

Systematics for a Global Christianity? Extending the Conversation

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Abstract:

In late June 2017, Amos Yong's Renewing Christian Theology: Systematics for a Global Christianity (Baylor University Press, 2014) was the subject of a specially organized Theology Forum at the University of Bern, Switzerland. Four of the discussants wrote up their reflections, and the author then penned a rejoinder. The following reviews, followed by a response from the author, track some of the questions and conversations being catalyzed by the ongoing development of Pentecostal theology, particularly as it has been received by theologians on the European continent. They suggest that much work remains for those seeking to work out of an explicitly Pentecostal confessional context, but also indicate how ecumenical interaction can be mutually beneficial for all sides of the wider theological endeavor.

Keywords: *Pentecostal theology; theological renewal; ecumenical theology; theology and the secular; baptism in the Holy Spirit; eschatology; pneumatology; theology and ethics.*

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I. Christine Lienemann-Perrin: Comment on Amos Yong's Search for Systematics in the Context of Global Christianity

Amos Yong's Book *Renewing Christian Theology*¹ is one of several attempts to reconsider Christian theology in the context of the multiple forms of Christian life worldwide. In a former publication, he explores "the possibility of global theology".² Now, more than in former days, incompatibilities between the diverse branches of Global Christianity impede a common understanding of the Christian faith. Theologians who are concerned about that situation have raised anew the question if there are "any theological frameworks that can facilitate the many tongues and languages into a cohesive yet faithful proclamation of the wondrous works of God for the globalizing world of the twenty-first century?"³ In his book, Amos Yong explores an organizational principle that can orchestrate the many voices into a harmonious whole. Similar endeavors have been contributed by other theologians even though they reflect considerable variation in purpose and methodical approach: The proposals range from "theology in global perspective" (Bevans) to "ecclesiology for a global church" (Gaillardetz), "global theology in evangelical perspective" (Greenman/Green), "globalizing theology" (Ott/Netland), "theology in a world context" (Smart/Konstantine), and "in the context of World Christianity" (Tennent).⁴

The increasing interest in exploring global theology – or global *theologies*, as I prefer to call them – moves beyond the contextual theologies emerging

¹ Amos Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology. Systematics for a Global Christianity* (with artistic images and commentary by Jonathan A. Anderson), Waco, Baylor University Press, 2014.

² Amos Yong, *The Spirit Poured Out on All Flesh: Pentecostalism and the Possibility of Global Theology*, Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2005.

³ Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology*, p. 11.

⁴ Stephen B. Bevans, *An Introduction to Theology in Global Perspective*, New York, Orbis Books, 2009; Richard R. Gaillardetz, *Ecclesiology for a Global Church: A People Called and Sent*, New York, Orbis Books, 2008; Jeffrey P. Greenman – Gene L. Green (eds.), *Global Theology in Evangelical Perspective: Exploring the Contextual Nature of Theology and Mission*, Downers Grove, IVP Academic, 2012; Craig Ott – Harold A. Netland (eds.), *Globalizing Theology. Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, Grand Rapids, Baker Academic, 2006; Ninian Smart – Steven Konstantine, *Christian Systematic Theology in a World Context*, Minneapolis, Fortress, 1991; Timothy C. Tennent, *Theology in the Context of World Christianity. How the Global Church Is Influencing the Way We Think about and Discuss Theology*, Grand Rapids, Zondervan, 2007.

from local situations in all continents during the last 50 years. So far, representatives of global theologies are, by and large, authors who live and teach in the USA. Many of them have worked as missiologists and missionaries in the global South and some even have roots in the global South (as Amos Yong). Strikingly few theologians originating from and teaching in the global South have contributed to global theologies yet. According to them, the time for contextual theologies is not over, nor is the struggle against (allegedly) exclusivist claims of theologies originating from the West. Likewise, until recently, European theologians have been reluctant to join in the discourse on global theologies. In Europe there are widespread concerns of repeating the mistakes committed by foreign missions during the colonial past. German theologians are wary of global theology and other currents emerging in the US-American context because they give the impression of presenting anew Western theology with universal validity. Instead, *intercultural theology* is an increasing trend in European missiology, and to a lesser degree in dogmatics.⁵ What are the reasons for global and intercultural theologies to communicate more often than not by means of parallel channels? I presume that the rare exchanges between them can be explained if we take into account both the predominantly Evangelical and/or Pentecostal background of global theologies, on one hand, and the mainline church background of intercultural theologies (in Europe), on the other.

Amos Yong's prevalent addressees are the American-based branches of the Assemblies of God and other Pentecostals in the US. However, the author attempts to enlarge the circle of potential readers by engaging members of other denominations who "can approach this volume as a case study of how to think

⁵ Volker Küster, *Einführung in die interkulturelle Theologie*, Stuttgart, UTB, 2011; Klaus Hock, *Einführung in die kulturelle Theologie*, Darmstadt, WBG, 2011; Henning Wrogemann, *Interkulturelle Theologie und Hermeneutik. Grundfragen, aktuelle Beispiele, theoretische Perspektiven*, Gütersloh, Gütersloher Verlagshaus, 2012; Ulrich Dehn, *Weltweites Christentum und ökumenische Bewegung*, Berlin, EBVerlag, 2013; see also the German missiological journal *Interkulturelle Theologie – Zeitschrift für Mission* which focuses on intercultural theology. For systematic theology, Rudolf von Sinner, "Christianity on Its Way to the South: Intercultural Theology as a Challenge to Systematic Theology", in Praveen S. Perumalla – Royce M. Victor – Naveen Rao (eds.), *The Yobel Spring*, Delhi, ISPCK, 2013, pp. 198-222.

with and through any set of dogmatic commitments in global context”⁶ Provided that members of mainline churches stay in a living dialogue with secular societies and that they share ecumenical concerns, would they perceive Yong’s systematics for a *global* Christianity as speaking also for them in their specific contexts? I will attempt to comment on three aspects of this question, fully aware that an ample discussion is not possible, due to space constraints.

(1) Questions from the perspective of mainline churches in secular societies

Throughout this section, the term *mainline churches* will be used to refer to the Orthodox churches, the Roman Catholic Church and the majority of Protestant churches, Anglicanism included. An important feature of these churches is their centuries-long connection with specific strands of doctrine which they seek to re-contextualize at any given time. Catholicism and Protestantism are rooted in the Greek and Latin traditions of Christianity. In the modern age, they have been challenged by the necessary and liberating criticism of Enlightenment, as well as all its ambivalences. Enriched *and* burdened by this mixed legacy, mainline churches have demonstrated repeatedly their ability to regenerate and revitalize their tradition when faced with the new challenges of shifting religious, political, economic or social contexts. The ample celebrations occasioned by the 500th anniversary of the Reformation in Germany and beyond are but one illustration of how important it is for mainline churches to create a meaningful dialogue between their doctrinal legacy and the modern-day concerns of ordinary people.

It is striking to see how deep Amos Yong delves into the great dogmatic themes (christology, Trinity, eschatology etc.) of the church in order to rethink them from a Pentecostal and ‘renewalist’ perspective. His book may provide a bridge spanning the divide of mutual suspicion between mainline churches (often judged by renewalists as being spiritually dead) and the Pentecostal movement (often judged by mainline churches as evincing little interest in theological reflection). Yong’s book certainly provides a forum for a theological discourse across boundaries separating denominations and non-denominational churches and movements. However, the question “Is Yong’s judgement on mainline

⁶ Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology*, p. 27.

churches not too one-sided?” remains to be discussed. An example might be taken from chapter 7 “The Church and Its Mission”. Here, Yong contrasts ‘renewalist’⁷ movements against ‘traditional churches’ or ‘Christendom’. While he charges the latter of being thrilled by the ideas of Enlightenment and modernity, he sympathizes with the argument that the time is ripe now for the emergence of a new, post-modern era in which “local cultural logics and languages” are displacing claims of universal truths in globalized theological discourses. Yong states that “we are now living in a *post-Christendom* world, one in which the church is no longer linked politically to the (modern) state. The network church thrives on engaging in ecclesial mission and evangelism amid, but yet without getting their hands dirty with, the political domain”.⁸ With the growing post-denominational Christianity, Yong envisions the end of denominationalism and its perpetuation of ecclesial divisions are near. When he addresses the so-called Christendom, he refers primarily, although not exclusively, to persisting forms of Christianity in Europe. Given the space limitations, we cannot comment in detail the many problems inherent in the English term ‘Christendom’, its equivalents and different meanings in several European languages and its use in the World Christianity studies. However, Amos Yong’s remarks could receive an in-depth analysis as part of a conversation which brings to the fore the variety of historical backgrounds in Europe:

(1.1) Using the analytical sharpness of the label “Christendom” in English-speaking conversations on World Christianity is questionable and should come under scrutiny. The extreme complexities of the European scene cannot be adequately described by this label. (1.2) Yong points to the emergence of “network churches” as a sign of the “wider shifts in ecclesial *forms* in a very fluid global context”.⁹ While the expected new forms are yet undetermined, Yong has no doubt about what is being left behind: “Hence we are now living in a *post-Christendom* world, in which the church is no longer linked politically to

⁷ In the introductory chapter, Yong employs the term *renewalism* „to refer to the pentecostal and charismatic forms of Christianity around the world, including independent and indigenous church expressions, as well as those established ecclesial bodies that are increasingly impacted by such tendencies” (*Renewing Christian Theology*, p. 6).

⁸ Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology*, p. 175.

⁹ Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology*, p. 175.

the (modern) state. The network church thrives on engaging in ecclesial mission and evangelism amid, but yet without getting their hands dirty with, the political domain.”¹⁰ To what extent are we living in a *post-Christendom* world today? Is it not more adequate to characterize World Christianity as simultaneity of the non-simultaneous? Manifold forms of church-state relationships exist side by side – and this will probably continue for quite some time in the future. Furthermore: What exactly does Yong mean by the phrase “the church is no longer linked politically to the (modern) state” in whose constitution the separation of church (or religion) and state is enshrined? Finally: What kind of agency in the political domain are network churches leaving behind so as to avoid “getting their hands dirty”? What sort of church-state relationship is compromising a church when she raises her voice in the public sphere? Of course, the network churches mentioned by Yong are developing – and have to develop various relationships with the state, but these will be different from the ones established by the majority churches. Precisely these distinctions would be illuminating, if discussed with partners from all political, constitutional and juridical contexts in a global theology project. (1.3) As a European Christian and member of a reformed church in Switzerland, my concern is focused on mainline churches with their ambivalences as we know them today. As long as they continue to exist, I am concerned about the need to provide theological answers to burning questions in secular settings in which these churches are embedded by culture and context. It is my hope that voices of these churches will not be silenced in the emerging global theologies. Amos Yong would certainly be an ideal bridge builder mediating the coming together of theological voices which, for the time being, are still separated from each other.

(2) *Questions from the perspective of churches in dialogue with secular societies*

Transmitting the essentials of Christian faith – as they are reflected in systematics – to the “nones” *i.e.* areligious people, unchurched, disinterested church members and nonbelievers is, at least in this book, not Yong’s concern. Rather is he addressing, first of all, people of faith, in particular communities of the As-

¹⁰ Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology*, p. 175.

semblies of God. As readers of the Bible, active church members and church goers, they are familiar with the biblical and doctrinal language. Yong can communicate with them directly, without translating biblical metaphors into secular language. This is a matter of theological communication *ad intra*, not *ad extra*. Nevertheless, he also adopts here and there the language of the (non-religious) academia, *i.e. ad extra*.¹¹ From a European point of view, I see some commonalities between Yong's switching from one language to the other and European systematic theologians who are doing the same. A good example is Dietrich Ritschl (1929-2018), a Reformed theologian from Switzerland who taught systematics in Germany, Switzerland, the USA, Australia and New Zealand. Ritschl has elaborated at length on the distinction between a theological language for the communication *ad intra*, and a language for the transmission of essentials of Christian faith *ad extra*.¹² The language *ad extra* should be employed in conversations with the unchurched and/or people of no faith, in dialogues on the relationship between theology and natural sciences, in encounters between theology and humanities, social sciences, economy, and jurisprudence and in discussions on the responsibility of the church in the public sphere. Both Ritschl and Yong's contributions are concerned with the transmission or translation of the Christian message in a given setting. There is also a difference between them, in that one of Ritschl's main aspirations was to translate insights of systematic theology to outsiders, such as people living in secular societies and academics who do not embrace religious worldviews. When Amos Yong uses a scientific language, he tries to convince Pentecostals, *i.e.* insiders, of the fact that scientific research does not contradict their own self-understanding as faithful Christians. Translating the message is necessary in both ways and should not be played off one against the other. But a question remains to be asked in relation to the pro-

¹¹ Examples involve making reference to astrophysical and cosmological sciences in connection with eschatology (*Renewing Christian Theology*, pp. 43ff.); psychology and anthropology in connection with deliverance ministries (p. 146); modern medical sciences in connection with disease, mental illness and healing (p. 196ff.).

¹² Dietrich Ritschl, *The Logic of Theology*, Philadelphia, Fortress Press, 1987 (German original: *Zur Logik der Theologie. Kurze Darstellung der Zusammenhänge theologischer Grundgedanken*, München, Chr. Kaiser, 1983); idem, *Konzepte. Ökumene, Medizin, Ethik. Gesammelte Aufsätze*, München, Chr. Kaiser, 1986; idem/Martin Hailer, *Diesseits und jenseits der Worte. Grundkurs christliche Theologie*, Neukirchen-Vluyn, Neukirchener, 2006.

ject of a global theology: Has Yong also an eye for secular societies? I am asking how his systematics for a global Christianity can be fully acknowledged as long as secular societies in the West as well as in Eastern Europe, Japan, Australia, New Zealand and increasingly also in other parts of the global South remain rather marginal in his perspective.

(3) *Questions from the perspective of ecumenists representing the 'churches of the oikoumenē'*

The term 'churches of the *oikoumenē*' derives from the 1970's, when the confrontation between ecumenists and anti-ecumenists was at the peak level. Member churches of the World Council of Churches as well as the Roman Catholic Church were invited to form the churches of the *oikoumenē*. They were confronted and challenged by evangelicals and Pentecostals who formed the camp of anti-ecumenists. Since then, the scene has changed significantly insofar as efforts to reach mutual rapprochement and theological convergence have been made on both sides. In addition to these efforts, it should be noted that the connotations of ecumenism changed significantly: the term is no longer used to exclude a priori evangelicals and Pentecostals from the ecumenical movement. Such developments notwithstanding, questions of the future shapes of ecumenism remain unanswered, and the visions intent on solving the prevalent ecumenical crisis move in diverging directions. Amos Yong touches on the ecumenical crisis when he writes that efforts to reach unity in matters of doctrine are in vain, if not counterproductive, since they tend to perpetuate ecclesial divisions rather than provide viable Christian unity.¹³ Yong longs for post-denominational solutions in ecumenism and is convinced that they can be provided only by non-denominational churches; that is, by the renewalist movements in global Christianity.

My concern is that this vision would leave the mainline churches behind. Would it not imply getting rid of the mainline churches when the future of ecumenism is envisioned? For mainline churches, the conversation on divergent doctrinal, liturgical, and practical traditions will remain essential. What

¹³ Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology*, pp. 173ff.

has to be re-examined, however, are the aims, methods and functions of such conversations. Consequently, ecumenical hermeneutics have to be examined anew. Ecumenists have suggested that mutual understanding has to be sought not at the surface of doctrinal language, but at a pre-linguistic level, namely, at the deep structure of language, where the steering of linguistic expression takes place. According to Dietrich Ritschl the ‘logic of theology’ is born here.¹⁴ At that level, it is sometimes possible to recognize common concerns despite different doctrinal expressions. Ritschl mentions examples which he explored during many years of work in the Faith and Order Commission of the World Council of Churches. According to him, the doctrine of justification of the sinner has an equivalent in the Orthodox doctrine of *theopoiesis* (deification); themes connected to Christology in Protestantism occur in connection with the veneration of Mary and Mariology in the Roman Catholic Church.¹⁵ Traditional understandings of the doctrine are at stake in the ecumenical movement. Instead of defining doctrine as a linguistically fixed teaching of Christian truths, a common understanding of the Christian faith could emerge from exchanges of diverse *proposals* to express what believers regard as the essentials in Christian faith: “So we see the most important things of faith, try to take our view, compare it with yours, so we see the work of the Christ present in the Holy Spirit with us – how do you see it?”¹⁶ One of the crucial aims in ecumenism is to increase the mutual understanding by hermeneutics of confidence.¹⁷ Ritschl has tested his ecumenical hermeneutics at the climax of mainline ecumenism between 1960 and the 1980’s. He has not put it to test, however, in contact with renewalist movements and their forms of ecumenism. Would

¹⁴ Ritschl, *The Logic of Theology*; Wolfgang Huber – Ernst Petzold – Theo Sundermeier (eds.), *Implizite Axiome. Tiefenstrukturen des Denkens und Handelns*, München, Chr. Kaiser, 1990.

¹⁵ Dietrich Ritschl, “Überlegungen zur gegenwärtigen Diskussion über Mariologie”, in Ritschl, *Konzepte*, pp. 40-59; idem, “Überlegungen zur gegenwärtigen Diskussion der Heiligenverehrung”, in Ritschl, *Konzepte*, pp. 60-71.

¹⁶ Dietrich Ritschl, “Konsens ist nicht das höchste Ziel. Gründe für eine Hermeneutik des Vertrauens in den *Christus praesens*“, in Konrad Raiser – Dorothea Sattler (eds.), *Ökumene vor neuen Zeiten: für Theodor Schneider*, Freiburg, Herder, 2000, pp. 531-547 (p. 546, translated from German).

¹⁷ Dietrich Ritschl, “Bemerkungen zur kulturellen Dimension bei ekklesiologischen Differenzen: Plädoyer für eine Hermeneutik des trans-intellektuellen Vertrauens”, in *Internationale kirchliche Zeitschrift* 91, Heft 1 (2001), pp. 60-74.

mutual understanding at a pre-linguistic level also work when ecumenical communication is extended to non-denominational churches, movements without a focus on doctrine, network churches and global para-church movements? Answers to these questions can be given only together with Pentecostal and other renewalist theologians like Amos Yong. Hopefully, the hermeneutics of confidence will play a significant role in the communication between mainline churches worldwide, church movements in the global South, and renewalists in North and South.

II. Dominik von Allmen-Mäder: Thoughts and Questions concerning the 2nd Chapter

“The Last Days and the End of Time. Christian Hope Now and Then”

The first thing that met my eye when I read the table of contents of Amos Yong’s “Systematics for a Global Christianity” is that the author reversed the classical order in which the topics of Christian dogmatic theology are usually presented. Eschatology, normally the last subject to be treated in systematic textbooks, is the first locus in Yong’s Book. The intention behind this is already made clear in the introduction: “Further, reversing the order of the loci foregrounds precisely those doctrines that are distinctive to renewal spirituality [...] rather than relegating them to being mere add-ons to the Christian theological vision” (22).

Yong structures the chapter on “The Last Days and the End of Time” into four parts.

The first part argues that Apostle Paul *can* “be understood as an apocalyptically inspired preacher” (32), but at the same time the example of his life and ministry shows that expecting Apocalypse now does not mean expecting the total destruction of the world; on the contrary, it can mean “a resolute and responsible steadfastness amid the challenges of life” (32). This “blessed hope” includes both the longing for the Parousia and the promise that the new life in Christ “opened up new possibilities for the present” (33).

The second part sketches how the “blessed hope” has been interpreted in theological thought and in the teaching of the church throughout history. To

me, the strength of Yong's review of eschatic expectations and hope in church history is its pursuit of a perspective that does not undermine the "missional fervor of the blessed hope" (37). This is a critique of the Catholic and the mainline Protestant churches which are characterized by a tendency to minimize speculations about the end of time, for fear of losing their standing, especially in contexts where tight connections to the state and the establishment had been created. Yong's critique is equally directed towards the conservative / historical Pentecostal churches and their theology, which often got caught up in a paralyzing discussion about "the charts of end-time speculation" (37) or developed an "escapist mentality" (50) and therefore also lost their focus on the mission and the responsibility they have for the world. These reflections are followed by an overview of disputed possibilities of final-state eschatologies as well as three contemporary challenges for an eschatology in a global context: (1) The differences between Christian and other religious eschatologies, especially (2) when it comes to the different notion of temporality either as cyclical or linear, that are (3) further complicated by modern science and its (e.g. astrophysical) quests for the origin and the end of our universe. Thus, Yong sets the basic standards for a renewal eschatology for global Christianity, one which seeks to live up to the great potential it carries with itself: eschatology needs to engage with various voices from inside and outside the church in order to keep a dynamic balance between the focus on the responsibility the church has for this world and the longing for the Parousia.

In the third section Yong draws on Lukan eschatology, which becomes the biblical groundwork for an eschatology that can keep up with the standards sketched above. According to the author, for Luke the 'last days' have already begun with the resurrection which "is itself a work of the Spirit" (45) and was (after Christ's ascension) followed by the outpouring of the Spirit. This does not mean "that Luke held only to what scholars have called a 'realized eschatology'" (47), for Luke shows a horizon that reaches beyond the present, pointing out both the imminence of the Lord's return and its unknown and unknowable hour. For Yong, this means "that living in light of the resurrection not only brings hope for the life to come but also participates in God's salvific work in the present" (49).

Building on this biblical groundwork, Yong revisits Article 11 of WAGF's Statement of Faith (SF). He foregrounds four aspects of the SF that "can potentially renew Christian thinking about eschatology in the present time" (50). First, the SF's eschatology is clearly Christocentric. This enables a hope and a yearning that is not fixated on certain events or places, but on the relationship to Christ as the groom for whose return the bridal church longs. In connection with the second aspect, which is based on the strong relationship to Christ as the departed groom, Yong shows that the SF makes possible the shift from a realistic eschatology, that expects the last days to happen in terms of physical, material transformation of the earth as we know it, to what I would call a hermeneutic eschatology. The latter sees the world as we know it in a new, wholly different perspective, derived not from "the charts of end-time speculation" but from the *person* to whom the Gospels give witness – Jesus Christ. This is tightly interconnected with the third aspect: "Article 11 indicated that the goal of contemplating eschatological matters is finally performative: to inspire followers of Christ to live into the purifying work of the Spirit in the present life" (52). To believe in the imminent return of Christ, to live expecting the last days does not mean just to assent to a certain dogma concerning the end of the world and therefore to belong to the circle of believers. More than that, it means to respond to the gospel of Jesus Christ in a holistic way which encompasses the believers' affections, deeds and attitudes, as well as their intellect. Thus, while salvation does not rest in the hand of the individual, is not "cheap" grace (52) in the sense that it only depends on his/her cognitive con- or dissent. The fourth and last aspect touches on the character of the eschaton, building on and reflecting on the aspects mentioned before. Yong concludes that the resurrection, in addition to being an otherworldly, spiritual reality, takes place within "the present physical world" (53), restoring and renewing it. Again, Yong emphasizes the high value of the present and the world, insisting that Christians are called to live according to the "blessed hope" *within* this world and time.

I see Yong's discussion of eschatology as a valuable contribution to the discourse about the meaning of eschatological expectations and how they are to be understood and communicated within a (post-)modern world.¹⁸ The author

¹⁸ See e.g. Christoph Schwöbel, "Last Things First? The Century of Eschatology in Retrospect",

argues that eschatology ought to be the ‘motor’ which fuels both Christian theology and life praxis. This overlaps with trends one can observe among German-speaking theologians, in that both Catholics and Protestants have showed a new interest in eschatology in recent years. However, there are still questions which have to be revisited.¹⁹ Given the limitations of a dogmatic textbook, it would be unrealistic to expect comprehensive answers to the following two questions, but they should be raised nonetheless, because they highlight the potential that lies in Yong’s approach to eschatology and could spark further discussions.

1. I see a certain tendency to restrict the practical value of the “blessed hope” of Christ’s imminent return solely to purification, which, of course, is already mentioned in article 11 of the WAGF SF. This is consistent with the emphasis on the punishment and the eternal bliss respectively that awaits those whose names are (not) written in the book of life. However, it seems to me that Christ’s role in the final judgement is underrepresented, especially in light of the reconciliation not only of humanity to God but of humans among themselves. Yong emphasizes that reconciliation of humans who hurt each other (e.g. the oppressors and the oppressed, cf. 248) is necessary (cf. 157). But how exactly is this reconciliation to be correlated with the eschatological expectation of Christ’s return ‘to judge the living and the dead’? And what potential holds the hope that Christ will judge and therefore reconcile all humans for a Christian’s attitude towards today’s global and local conflicts?

2. I am intrigued by the thought that Christian hope is not about certain events occurring in a certain timeline, but rests on the person of Jesus Christ and his relationship to us humans. An issue which needs further reflection is the concept of truth arising from this approach. ‘What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man imagined’ (1Cor 2:9) can hardly be considered a fact in the common sense. It is clear that the concept of truth is a wholly different

in D. Fergusson – M. Sarot (eds.), *The Future of God’s Gift. Explorations in Christian Eschatology*, Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 2000, pp. 217-241.

¹⁹ For both an overview and a critique of several recent German publications on eschatology, see Folkart Wittekind, “Eschatologie. Zur Diskussion in neueren Sammelbänden”, in *Theologische Rundschau* 80 (2015), pp. 14–55.

one in the context of natural sciences and even in many social sciences. It is also clear that neither Christ himself nor the promise of his return can be considered a ‘fact’ in solely historical (let alone e.g. biological) sense of the word. But on the other hand, hope is not built on fiction. How then can we think ‘truth’ based on a person who is yet to come, returning in a global context characterized by very different mindsets and beliefs? And, above all, how can we as theologians and Christians dialogue meaningfully with other religions or sciences about the “blessed hope”, not just stating the Christian dogma, but seeking to understand and gain understanding?

III. Matthias Wenk: A Response to Amos Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology*, “Baptism in the Holy Spirit”

In “The Baptism in the Holy Spirit”, the 4th chapter of his book titled *Renewing Christian Theology*, Amos Yong es one of the hallmarks of Pentecostal theology which perceives itself to be a renewal movement. This raises an obvious question: How can a theological topic which is perceived to be «renewing» be theologically renewed itself? But before outlining Yong’s argument, we need to quote the WAGF SF regarding baptism in the Holy Spirit:

We believe that the baptism in the Holy Spirit is the bestowing of the believer with power for life and service for Christ. This experience is distinct from and subsequent to the new birth, it is received by faith, and it is accompanied by the manifestation of speaking in tongues as the Spirit gives utterance as the initial evidence (Luke 24:49; Acts 1:8; 2:1-4; 8:15-19; 11:14-17; 19:1-7).

Yong starts the chapter on the baptism in the Holy Spirit with a meditation on the life of the apostle Peter and makes it clear that the apostle’s life cannot be divided as easily into “prior to Pentecost” and “after Pentecost” as it is sometimes done in Pentecostal churches.

After this introductory meditation, the discussion on Spirit Baptism is placed in the wider context and history of the Holiness revival movement, which was confronted with the question of an external sign, a visible evidence of the work of the Spirit in the life of the believers. Whereas for Wesley the sign

had been coterminous with the practice of a holy life, Holiness thinkers were concerned with the issue of tangible signs indicative of post-conversion experiences. Parham, like many others, understood speaking in tongues to be external evidence for the post-conversion experience of Spirit Baptism. For obvious reasons, charismatic groups which remained within their initial denominational boundaries did not follow this line of reasoning; they often preserved a more sacramental approach to the question of an external sign for the work of the Spirit in the life of believers. However, from a global perspective the issue of speaking in tongues as the evidence for Spirit Baptism becomes less and less important, with many Pentecostal churches in the global south emphasizing healing and other similar experiences as external signs of post-conversion Spirit manifestations.

After having thus set the stage, Yong undertakes a reading of the third Gospel which allows for an understanding of Spirit Baptism which is broader than that which is prevalent in classical Pentecostal churches. To put it briefly, for Yong Spirit Baptism represents the expression and experience of the God who saves, sanctifies and empowers people to become subjects of the divine salvation history. Notably, the author construes the Baptist's promise «of the One who comes after him and who baptizes with Spirit and with fire» within the parameters of the Synoptics – feeling no need to include Acts from the outset. This is a very important decision, because it allows Yong to define Spirit Baptism as encompassing the entire life and ministry of Jesus, rather than being a narrowly defined experience in the life of Christians. Yong's approach is also much more in line with the overall outlook of the Synoptics, who agree that the Baptist primarily spoke about something that Jesus will do – and not primarily about something his followers will experience. Yong's emphasis on Spirit Baptism as a work of Jesus, who enables people to live a life in the Spirit, leads him to affirm the possibility of a “crisis moment” in the life of a believer, for the work of the Spirit is both irruptive and continual.

Yong is very explicit in his attempt to provide a more inclusive theology of baptism in the Holy Spirit and consequently moves beyond the narrow definition of the WAGF SF. At the same time, his endeavor to define baptism in the

Holy Spirit mainly with the Synoptic Gospels in view, leads him to affirm that “Acts... simply highlights that the empowerment of the Spirit enables testimony to and participation in God’s work manifest in Jesus, albeit now beyond the confines of Israel to the ends of the earth” (p. 95). While I have a lot of sympathy for Yong’s emphasis on the Spirit empowering people to be witnesses, and especially for his argument that such an emphasis on witness counters the one-sided theology of glory, health and wealth, I am cautious about reading too much into the term *martures* as used in Acts. I am not sure that Luke’s use of the term already implied our understanding of being a martyr.

In his final section, Yong briefly discusses three vital issues: 1) The “initial-evidence” formulation is a by-product of modernist optimism about the empirically demonstrable nature of science. According to Yong, the emphasis should rather be on Pentecost as reclaiming “the glory of God, but by harmonizing rather than homogenizing the many tongues” (p. 98). 2) “The gift of the Holy Spirit thus includes the reception and sharing of God’s saving work” (p. 98). 3) The egalitarian character of the renewed community as a result of the Spirit outpouring upon the disciples.

In sum, Yong’s discussion of baptism in the Holy Spirit broadens the narrower definition of the WAGF SF and represents a mixture of biblical theological arguments with more systematic considerations. His major contribution, over against a sacramental approach to Spirit Baptism, is his understanding of Spirit Baptism as an expression for Jesus’ gift of the Spirit that facilitates witness to the cosmic purification, redemption and perfection.

Yong’s discussion of Spirit Baptism raises two important questions. The first one centers on the issue of evidence for the work of the Spirit in the life of the believers and the church. Apparently, the church has never lived well with the confession of the Spirit’s indwelling without providing a more specific (tangible) testimony for that. This raises the question what an ecumenical and global theology could contribute towards this discussion.

The second question revolves around the very terminology of “baptism in the Holy Spirit”. Since the term is surrounded by many semantic confusions (Norbert Baumert) and since Yong (as well as Frank Macchia) intends to broaden its understanding anyway, why not drop all the dogmatic formula-

tions at all? To be sure, this does not imply that the relevant New Testament passages are of no importance, but would make it harder for exegetical studies to take place in the interest of certain doctrinal positions. After all, “baptism in the Holy Spirit” is to a certain extent an artificial construction. However, the issues related to it are, as Yong has demonstrated, of vital importance for the church.

IV. Wolfgang Lienemann: The Spirit and the Ethics. Some remarks on their relation in Amos Yong’s *Renewing Christian Theology*

Amos Yong’s formidable endeavor of “Renewing Christian Theology” by his “Systematics for a Global Christianity” is ambitious and timely.²⁰ The first addressees are of course members of renewalist and Pentecostal communities, but the book has a far larger outreach. Although stemming from academic courses held at various American divinity schools and universities, it was written from a trans-confessional point of view. This is not in contradiction to the fact that the starting point and the basics of every chapter are the 11 articles of the WAGF SF from 2000/2011. The author maintains a universalistic perspective on every topic which is discussed, and this characteristic trait is emphasized by the composition of the chapters: first the introductory lead with biblical key-figures from Mary and Paul to John, then an important example of reception history, followed by explanations from the biblical and historical traditions, actual controversies, and systematic conclusions. Every chapter ends with questions for further investigations and some suggestions for further reading (only in English, which is surprising, given that the most cited German-speaking author is K. Barth).

Having taught (Christian-theological and philosophical) ethics, I found it of great relevance to analyze the interplay between ‘pneumatology’, ‘eschatology’,

²⁰ Yong grew up “as a pentecostal pastor’s kid and missionary kid” and presents himself as “a pentecostal theologian” (*Renewing Christian Theology*, p. xix). J. Anderson “as collaborator on and contributor to this volume” was responsible for the images in the book – not “illustrations” or commentaries, but a series of authentic manifestations of the historic and actual/actualized present of the Holy Spirit.

‘ecclesiology’, and ‘ethics’ in this book (quotation marks are necessary because the meaning of these terms is not clear – not only for professional theologians, as we will see). I will concentrate on the chapters 2, 3, 7, and 11 of the book. My questions are: (1) What is the outcome of different types of ‘eschatology’ – understood as types of expectation of things to come – in questions of morality and ethics? (I understand ‘morality’ in the Aristotelian tradition as usual, typical, [counterfactual] expectable behavior, and ‘ethics’ as the theories of ‘morality’, together with the empirical presentation and the normative evaluation.) (2) What is the relation between the triune God and the understanding of the agency and impact of the Holy Spirit? (3) Does the experience of the Holy Spirit among the renewalists lead to certain moral convictions, positions and actions, which affect not only the behavior of individuals, but have an impact on the community at large? (4) Which structures and processes does a missional church need in order to communicate their experiences of the Holy Spirit and their social-political commitments in a secular society?

(1) Chapter 2: “The Last Days and the End of Time. Christian Hope Then and Now”, which follows the introduction, takes as the starting point art. 11 of the Statement of Faith, which recapitulates the creedal statements of the early church, while also adding some characteristic Pentecostal elements, namely “the bodily resurrection of all humanity” (sic) and the belief “in the premillennial, imminent, and personal return of our Lord Jesus Christ”. Which is here the meaning of ‘eschatology’?

Yong starts with “Paul the Apocalyptic Apostle”, a perspective which is strongly evocative of Ernst Käsemann (who is not mentioned) and not far from the Overbeck-thesis on the “radical eschatology” of the early Christ-followers.

As it is well known, the different types of ‘eschatology’, understood as believing and teaching certain aspects of the things to come, in renewalist and Pentecostal groups are more or less contradicting and incompatible. Yong seems to avoid exclusive alternatives; he is neither a “premillennialist”, nor a “dispensationalist”.²¹ This harmonizing tendency becomes obvious by the exegetical conclusion, namely that his picture of “Luke’s eschatology is consistent

²¹ Regarding different positions of a pre-, post- or a-millennial return of Christ, Yong asserts that “there has never been any consensus across the renewal spectrum” (33).

with what is found in the rest of the New Testament” (48). Systematically, Yong is close to K. Barth’s emphasis on Jesus Christ as the *eschatos* (without speculations about the *eschata*) and on the immediate presence of God in Christ at every moment of (human) history. “In fact, that Jesus is raised from the dead suggests that the end of time has invaded the history of the world. Thus, believers in Jesus live in anticipation of their own future resurrections, even as they participate now in the work of the Spirit poured out upon them by the resurrected Christ” (37). This ‘christological’ concentration and the understanding of the Holy Spirit (only) as the powerful presence of Christ in the lives of people is arguably the center of Yong’s ‘eschatology’ without free-floating speculations. On the other hand, he is keen to understand and appreciate the different types of thinking about the “last days” and the “end of time” in non-Christian religious systems as well in the actual scientific theories.

What about the ethical consequences of this present and futuristic eschatology? Here Yong turns to the topic of “Christian hope today”, stressing first the “personal return” of Jesus Christ, touching on his “imminent return”, and only then referring to his human activity. But “sharing in God’s work of reconciling all creation to himself” (51) is in my understanding too vague for introducing ethical perspectives. While Yong tries to avoid an individualistic (“personal”), narrow-minded concept of revelation, the gift of the Holy Spirit and redemption, the mandate of Genesis 1:26-28 needs a broader explanation, one which describes in more detail the dimensions of human responsibility (53).

(2) As already mentioned, Yong writes about the Holy Spirit not dispensing from Jesus Christ. This means that he represents a strong trinitarian conception of Christian theology. This is obvious in chapter 11: “The Eternal Godhead. The Mystery of the Triune God in a World of Many Faiths” (293-326).

Here we find the already well-known sequence, starting with a biblical person, “Cornelius the Just”, followed by “The Triune God: Pentecostal, Ecumenical, and Interreligious Perspectives” (with the following subdivisions: “Oneness and Trinity: Foundational Issues”, “Toward a Twenty-First-Century Trinitarian Faith” and “Renewal Theology in a Pluralistic World”). The last two sections are titled “From Israel to the Nations: Matthew’s Narrative of the Triune God” and “Worshipful Witness to the God of Jesus Christ in the Spirit”, respectively.

The topic of chapter 11, Art. 2 concerning the “Eternal Godhead”, is the longest and most variegated article of the WAGF SF. It follows the statement concerning the “inspiration of Scriptures” (which is described as being “verbally inspired of God”) and constitutes the Trinitarian frame of the Confession. So, this sequence is characterized by a strong tension: already in the early church the biblical foundation of the doctrine was under severe scrutiny. Moreover, the confession of the triune God will be perceived by people of other faiths, particularly by the Muslims, as a massive provocation. A more detailed analysis of such issues will be given below.

a) The biblical frame of reference uses the story of Cornelius (Acts 10; cf. the Ethiopian eunuch of 8:26-40) and a comprehensive re-reading of Matthew’s “narrative of the triune God”. Within these brackets, Yong discusses historical and actual positions on the Trinitarian reflections.

The Cornelius story is interpreted as a great opening of the Christian faith, which breaks through important socio-political and religious boundaries. Being the chief of the “Italian Cohort” Cornelius is a (minor) political ruler as a “God-fearing man”. The strange vision he has (10:9-16) undermines the traditional delineations of clean and unclean or sacred and profane. It is Peter himself (in Luke’s perspective) who opens the Jewish religion: “Peter’s conversion as a Jewish exclusivist to one willing to be in fellowship with Gentiles” (295).

b) Among renewalists, speaking about the Triune God used to generate controversy. (I note in passing that Yong always tries to reconcile different positions not by reducing them to the lowest common denominator, but by pleading in favor of the maximum.) There were adherers of a strong biblical monotheism as well as those who emphasized the continuity of the biblical “Trinitarian” passages with the teaching of the Old Church. One typical controversial subject was and still is the reception of ancient philosophical concepts such as *persona* (πρόσωπον) or *natura* (οὐσία). Yong follows the great lines of the Trinitarian and christological disputes and conciliar decisions close to the Nicene orthodoxy of 325, 381 and 451, including a sympathy with the Nestorian tradition. The *filioque* seems to be (for him) an open question, in spite of being affirmed in art. 2c of the “Statement of Faith”.

c) In general, Yong follows the “post-Barthian resurgence in Trinitarian the-

ology”, situating himself in the vicinity of V.-M. Kärkkäinen’s books. “A robust doctrine of the Trinity needs nothing less than an equally robust doctrine of the Holy Spirit; simultaneously, the development of pneumatology also pushes forward the discussion of Trinitarian theology” (305). The specific profile of Yong’s concept of the Trinity is the openness for complementary experiences in feminist theology, Hindu traditions, African indigenous traditions “and even Islam” (306). So, he tries to build bridges to “so-called pluralist models that relativize Christ vis-à-vis other faiths”.

I’m not sure whether representatives of other religions will enjoy this inclusive and embracing concept. But I can imagine that it is attractive for renewalists following the work of the Holy Spirit inside *and* outside the Christian communities. Stressing the universalistic and apocalyptic witness of Matthew, especially on baptism (3:16-17) and the “Great Commission”, Yong illustrates the border-crossing missionary impact of the gospel, including “its ethical message”, as in the Sermon on the Mount. This wide understanding of the Triune God seems to me almost like a *coincidentia oppositorum*, but it is in great accordance with the Trinitarian theology of Karl Barth, to whose views I will turn briefly by way of a few excerpts taken from his *Church Dogmatics* (CD).

1. The doctrine of Trinity is situated on the beginning of CD (I/1, §§ 8-12) and is the opening field and structural concept of the whole work.

The Triunity of God (§ 9):

“The God who reveals Himself according to Scripture is One in three distinctive modes of being subsisting in their mutual relations: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. It is thus that He is the Lord, i.e., the Thou who meets man’s I and unites Himself to this I as the indissoluble Subject and thereby and therein reveals Himself to him as his God.”²²

God the Holy Spirit (§ 12)

“The one God reveals Himself according to Scripture as the Redeemer, i.e., as the Lord who sets us free. As such He is the Holy Spirit, by receiving whom we

²² Original: “Der Gott, der sich nach der Schrift offenbart, ist Einer in drei eigentümlichen, in ihren Beziehungen untereinander bestehenden Seinsweisen: Vater, Sohn und Heiliger Geist. So ist er der Herr, d.h. das Du, das dem menschlichen Ich entgegentritt und sich verbindet als das unauflöbliche Subjekt und das ihm eben so und darin als sein Gott offenbar wird.”

become the children of God, because, as the Spirit of the love of God the Father and the Son, He is so antecedently in Himself.”²³

2. The doctrine of Trinity is also constitutive for the ethics in the context of CD.

“God is One. That He is Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and that in this Trinity He is the epitome and sum of all riches, does not mean that His being is inwardly divided. The older dogmatics spoke here of the *perichoresis* of God’s three persons or modes of being. It meant by this that He is always the One, not without the Other, but in and through the Other. Just as God in His unity is not only one, but many and single, He is not abstractly and therefore not diffusely many and single, but in His manifoldness and singleness He is one and indivisible. Similarly, God is one and indivisible in His working. That He is Creator, Reconciler and Redeemer does not imply the existence of separate divine departments and branches of authority. *Opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa*. The first and third articles of the creed can be understood only from the second, and the latter only on the assumption and in development of the first and third. All this is true also of the command of God. If we consider it in its different spheres, and therefore if we here ask particularly about the command of God the Creator, this cannot and must not mean that beside this first there is a second and separate command, that of God the Reconciler, and then a third, that of God the Redeemer. If, then, we turn particularly to the sphere of the relationship of Creator and creature, this cannot mean that we turn away from the other spheres in question. Always in the ethical event God commands and man acts in all three spheres at once. Our whole exposition of the first article in this doctrine of creation was executed in the light of the second and with a view to the third. How could one think and say anything at all serious and tenable about creation without proceeding at every point from Christology and for that reason assuming the main contents of Pneumatology and eschatology? It would not be God the Creator, the Father Almighty, as manifested in His Word and attested in the creed, if we did not immediately and fundamentally recognize in Him the Son and His work, and the Spirit, the Lifegiver. It is on the broad basis of this Christian knowledge of God the Creator that we now take our stand as we ask concerning His command. It is the one whole command of the one whole God” (CD III/4, § 52.2, 32f).²⁴

²³ Original: “Der eine Gott offenbart sich nach der Schrift als der Erlöser, d.h. als der Herr, der uns frei macht. Er ist als solcher der Heilige Geist, durch dessen Empfang wir Kinder Gottes werden, weil er es als der Geist der Liebe Gottes des Vaters und Gottes des Sohnes zuvor in sich selber ist.”

²⁴ Original: “Gott ist Einer. Daß er der Vater, der Sohn und der Heilige Geist und in dieser seiner Dreieinheit der Inbegriff und die Summe alles Reichtums ist, bedeutet nicht, daß es in ihm Scheidungen gebe, daß Gottes Sein ein in sich gespaltenes sei. Die alte Dogmatik sprach hier von der «Perichorese» der drei Personen oder Seinsweisen Gottes und wollte damit sagen: Er ist je das Eine nicht ohne das Andere, sondern immer auch in dem Anderen und durch das An-

(3) Ethical themes and problems are not in the foreground of the book, but sometimes they are alluded to. It is not surprising that chapter 5 on “Sanctification and Holiness” follows the line of chapter 4 concerning the Wesleyan tradition of “search for perfection”. John Wesley (1703-1791), who ascribed his personal conversion to reading Luther’s interpretation of Paul’s letter to the Romans, followed by a journey to Frankfurt and Herrnhut, is a key-figure of the pietistic wing of the radical Protestantism with immense influence in England and the New England territories. In Yong’s estimation, the chief tenet of the Methodist movement is relevant not only for personal life but also for social relations – “Christian conversion ought to be followed by purification and perfection” (87). But this is not understood as an ethics of (radical-protestant) legality (“Gesetzlichkeit” in the sense put forward by Luther, who posited the distinction between ‘law’ and ‘evangelium’), but transformed in a Johannine spirit of love (see 117ff.). That is, the ethics of God’s “commandments” is nothing else but “believe in the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another,

dere. Wie Gott in seiner Einheit nicht nur Eines, sondern Vieles und Einzelnes ist, so ist er nicht abstrakt und also nicht diffus Vieles und Einzelnes, sondern in seiner Vielheit und Einzelheit Eines und Einer. Und so ist Gott Eines und Einer auch in seinem Wirken. Daß er der Schöpfer, der Versöhner und der Erlöser ist, bedeutet nicht die Existenz getrennter göttlicher Departemente und Verwaltungszweige. Opera Trinitatis ad extra sunt indivisa. Man kann den ersten und den dritten Glaubensartikel nur vom zweiten und diesen nur unter Voraussetzung und in Entfaltung des ersten und dritten verstehen. Das Alles gilt auch vom Gebot Gottes. Wenn wir es in seinen verschiedenen Bereichen betrachten, wenn wir also hier im Besonderen nach dem Gebot Gottes des Schöpfers fragen, so kann und darf das nicht bedeuten, es gebe neben diesem ein anderes, ihm gegenüber abgesondertes Gebot Gottes des Versöhners und dann, wieder abgesondert, als Gebot Gottes des Erlösers, auch noch ein drittes. Wenn wir uns also im Besonderen dem Bereich des Verhältnisses zwischen Schöpfer und Geschöpf zuwenden, so kann das nicht heißen, daß wir uns von den anderen hier in Frage kommenden Bereichen **abwenden**. Gott gebietet und der Mensch handelt im ethischen Ereignis immer in allen drei Bereichen zugleich. Es geschah die ganze Auslegung des ersten Artikels in dieser Lehre von der Schöpfung vom zweiten her und im Blick auf den dritten. Wie könnte man von der Schöpfung irgend etwas theologisch Ernsthaftes und Haltbares denken und sagen, ohne dabei von Punkt zu Punkt von der Christologie herzukommen und eben darum die entscheidenden Gehalte der Pneumatologie und Eschatologie vorwegzunehmen? Der wäre nicht Gott der Schöpfer, nicht der Vater, der Allmächtige, wie er in seinem Wort offenbar ist und wie ihn der christliche Glaube bekennt, in dem wir nicht sofort, und zwar grundlegend, auch den Sohn und sein Werk und den Geist, der lebendig macht, erkennen würden. Auf den weiten und breiten Boden dieser, der christlichen Erkenntnis Gottes des Schöpfers, stellen wir uns jetzt auch, indem wir nach dessen **Gebot** fragen. Es ist das eine, ganze Gebot des einen, ganzen Gottes” (III/4, § 5).

just as he has commanded us” (1 John 3:23). The ability to love is the gift of the Holy Spirit. This is of course a far cry from all legalistic misunderstandings of the Gospel. Even more, this is incompatible with every separation from the ‘world’, but includes global models of cultic, moral, spiritual, and social holiness and – I would add – solidarity (122). Obviously, this is the inside perspective of renewalists, but I want to ask: How can this reality of a Christian life be communicated to non-Christian, secular people? I presume the answer can be only (but is not explicitly given by Yong): praying and doing what is righteous in the power of the Spirit.

The author does not address concrete moral challenges and conflicts, such as how to act in the name of the Spirit in armed conflicts. What is the stand of renewalists in matters of war and peace? While I cannot assess Pentecostals as a whole, it seems that many conservative evangelicals in the US are followers and supporters of the US-president of today. What can be said about problems of family and sexuality, including same-sex unions? Granted, questions like these cannot be discussed *in extenso* in one volume about Systematics, but the direction of ethical discernment should be demonstrated, especially given that these questions have the potential of church-dividing controversies.

(4) Coming to my last point, it is worth knowing what is the relation between the personal and collective experiences of the Holy Spirit and the structure, organization and social-political praxis of renewalists? In chapter 7 (“The Church and Its Mission”), Stephen, the “first Christian martyr”, is the leading biblical figure. The deacon and his circle were transcending the Hellenistic Jewish diaspora and adopting a “more universal and inclusive vision of God’s salvific intentions” (162). Stephen was a cosmopolitan Jesus-follower of Jewish descent. Opening such universalistic horizons of grace and reconciliation is always in the focus of Yong’s awareness. But he always insists on the particularity of the origins, especially the foundation of the church and its mission in the eternal covenant of God and his elected people Israel. (Similar with K. Barth’s understanding of Israel!) Yong does not avoid the complex and crucial question of the messianic Jews, especially since two-thirds of them are charismatics (167f). From the Israel-covenant stems the vision concerning the pluralistic universe of the “global Christianity” (174), illustrated by an “Ephesian ecclesiology” and

concentrated in four theses about the “Church as *Missio Spiritus*”: the worldwide church has a christological fundament, is pneumatologically driven in its proclamation, eschatologically oriented in its *telos*, and, last but not least, missiologically minded in its activity. That sounds charismatic and ecumenical – including the revelation and proclamation of the triune God for the whole world –, but there is no word about appropriate structures, internal organizations and public responsibility. This may be always an important, but second task of renewalists and their social and political standing.

V. Amos Yong: Many Tongues, Many Discursive Practices: Whose Systematics, Which Global Christianities?

I am grateful that Swiss theologians have not only read *Renewing Christian Theology*, but also deemed it worthwhile to organize a forum for conversation about it and found time to engage the book in writing.²⁵ Although my conversation partners have been quite generous in their assessments and even kind with their critical questions and observations, the preceding reflections and questions depict how challenging the task of writing a systematic theology is in the present time. If I could summarize my response in one sentence, it would be that the book itself, plus these reviews of it, show that a generic and universal systematic theology is oxymoronic (i.e., no longer possible) precisely because globally speaking – and here deconstructing what was already announced to in the subtitle of my own book – Christianity is not one but in some important respects, many. The following explicates further both aspects of this claim in grateful conversation with the above remarks.

Christine Lienemann-Perrin rightly notes that while the primary audience for *Renewing Christian Theology* are those in the Assemblies of God and other Pentecostal churches, I have sought “to also members of other denominations” or anyone sensing the need “to think with and through any set of

²⁵ Amos Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology: Systematics for a Global Christianity*, images and commentary by Jonathan A. Anderson, Waco, TX, Baylor University Press, 2014. Thanks especially to Christine Lienemann-Perrin who organized the event, and to her colleagues for their written responses.

dogmatic commitments in global context.”²⁶ As such, the scope is expansive: from the Assemblies to God to Pentecostal churches more generally to other denominations to Christian traditions even more broadly considered, at least theologians of churches with doctrines that invite reconsideration of any sort. The latter point, however, begs an even more fundamental question, one raised by my fellow (Swiss) Pentecostal colleague, Matthias Wenk, in the context of my widened understanding of the central Pentecostal dogma, baptism in the Holy Spirit: “why not drop all the dogmatic formulations?” he asks. His point, as I understand it, is that the relevant exegetical and theological work unfolded in that chapter (3) of the book is artificially constrained by this Pentecostal doctrinal claim.²⁷ While in agreement with his assessment at one level, the underlying question now comes to the fore: would not Pentecostal contributions to the wider ecumenical discussion be more generative when unimpeded by dogmatic frames? Further, Wenk’s question can be extended: isn’t any dogmatic conceptualization, Pentecostal or otherwise (including here the Assemblies of God), by definition particularistic rather than ecumenical – that is what confessionalism means – even as such particularity opens up to a de facto pluralism of many doctrinal or confessional systems side by side, each relativizing the other?

I posit two related comments in response here. First, pluralism is not a problem but a theological opportunity; second, the opportunity opened up by pluralism is the space for particularity. The former, I admit, embraces our present late or post-modern sensibilities,²⁸ a posture quite comfortable with the demise of the modernist, totalistic, and universalistic one. I have long argued this point

²⁶ Yong, *Renewing Christian Theology*, p. 27.

²⁷ I hazard the guess that Wenk’s own PhD thesis, published in the same year as mine in the same book series – Wenk: *Community Forming Power: The Socio-Ethical Role of the Spirit in Luke-Acts* (Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series 19), Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 2000; Yong: *Discerning the Spirit(s): A Pentecostal-Charismatic Contribution to Christian Theology of Religions* (Journal of Pentecostal Theology Supplement Series 20), Sheffield, Sheffield Academic Press, 2000 – lends authority to his question and suggestion: that we may always need more scriptural and theological reflection on this Pentecostal notion of Spirit-baptism, including and especially efforts that are dogmatically unhindered.

²⁸ I prefer to talk about the *late modern* rather than the *postmodern*; e.g., Yong, *Theology and Down Syndrome: Reimagining Disability in Late Modernity*, Waco, TX, Baylor University Press, 2007.

theologically, however: that a more pluralistic imagination is needed since this is to be oriented fundamentally by the pluralism revealed in the Day of Pentecost narrative. This is what might be called a Pentecostal or pneumatological pluralism, but it heralds not pluralism for its own sake, but for the purpose of witnessing to the God of Jesus Christ in and through many tongues.

Here, then, it is important to say a bit more about the particularity of pluralism. Welcoming pluralism leads not to any debilitating relativism but to attentiveness to the many voices as such specific voices were heard in the Day of Pentecost narrative. But if in our finitude we cannot thereby listen to *every* voice, we ought to do what we can to focus as deeply as possible on our own specificity while also being open in principle to any and all others. *Renewing Christian Theology's* home site is therefore the World Assemblies of God Fellowship's Statement of Faith while its interlocutors echo with witnesses to the topic at hand resounding from any direction. Late modernity deprivileges abstract locations and values instead situatedness. This is in part my round-about manner of responding to Wenk's query about being free from dogmatic baggage: each of us stands somewhere whether recognized or not and our work proceeds more honestly if so acknowledged. This does not require unthinking dogmatic regurgitation or mere doctrinal repetition, but rather invites ongoing testing in dialogue with the many other perspectives.²⁹

But if confessional and dogmatic rootedness does not have to be non- or anti-ecumenical in approach, how is such openness sustained? Within the ecumenical compass, one clue derives from Wolfgang Lienemann's astonishment that "the most cited German-speaking author is K. Barth." I confirmed this by looking at the name index of the book and reflecting further on this observation, see that the grandmaster from Basel remains relevant because of his resolutely theological approach: funded first and foremost on the person and reality of Jesus Christ and opening up from there to history in all its particularity. My approach, comparatively, is no less theological, albeit one taking off Jesus *Christ*

²⁹ On Wenk's other critical question about whether I am "reading too much into the term *martures*" which appears in Acts 1:8, I grant his theological point even while defending the import of registering the rhetorical question that such language ought to give pause to, a particularly important matter for renewalist movements that are often triumphalist in their approach to mission and evangelism.

as the one anointed by the divine breath and then poured out on all flesh (Acts 2:17), and thereby also similarly opening up the multiplicity and plurality of history but much more intentionally so (here contrasting with Barth).³⁰ This latter trajectory, it ought to be stated, is also intrinsic to my Pentecostal and pneumatological vision. But in that respect, the many voices are trinitarianly founded and funded, grounded both christologically and pneumatologically in the work of what the patristic theologian Irenaeus called the two hands of the Father. The specificity of Jesus Christ persisting throughout my book – as both von Allmen-Mäder and Wenk confirm in their treatments of chapters 2 and 4, the constructive moves in these chapters (and in every other) are christological and pneumatological, together – enables Christian witness even while his outpouring of the divine breath invites discerning engagement with the voices of others.

But Pentecostal and pneumatological pluralism does not, in and of itself, guarantee that the many voices will be heard or valued appropriately by us (whoever the “us” is). Speaking for myself, and now confessing the prejudices that Christine Lienemann-Perrin’s review identifies, if ever so gently: my own Pentecostal-evangelical and free church sensibilities were rather dismissive, however unintentionally, of the mainline Protestant traditions, particularly those from and across the European continent. I have been alert neither to the pluralism within the so-called *Christendom* churches (itself much more ambiguous than my use of the term in *Renewing Christian Theology* let on) nor to the witnesses that continue to reverberate amid and out of processes of engagement with the modern nation-state that I have disdainfully characterized as “dirty-handed.” Here Lienemann-Perrin’s point is well taken: that renewalists – and others from Pentecostal and charismatic movements – ought to look again at the historic churches. If we were to be honest, actually, there is a sense in which even Pentecostal churches are increasingly passé, which is partly why the *renewalist* nomenclature was adopted. As such, history shows that hubristic

³⁰ Thus, I have long understood my work as complementary with fellow Pentecostal and Barthian theologian Frank D. Macchia; see the running references to Barth in our article, with Ralph Del Colle and Dale T. Irvin, “Christ and Spirit: Dogma, Discernment and Dialogical Theology in a Religiously Plural World,” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology* 12:1 (2003), pp. 15-83, esp. 42-43, 47-48, 52-56, 58-59, 63-64, and 66-68.

presumption that one's own location rides the wave of divine favor not only enjoys the benefits of the high tide but also then suffers the consequences of the low tide, unless we can recognize that the church, the body of Jesus Christ and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit, is being divinely orchestrated through its many voices together – waves ebbing and flowing, to retain the preceding metaphor – to witness to the living God. This is in large part the important point Lienemann-Perrin highlights (and with which I fully concur): that the Christian theological task of the third millennium needs resources from all of the “divergent doctrinal, liturgical, and practical traditions” it can bring together and that nothing less than a fully ecumenical effort can sustain the discussion going forward. As Wolfgang Lienemann notes, this has been at least the effort of the book: to maximize – via a hermeneutic of charity, I might add – the many voices rather than the opposite.³¹

Lienemann-Perrin also asks whether *Renewing Christian Theology's* foci are so apologetically oriented toward retrieval of Pentecostal self-understandings that it is more anemic for those outside the church, secular societies such as Western Europe for instance. Von Allmen-Mäder likewise ponders, in the context of thinking through the eschatological theology especially in chapter 2 of my book, about what truth concept is assumed in my defense of the World Assembly of God's dogma of Jesus as the blessed hope: what is meant, exactly, by the promise of his return and what are we waiting and hoping for, especially given secular and even scientific understandings of the end of the cosmos? On the one hand, I grant that my instincts – and here consistent with one interpretation of the Barthian legacy – is to prioritize our theological language and commitments rather than render them subservient to other discourses, even that of secular society or of various scientific communities. At this level, I am reluctant to engage in any form of modern apologetics that presumes concordance between theology and the secular.³² On the other hand, I have repeat-

³¹ See also my *The Dialogical Spirit: Christian Reason and Theological Method for the Third Millennium* (Eugene, Ore.: Cascade Books, 2014).

³² For this reason, I have published very little about apologetics as I feel it is laden with modernist presuppositions; see my “Toward a Relational Apologetics in Global Context: A Review Essay on Benno van den Toren's *Christian Apologetics as Cross-Cultural Dialogue*,” *Philosophia Christi* 14:2 (2012), pp. 437-445, which registers my sympathies for a dialogical approach that

edly insisted in various books that theology today is both post-secular and a form of public witness. This has two implications: that theology cannot be a merely private religious (i.e., intra-Christian) conversation and that its health and vitality depend on ongoing engagement with any others – those of other religious traditions or of no faith; those in the public square whether social, economic, or political; those in the various scientific communities of inquiry, etc. – on topics identified as being of mutual interest.³³ Did I do this as well as I might have in *Renewing Christian Theology*? Perhaps not, as evidenced by at least Lienemann-Perrin’s line of questioning. Certainly, every aspect of my book can be improved, and this line of consideration identifies some important shortcomings that I hope readers will find complementary argumentation for in my other works.

What kind of concept of truth is required for such a wide-ranging dialogue with the many voices? Nothing less than one that takes references seriously (which correspondence theories of truth do), even while recognizing that different discursive communities have varying perspectives from which their judgments even about the nature of truth are made (here recognizing the irreducibility of coherence theories of truth).³⁴ Returning to von Allmen-Mäder’s question, now, suggests that there is no simple response available. The Christian “blessed hope” is neither literalistic nor merely symbolic. Rather, if there are many tongues and many respects with which such tongues speak, then part of the theological task involves translations across linguistic discourses. This is not resolvable via some kind of charismatic gift of tongue-interpretation (even if the analogy invites such consideration), but rather involves the hard work of

I deem crucial to any plausible apologetics for the present time.

³³ Thus, I have published widely on interfaith dialogue and on theology and science; for a succinct statement, see my essay, “Pluralism, Secularism, and Pentecost: Newbegin-ings for *Mis-sio Trinitatis* in a New Century,” in Scott W. Sunquist and Amos Yong (eds.), *The Gospel and Pluralism Today: Reassessing Lesslie Newbigin for the 21st Century*, (Missiological Engagements: Church, Theology and Culture in Global Contexts 1), Downers Grove, IVP Academic, 2015, pp. 147-170.

³⁴ I defend both, plus a form of the pragmatic theory of truth (that I will mention more of momentarily) in my *Spirit-Word-Community: Theological Hermeneutics in Trinitarian Perspective* (New Critical Thinking in Religion, Theology and Biblical Studies Series), Burlington, VT – Aldershot, UK, Ashgate, 2002), esp. ch. 5.

dialogue across communities of inquiry and action. This last point is an important one: in some if not many cases, even ongoing dialogue will not resolve differences, much less clear away completely misunderstandings accruing across translations; rather, we have to learn to live well with our less-than precise comprehension of one another and with our differences. Thus, truth involves a pragmatic or performative component: the alethic value of our claims depends also at least in part, if not substantively, on how they orient our lives in relationship to others.³⁵ For followers of Jesus as Messiah, we are thereby responsible for living and demonstrating whatever truth we believe we may have, and this involves the empowering of his divine Spirit.

It is for this reason that the constructive moments of each of the eleven chapters of *Renewing Christian Theology* devoted to doctrinal statements include a performative element. Wolfgang Lienemann appropriately asks about the ethical implications of each reappropriation – he looks at four of my chapters – and rightly observes that the book is short on explicit ethical prescriptions. What are the ethical demands for the kind of partially realized eschatological stance (ch. 2)? What about the ethical mandates of holiness and the Christian life (ch. 5)? What are the ethical aspects of the church’s living witness in the public square (ch. 7)? And last but not least, what are the ethical dynamics vis-à-vis relating to people of other faiths (ch. 11), among other questions? There are all apposite to the pragmatic and performance dimensions of contemporary Christian theology in global contexts. Even if I have written at further length in some places about some of these matters,³⁶ my own limitations as a systematician are evident in this regard: ethics is a secondary rather than primary domain of my

³⁵ Thus, my essay, “Poured Out on All Flesh: The Spirit, World Pentecostalism, and the Performance of Renewal Theology,” *PentecoStudies: An Interdisciplinary Journal for Research on the Pentecostal and Charismatic Movements* 6:1 (2007), pp. 16-46, which accentuates the pragmatic dimension of renewal theology.

³⁶ E.g., much about interfaith engagement and one book on public theology – *Hospitality and the Other: Pentecost, Christian Practices, and the Neighbor* (Faith Meets Faith series), Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 2008, and *In the Days of Caesar: Pentecostalism and Political Theology – The Cadbury Lectures 2009* (Sacra Doctrina: Christian Theology for a Postmodern Age series), Grand Rapids and Cambridge, UK, Eerdmans, 2009, are the most relevant – but a smattering of essays on ecological theology that do not come close to delineating the kind of ethical obligations theology opens up to.

theological vocation and of this book. Wolfgang Lienemann's important question deserve thoughtful answers that will need to be filled in and completed by others, perhaps others who read this rejoinder also.

I want to close by returning to my one-sentence thesis explicated above. In hindsight, presenting *Renewing Christian Theology* as a "systematics for a global Christianity" is too ambitious, if not self-contradictory, not least because there is not one world Christianity but many types of Christianities across the globe. Also relevant on this score is that the genre of *systematic theology* is also in some respects a very modernist endeavor, presuming that one can organize one's theological vision in its entirety according to some kind of overarching frame. In a fallen world such as ours, it is no wonder systematians like myself exist, full of ourselves – again, speaking first and foremost personally – and of our own capacities! I suppose my book's subtitle was addressed to others in this "camp": those still within the thralls of the modern project, even if many of us are exploring conduits of escape. The critical questions and comments in this collection of reviews and responses perhaps are indicative also of fellow sojourners appreciative of the achievements of systematians who have gone before us but also aware of the need to chart fresh paths beyond the confines of all-too-neatly-organized theological systems. Wolfgang Lienemann's emeritus status provides him with additional vision which insists that the theological task is incomplete apart from the ethical steps. I hope I can live ever more fully into this mode of eschatological truth-telling – truth-living, more exactly – that would herald the coming reign of God by the power of the Spirit of Jesus (thus the priority of eschatology). Toward this end, "renewing Christian theology" may after all be aptly titled, as its first and maybe also final word is a gerund; this verb form prioritizes the dynamic, ongoing, and never-completed character of theological work that links reflection and action among and between us – within and outside the *ekklēsia* – that all-together is the life of the eschatological spirit who leads us into all truth.³⁷

³⁷ I am grateful to Emanuel Conțac, editor-in-chief of *Plērōma*, for his openness to a multi-authored review-and-response-essay, and for his editorial work. I remain responsible for any errors of fact or interpretation for my segment.

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