

Steven M. Studebaker, *The Spirit of Atonement: Pentecostal Contributions and Challenges to the Christian Traditions* (New York: T&T Clark, 2021). xi + 202 pp. \$104.25 hardback; \$81.49 Kindle.

Steven Studebaker identifies himself with more progressive Pentecostal theologians such as Terry Cross, Frank Macchia, Wolfgang Vondey, Nimi Waiboko, and Amos Yong (201). He joins them in their “move away from the compartmentalized understanding of Christ and the Holy Spirit in Classical Pentecostalism.” And “Rather than locating the primary work of the Spirit in a post-conversion experience of spiritual empowerment,” he “provides pneumatological categories for Pentecostals to understand and expand their holistic and transformative praxis of the Spirit of Pentecost” (201). In his critical task, Studebaker rejects penal substitution as excessively “Christocentric and crucicentric” (4). He objects to a theology of atonement “that calls the killing of the innocent Christ on the cross an act of divine justice. . . . It operates according to the punitive and vindictive logic of retribution and redemptive violence” (ix). In his constructive task, he seeks “to articulate a theology that reflects the pneumatological, holistic, and life-renewing empowering character of pentecostal experience” (ix). In his introduction, Studebaker explains that Pentecost is his hermeneutical starting point for constructing a theology of atonement that includes both Christology and pneumatology. He suggests that Classical Pentecostalism’s theology is dependent on a traditional, evangelical theology that is not conducive to Pentecostal praxis; a new Pentecostal atonement theology more in keeping with Eastern Orthodoxy is required.

The organization of *The Spirit of Atonement* is clear enough. The book has two main parts, the first part developing a pneumatic theology of atonement in relation to Pentecost, the incarnation, the crucifixion, the resurrection, and eschatology. The second part mirrors these chapters in practical application. In his discussion of Pentecost (chap. 2), Studebaker argues that “Pentecost, not the cross, is the *telos* of redemption” (18). He highlights the work of the Holy Spirit from creation forward, calling creation a “proto-Pentecost” (20) and an “act of redemption” (24). He sees continuity in the Spirit’s redemptive work in creation, the exodus, exile, and at Pentecost. In fact, “The purpose of the Spirit of Pentecost, the Spirit of atonement, cannot be understood outside of this wider narrative of the Spirit of God” (39). And “Jesus’ saving work does not

reach its climax on the cross or even in the resurrection, but on the Day of Pentecost with the outpouring of the Spirit” (39). In his third chapter, dealing with the incarnation, Studebaker explains that “traditional Western atonement theology has almost no role for the Holy Spirit,” and “the Incarnation of Christ plays no fundamental role in the atonement” (41). He proposes a Spirit Christology of the incarnation that incorporates the broader narrative of the Spirit in place of the forensic view of atonement. Jesus’s conception by the Spirit is a fuller expression of God’s gift of life to humans in Gen 2:7 and will result in the eschatological outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, when Spirit-breathed life becomes available to all. Spirit baptism is a redemptive expression in the Gospels and “the fundamental nature of the atonement” (50). The time lapse between the incarnation and the Spirit’s arrival at Jesus’s baptism presents a problem, so Studebaker explains the latter event as a public identification of Jesus and a “confirmation of his perennial pneumatological identity as the Spirit-anointed Messiah.” No “ontological change” took place, but it was “a public manifestation of the Spirit’s abiding presence” (50). Studebaker emphasizes the participatory and relational aspects of the atonement and identifies with the non-*filioque* approach of Eastern Orthodoxy in contrast to the “forensic and extrinsic nature of much of Western atonement theology” (54).

The topic of the fourth chapter is the crucifixion, and Studebaker spends much of it challenging the perceived problems with penal substitution’s focus on the cross. It “makes sanctification theologically superfluous,” and “makes the righteousness of the cross extrinsic” (59). “Forgiveness cannot derive from the cross in the penal view” (61). The solution to this is found in the broader mission of the Spirit through Jesus, who lives in righteousness and fulfills the “human vocation to bear the Spirit-breathed divine image” (66). Jesus’s death on the cross is accomplished in solidarity with humans, and it is substitutionary, vicarious, participatory, pneumatological, and sacrificial. However, Christ is not a propitiation for sin, but an expiation. Studebaker dismisses sacrifice as propitiation based on its similarities with Near Eastern practices.

The fifth chapter concerns the resurrection of Jesus, and Studebaker argues that penal substitution minimizes the role of the resurrection in regard to atonement. However, the Holy Spirit raised Christ from the dead (Rom 8:11; 1 Tim 3:16) and is “key to the atonement” (78). “Christ’s work of atonement continues beyond the cross,” his declaration that “it is finished” did not complete the atonement, and atonement encompasses the resurrection (89). In Christ’s resurrection is the renewal of life and the securing of eschatological new creation.

The final chapter in Studebaker’s development of the theology of atonement (chap. 6) focuses on eschatology. He emphasizes “the eschatological character of the Spirit of Pentecost” (94) and the broader narrative of Christ and the Spirit in redemption. Studebaker employs the concept of exodus from exile as an alternative way of referring to atonement and as a description for life lived in the Spirit. Pentecost is the transition from Christ’s life in the Spirit to the Spirit’s availability universally, so redemption continues and atonement is dynamic.

In the second part of the book Studebaker applies his theology to Pentecostal experience and suggests examples of “embodied” atonement. Pandita Ramabai and William Seymour illustrate the multicultural, diverse, and inclusive nature of Pentecost and how the atonement unites alienated people (chap. 7). In chapter 8 the incarnation provides the theological basis for embodied life. Studebaker argues that defining Pentecostalism by doctrine or by charismatic experience results in an otherworldly approach rather than a holistic, embodied approach that includes “social, physical, economic, personal, and familial” healing (143).

In chapter 9 Studebaker takes issue with both Classical Pentecostalism’s doctrine of healing in the atonement and with the prosperity doctrine. Both result from the forensic view of atonement and “being colonized by the Protestant and more or less Reformed evangelical tradition of atonement theology” (153). He prefers a view that resists triumphalism and emphasizes participation in Christ’s life in a suffering world. In chapter 10 Studebaker outlines how healing comes through participation in the resurrection life of Christ. In his final chapter he advocates abandoning an escapist eschatology in favor of a Pentecostal eschatology that focuses on redeemed life in this world in light of the eschaton.

I agree with Stuebaker that penal substitution alone does not account for the breadth of biblical images describing atonement, but I disagree with his wholesale rejection of the doctrine. Various theories such as Christus Victor, recapitulation, the exemplary view, and penal substitution contribute important insights to the multifaceted work of Christ. Stuebaker avoids the exegetical issues involved with penal substitution because he rejects it on logical grounds (73, 202), but the heavy emphasis on the sacrificial system cannot be easily dismissed as simply the imposition of Near Eastern customs, and several New Testament texts pointing to penal substitution require explanation (e.g., Rom 3:21–26; Heb 2:17; 1 Jn 2:2; 4:10). It is also difficult to imagine how an atonement theory can be too “Christocentric” or too “crucicentric,” but Stuebaker has entirely shifted the focus from Good Friday to Pentecost. Many scholars will object to this shift and to using Pentecost as the primary lens for atonement.

I sympathize with Stuebaker’s desire to incorporate the Spirit’s activity into an atonement theology. This is certainly a topic worthy of reflection. But in order to support his pneumatic view, he broadens the definition of atonement until the term becomes so all-encompassing that it includes virtually every aspect of the Spirit’s work in redemptive history. The term practically becomes unrecognizable.

The Spirit of Atonement identifies some areas that have historically been problematic in Pentecostal circles. Stuebaker rightly addresses triumphalism, extreme prosperity teaching, racial division, and a failure to recognize the symbolic significance of the many tongues of Pentecost.

Although *The Spirit of Atonement* approaches atonement with Pentecost as a lens, it is by no means written from a Classical Pentecostal perspective. Spirit baptism as logically distinct from conversion is summarily dismissed, tongues as evidence of Spirit baptism is viewed negatively (114), Jesus did not receive charismatic empowerment at his baptism, the distinct charismatic emphasis in Luke–Acts is ignored, and Classical Pentecostals are stereotyped as denying the Spirit’s “soteriological role” (6).

Stuebaker’s desire to have a more participatory atonement theology is commendable, and I am glad that he has retained the doctrines of sin and expiation. He has also argued passionately against penal substitution, but despite his efforts to dismiss Christ’s “It is

finished,” it still seems to me that the debt of sin was paid and atonement was made at the cross.

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Wonsuk Ma and Emmanuel Anim, eds., *Proclaiming Christ in the Power of the Spirit: Opportunities and Challenges* (Tulsa, OK: ORU Press, 2020). xii + 482 pp. \$28.99 paperback.

This edited work of Wonsuk Ma and Emmanuel Anim (along with associate editor Rebekah Bled) provides numerous global voices pertaining to the message about Jesus proclaimed in the power of the Spirit. The Spirit-empowered movement of which they seek to speak within, to, and for is intentionally broader than those who might self-describe as “Pentecostal” or be deemed part of the historic “Classical Pentecostal” fellowships globally, even as many of the contributors might identify with such. Half of the chapters of this volume emerge from the Empowered21 Scholars’ Consultation held in Johannesburg, South Africa (2018). The others were invited essays pertaining to other global issues pertinent to the Spirit-empowered message of Christ. The Consultation is itself intentionally broad to attempt to encompass more Spirit-ed voices beyond the Pentecostal fold. Further, as part of the Empowered21 publications this volume comes in a series of edited volumes all intentionally offering global perspectives on a given topic/region within the Spirit-empowered movement (see <https://empowered21.com/resources/books-2/>).

The volume is split into two parts with an introductory essay and a one-chapter postscript: establishing the foundation and proclaiming the uniqueness of Christ in the world. The first six chapters comprise part one and seek to address what might be construed as more foundational issues of the centrality and singularity of Christ. James Shelton opens with a tracing of “The Name of Jesus in Luke-Acts” as a way of thinking through the mission of God. Two chapters on issues of pluralism (chapter two by Mark Roberts and six by Samuel Thorpe and J. Elias Stone). The first of these brings NT texts into conversation toward appreciating and