohesive theology around a major theme. Rather, the book explores the major loci typical of systematic theology, without trying to tie neatly together the various ideas and show their mutual entailments.

Few theologians could pull off a book that seeks to identify scholarship across the globe. But Yong is so well connected with renewal-oriented scholars and so well read that he does an amazing job in this book. References to scholarship riddle the book's chapters, a tribute to Yong's diverse interests and stature as a leading renewal theologian of our day. These references also include scholarship far beyond renewalist thinkers. Several times while reading I found myself in awe of Yong's expansive interests.

A unique feature of the book is the collection of art photos sprinkled throughout. These artistic pieces are meant to illustrate or deepen reflection of the particular topic at hand. After looking at the first few art photos and reading the brief commentary associated with each, however, I found myself skipping the commentary associated with the photos in the remainder of the book. Perhaps I'm not as visually oriented as some readers will be, but I thought the photos and commentary sometimes interrupted the flow of Yong's argument. But it's a creative idea!

I Descriptive or Prescriptive?

After reading the introductory chapter describing the global context of renewal theology, I had the sense that

the book would be primarily descriptive. Yong informs the reader that he would begin each chapter with a World Assemblies of God Fellowship doctrine of faith. After a brief reflection on a biblical passage or story to begin each chapter, Yong tells readers he plans to show how voices across the world interpret, expand, or are compatible with the doctrine addressed in the chapter.

In a move uncharacteristic of systematic theologies, Yong begins with eschatology. The chapter is titled 'The Last Days and the End of Time', and this caught my attention, not only for its reversal of typical ordering, but also for what it says theologically. I love even more the fact that Yong puts the doctrine of scripture last in the book, illustrating rightly the proper place of Scripture relative to the major doctrines of the church. Creative moves such as these should impel readers toward new insights and novel reflection. I applaud Yong for such moves!

As I read the Global Assemblies of God Fellowship statement on eschatology and then each Assemblies doctrine in the chapters thereafter, however, I discovered my expectations for Yong's project were misplaced. Perhaps I read too much into the introduction. Instead of an entirely descriptive account of renewalist reflection related to the Assemblies statements, I found Yong's theological commentary in each chapter considerably different from the wording and usual interpretation of the Assemblies of God statements.

The eschatological statement begins with statements about millennialism. It preaches purification in readiness for the return of Jesus. And it affirms everlasting conscious punishment for those not in the book of life. These claims are

not what I'd personally propose for a statement about eschatology, and I'm glad I'm not a member of the Assemblies of God Fellowship so that I would be expected to affirm them. And other Assemblies statements of faith would not be winsome to most contemporary theologians I know.

I'm not complaining that Yong doesn't simply follow the Assemblies doctrine and descriptively tell the reader what that entails in relation to other renewal thinking. Nor am I complaining that the views Yong proposes seem sometimes only loosely associated with the statements. I'm not complaining, because I do not find the Assemblies of God Fellowship statements attractively worded. The substance of some statements also strikes me as unhelpful. These statements have wording that may have been in vogue a half century ago or more. But the wording is stilted and unhelpful to many today.

If Yong's prescriptive views in these chapters are the heart of renewal theology, however, count me among the renewal theologian! I have no interest in affirming the Assemblies doctrines as they are worded, however.

II Creation Theology

Although I found something in every chapter of *Renewing Christian Theology* that either inspired, informed, or intrigued me—again, this is an excellent book—I will focus my remaining thoughts on the longest chapter in the book, 'Creation and Fall: Natural History and the Redemptive Ends of God'.

Yong's primary focus of this chapter is soteriological. 'The bulk of this chapter will be focused on clarifying the doctrine of humanity in its fallen con-

dition', he says. But Yong knows that this raises questions pertaining to science. 'Any adequate understanding of the present global theological context', says Yong, 'cannot avoid engaging the most pressing of scientifically induced questions'. Consequently, providence, death, evil, and sin are best considered using both theologically and scientifically-informed lenses.

On the doctrine of initial creation and its accompanying issue of the age of the earth, Yong says renewal Christians have among their numbers young-earth creationists, old-earth creationists, and evolutionary creationists. Yong believes the tide is gradually moving away from young-earth interpretations. The science is strongly on the side of evolutionary perspectives, although Yong believes these evolution theories must be theistic in orientation if they are to provide adequate Christian accounts of creation.

Yong notes that embracing evolutionary creation brings along with it a set of questions: Why is there natural evil prior to human sin? Why did there have to be *so much* death and suffering, far more than what a young-earth perspective would require?

In answering these questions, Yong lays out a variety of alternatives. From a 'renewal point of view', he says, 'the most promising theodicies are less those that attempt to account for the origins of evil (and pain, suffering, and death) than those that reinterpret existing evil in light of the Christian drama of redemption'. Yong mentions themes pertaining to the suffering God and eschatological redemption. He notes that positive elements can come from death, and both evolutionary theory and theological perspectives can

affirm such positive elements.

Yong says in response to his brief survey of renewalist responses to evolution and evil that 'If anything like the current evolutionary hypothesis holds forth going forward, any efforts to renew the Christian doctrine of creation in the third millennium will need to provide coherent, if not convincing, accounts of the prevalence of suffering and death before the appearance of human beings for the their resolution'. I agree entirely. I strongly appreciate Yong saying this so clearly, without seeing it as reason to embrace a young-earth perspective, which is so contrary to contemporary science.

As far as I can tell, Yong offers no coherent or convincing account of his own for the origin of suffering, death, and evil. He doesn't tell us why God would allow such evil, if God were able to prevent it. His purpose is to survey, not provide his own constructive answers. I will return to this point later in my review.

Moving from the issue of the age of creation and evil, Yong addresses Adam, sin, and the image of God. As is his usual method, Yong lays out various ways one might understand Adam and Eve. The ways range from them being literal, historical people to being literary devices that make theological points.

Although Yong claims all Christians think humans are unique from other animals, he notes that it is difficult to identify what makes humans unique. Later in the chapter, Yong says the 'intellectual, moral, and spiritual capacities of humans are far above and arguably qualitatively different from other animals' (283). While I agree with Yong's statements about the dif-

ferences in degree between humans and other animals, I would like to see a strong argument for how those differences become qualitatively so.

The question of human uniqueness moves to the issue of original sin. Again, Yong lays out options for why humans have a sin propensity. He does not offer his own proposal to explain how a creation originally created good could have creatures in it inclined toward evil. Instead, Yong looks to the redemption of sinful humans that can 'reorient human hopes and desires in anticipation of the immanent divine reign that is nevertheless yet to come' (274). Here we have not an explanation for the sin's origin but an emphasis upon the hope for our overcoming it.

Yong's purview of creation theology is not just limited to theories about humans. Taking Romans as his text, Yong says the fate of the entire cosmos is at stake. In this context, he returns to the issue of Adam. Here his own preferences seem to appear. Yong argues that Christological readings of Romans allow us to believe a historical Adam is not necessary to affirm our spiritual solidarity with Christ. St. Paul takes Adam as a representative figure, and Yong argues we need not think of Adam as the initial *homo sapiens*.

Pneumatology plays a key role in this chapter exploring creation. Those of us who know Yong's work would expect this, because he has been exploring the implications of pneumatology for decades. The Spirit is the primary actor in the Romans context, says Yong, and the Spirit delivers us from bondage and intercedes for saints. This Spirit is not just in humans; it is active in all creation. 'The creation and all its creatures, human beings includ-

ed,' says Yong, 'are thus caught up in this cosmic renewal of the triune God' (279).

III Initial Creation, Evil, Future Redemption

The chapter on creation ends by exploring what Yong calls 'A Trinitarian Theology of Creation, Cross, and Culmination'. In this chapter's final section, Yong moves from mostly descriptive to more prescriptive accounts of how he thinks good theology should be done in relation to creation issues. No longer are multiple bibliographical references inserted generously into paragraphs. This section most reflects Yong's own views.

Yong begins this final section by saying the thrust of renewal theology is Trinitarian, by which he means Christological, pneumatological, and eschatological. Yong looks briefly at ways theology and science might be thought to relate. I must admit, I thought this methodological survey would have been earlier in the chapter. But perhaps Yong's decision to place last the methodological question of the relation of science and theology mirrors his move to place Scripture as the last chapter in the book. Perhaps Yong is making what is typically prolegomena into 'postlegomena'.

I was disappointed when Yong argues in the following way: 'God's two books—of Scripture and of nature—cannot be finally contradictory, so any appearances of conflict are the results of either mistaken scriptural interpretations, or incomplete scientific data or understanding, or both' (282).

I have grown highly suspicious of the view that it is only our interpreta-

tion of the Bible that is at odds with well-established theories in science, rather than the Bible itself. I wish Yong had said bluntly that the Bible is sometimes wrong about scientific matters. Claims of biblical error also rely upon interpretation, of course. But so do claims that the Bible is without error. Our views are inexorably tied to our interpretation, so why not say the Bible is wrong when it appears to be so? I wondered if Yong's failure to say the Bible has errors was caused by not wanting to offend some of the more conservative elements in the renewalist movement.

In this final section, Yong's theology becomes the primary lens for making sense of creation. Whereas previously Yong laid out possible ways to think about the image of God, for instance, here he says the image of God for humans is eschatologically revealed in Christ. Yong also plainly says the fall of humanity is a theological claim not a scientific one. A historical Adam is not necessary for such theological claims. Death is both physical and existential, because creation is cruciform. And death anticipates eternal life in God.

On the final pages, Yong briefly broaches the issue of the absolute beginnings of our universe. 'From the foundations' or 'the beginning of the world,' says Yong, God in his wisdom and foreknowledge anticipates fallen sinfulness. In this cleverly worded section, Yong does not tell readers conclusively his own views on foreknowledge or *creatio ex nihilo*.

Yong says creation is 'neither self-originating nor self-sustaining.' But this leaves unresolved many issues of original and ongoing creation. Whether there was something before

our world, Yong does not say. But according to Yong, God 'actualizes this kind of world that allows for the fall, a world in which evolutionary predation and death are part of the 'fine-tuning' (286). It is God's intention, says Yong, to 'overcome the power of death through the renewing, redeeming, and resurrecting power of the Holy Spirit' (287).

As I read Yong's statements about initial creation, death, evil, and the Spirit overcoming work, questions kept arising in my mind. I wondered what Yong thought about the nature of God's power both initially to create and finally to redeem. 'How did this happen and how will God redeem it?' I asked myself. Does creation have an essential role to play in this grand drama? If so, can God's redemption be guaranteed? If not and God can control creatures entirely, why doesn't God prevent far more death and all genuine evil?

My questions found a point of reference in these words from Yong: 'Christian theodicy is most successful explicating not the whence of evil but the whither of evil, especially its eschatological redemption in Christ by the Spirit' (289). I assume that this statement is more than merely a description of what renewal theologians think. The statement seems to represent Yong's own view. However, it is here that I disagree with Yong, despite my agreement with the vast majority of the other proposals Yong makes in the wonderful book. In my view, the 'whence' of evil

is directly relevant to the 'whither'. Without a plausible proposal for why there is evil in the first place, one cannot offer a plausible proposal for why God will someday overcome it.

To put my disagreement in the form of a question, 'Why should we trust that God will, as Yong puts it, overcome death and evil by the renewing, redeeming, and resurrecting power of the Holy Spirit if God unilaterally set up a universe with genuine evil and/or fails to prevent genuine evil throughout the history of that universe?' The 'whence' matters if the 'whither' is to be believable.

Although I don't know the renewal literature in the way that Yong does, I suspect that few renewal theologians are seriously rethinking issues of God's power in ways that make offering a plausible explanation of evil possible. In this sense, I don't fault Yong. The issues are thorny and the work to rethink creation and providence is difficult. But doing this work seems to me important for offering the most plausible account we Christians can for the hope within us.

Amos Yong is a trailblazing theologian. This book is an amazing contribution to theology in general and renewal theology in particular. He is at the centre of much good and exciting work, as Christians today seek to answer well the puzzling questions of our time. Serious theologians must read this book!