

EDITORIAL

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Twenty years ago, I took a group of Christian youths to Lugansk in eastern Ukraine. For ten days, we were hosted by a small but lively Pentecostal church here, which rented a local cinema and built up a centre of their own. The purpose of our trip was to deliver some aid we had collected, help in their building project and get to know their world. The memorable three-day road trip from Leipzig via Poland took us through Lviv, Kiev and Kharkiv, and was an eye-opening introduction to a vast and complex country. In Lugansk, poverty was rife, and nobody had any hopes under the corrupt Kuchma regime. Kiev was far away, and there were some murmurings about Ukrainian Neo-Nazis attacking Russian speakers. But nobody looked to Moscow for salvation either. Both capitals offered little hope to a town that would always be on the periphery of either. Salvation was not found in nation states. Instead, there was much energy and faith to just get on and build up what you can. I have often wondered how our hosts have fared these past eight years since 2014, when the fog of war descended on their region like a dark, foreboding shadow, and much of the world looked away. Now, front lines are being drawn all over the country right through people's homes and lives as loud narratives of geopolitics are defining their past, present and future.

Returning from this trip in 2002 and about to begin a PhD on Pentecostalism elsewhere, I was struck by the contrast between the often heady and self-referential world of scholarship and this direct and practical encounter of inter-church aid. How relevant was research on Pentecostalism to the lives of those we study? Now in the midst of yet another war in our world, this question rings as loud as ever. It reaches beyond promises of "impact" or other crude measures of academic utility and into the very heart of scholarly ethics: who or what is our study ultimately *for*?

The scholars whose work make up this volume of *PentecoStudies* would probably give very different answers to this question. Marcin Rzepka, whose article on Iranian Pentecostal history leads this issue, seeks to serve the memory of Assyrian Pentecostal missionaries before the First World War. In analysing the writings of Andrew Urshan, Benjamin Alexander and Thomas Nasser, he presents an anti-history of early Pentecostal missions where Iranians tell their own story, rather than letting foreign evangelists speak for them. In doing so, Rzepka also shows how Pentecostalism from the start was interwoven with ethnic essentialism, global migration, and a complex heritage of Christian identity. This serves as an important reminder not to essentialize Pentecostal identity around any particular historical experience.

Mark Cartledge, whose article on digital Pentecostalism follows next, offers practical theological reflections to the church as it considers how the pandemic-induced moves to online services have impacted and will continue to influence Pentecostal worship experience. Due to their media affinity, Pentecostals have more eagerly embraced, explored, and exploited the digital world than many, but Cartledge urges a more thorough ecclesiological reflection. On the one hand, as the virtual became mundane it grew in its ability to mediate Pentecostal spirituality; but on the other hand the electronic medium does and will get in the way and therefore cannot replace the multisensory experience of communal worship. Therefore, Cartledge invites his readers to retain the eschatological horizon of a renewed physical and material world rather than a technically mediated (hyper-)reality.

Our third article, by Anna Droll, seeks to enable a deeper understanding of what lies beneath the fascination with Pentecostal melodramas in parts of Africa. Through a study of Pentecostal engagements with dreams and visions, she seeks to show that at the heart of the Pentecostal experience of the real, there is an epistemology of “piercing the veil” between the noumenal and the phenomenal. This is not simply an exercise in hermeneutics and interpretation, but a matter of doxology. Prayer and testimony form essential mediating techniques to frame and integrate the dreams and visions into the Pentecostal experience. It is here, in the midst of Pentecostal individual spirituality, that narratives are formed and reshaped about what is really going on, which is why recent calls to censor Pentecostal films are not only problematic but ultimately misguided.

Finally, Josiah Baker seeks to broaden the theological horizon of Pentecostal–Lutheran dialogue by breaking out the mould of baptismal doctrine, and like Droll, he explores how Pentecostal doxology may offer

new insights into Pentecostal theology. Baker conducts a careful exegesis of the Hillsong hymn “Beneath the Waters (I Will Rise)”, which is often used in baptismal contexts, and shows how this hymn emphasizes God’s salvific grace in the life of the believer and baptizand. Baptism and worship thus become liturgical sacraments proclaiming God’s work above all. Surely, Pentecostals will always retain an emphasis on the human experience of this divine work, but rather than attracting accusations of synergism or even the denial of God’s work, Baker shows how Pentecostal doxology offers opportunities for discovering areas of soteriological convergence with Lutherans.

Richard Burgess has once again curated a fine set of reviews. These offer a further excellent portrait of how current scholarship of Pentecostalism continues to strive for a fair and accurate representation of the movement in its historical, theological and socio-economic dimensions. It is an encouraging sign that scholars of Pentecostalism still seek to serve those they study, but now, more than ever, we need to ensure that our research includes the voices that are drowned out by machinations of geopolitics and the cries of war.