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Chapter 4

From the Atonement to Pentecost: An Exegetical and Theological Reflection (Frank D. Macchia)

Introduction

In rightly cherishing the diversity that constitutes the one people of God, it is common to open our Bibles to Acts Chapter 2. There, we find that the Spirit is poured out on the Day of Pentecost for the sake of all peoples, and the subsequent chorus of various tongues that spring forth from a small band of Christ's Galilean followers signals the future rise of a vastly diverse global Church.

We celebrate what we have learned from Pentecost about the way in which the Spirit cherishes diversity, but all that we say about Christology in the context of the Atonement seems abstract and uniform by comparison. When it comes to the Atonement, or Christ's representation of humanity on the Cross so as to redeem them to God, it feels tempting at that point to turn to abstractions. Christ is said to have died for all "humanity" or "sinners" as an indistinct mass. But what if what happens at Pentecost follows the lead of what Christ does in the Spirit at the Cross?

If we follow Revelation 5:9, we learn that Christ redeemed persons "from every tribe and language and people and nation." What if, in following this text, it can be shown that Christ on the Cross follows the Spirit in embracing humanity in all of its diversity in order to incorporate them all into his life with all of that marvellous diversity preserved for all of eternity? And what if we say, then, that the Spirit is poured out through Christ at Pentecost for the sake of Christ, to give him the diverse body that he gave his life on the cross to have? This is the argument I wish to develop in this chapter taking us all from the Atonement to Pentecost.

The Cross and Human Diversity in Revelation:
An Exegetical Foundation

I begin by quoting Revelation 5:9-10:

And they sang a new song, saying:
“You are worthy to take the scroll
and to open its seals,
because you were slain,
and with your blood you redeemed for God
persons from every tribe and language and people and nation.
You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to serve our God,
and they will reign on the earth.”¹

The context of this text describes the lamb, “looking as if it had been slain” (v. 6) approaching him who sits upon the throne so as to take the scroll from his hand, break its seals, and reveal its contents (v. 7). The lamb is worthy to do this because he has redeemed a diverse community of people from “from every tribe and language and people and nation” (v. 9), overlapping terms listed together so as to emphasise the diversity and universality of the people redeemed by the lamb and to whom the message of the scroll was directed. The implication is that the slain and overcoming lamb is the central fulfilment of the scroll’s prophecies. The context of this text about the slain and overcoming lamb, however, implicitly reaches all the way back to the Book of Daniel, where Daniel’s prophecy was said to be rolled up and sealed into a scroll “until the time of the end” (Dan. 12:4). Part of that prophecy involved a vision of “one like a Son of Man” approaching the Ancient of Days so as to receive sovereign authority to reign over “all peoples of every language” who then respond by worshipping him (Dan. 7:13-14). By way of partial fulfilment, in Revelation 5, the lamb likewise approaches the one who sits on the throne so as to take the scroll from his hand to reveal its meaning and is worshipped as a result

¹ All Scripture quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the NIV version.

(5:1-13), foreshadowing the global fulfilment foretold in Daniel 7:13-14. Following this text, Revelation 5:9 specifically mentions that the Messiah had redeemed for God people from all peoples and languages!

Interestingly, Revelation anchors the globally diverse reach of the Messiah's reign theologically in the Atonement or Christ's death on the Cross to redeem all peoples from slavery to sin and death. Christ's representation of humanity at the Cross is then viewed as all-inclusive and diverse. The explicit mention of "every tribe and language and people and nation" (v. 9) in the context of describing the Atonement is thus significant, but are we not possibly reading too much into Revelation 5:9 at this point? Is not Christology (incarnation and atonement) the victory of the "one" while Pentecost involves the "many?"

Following this distinction, we Pentecostals are especially quick to link the globally diverse reach of the gospel with the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Luke-Acts is the part of the canon to which Pentecostals typically turn to understand this fulfilment. Our favourite text to describe it is Acts 2:4, where it states that all 120 followers of Jesus "were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them". Luke tells us that an audience had gathered involving "God-fearing Jews from every nation under heaven" visiting Jerusalem at that time and that many of them heard their own languages spoken from this group of Jesus' Galilean followers. In Luke's Acts narrative, this event involving speaking in tongues had notable symbolic significance, for it signalled a global witness that would involve both Jews and a diversity of Gentile peoples from diverse backgrounds, all ages, genders, and servants as well (2:17-18). The event of the Spirit overflowed the boundaries of Israel because the Spirit overflowed the body of Israel's Messiah. Put differently, the Spirit was poured forth from the heavenly Father through Israel's Messiah and for his sake, for he redeemed them, making them

worthy of the Spirit (Acts 15:8). Christ now reigns as Lord and Head of his Church in all its expanding diversity (2:33-36).

The Acts narrative tells us further on in the story that God had been preparing the nations for their encounter with the gospel of Christ. God provided the peoples of the earth with sustenance and guidance, marking out “their appointed times in history and the boundaries of their lands” (Acts 17:26). This reference to “appointed times” (προσ τεταγμένους καιρούς) referred to events rich with potential meaning in the diverse lives and journeys of these various peoples. The use of the term *kairos* arguably has this connotation. God provided for and guided these peoples throughout the *kairos* moments of their unique journeys so they would seek after him, each in their own contextually determined ways (v. 27). The goal was undoubtedly to add their diverse voices to the praises and witness of the people of God begun at Pentecost. The diversity of tongues points to the fact that the Spirit-empowered mission of the Church was the expanding boundary of the Church’s diverse inclusivity. All of this is familiar territory for Pentecostals, and so it should be. Luke fills in the valuable pneumatological dimension of a Church that would include persons “from every tribe and language and people and nation” (v. 9).

True, Christ’s atonement is the victory of the one, and the granting of the Spirit at Pentecost involves the possibility of receiving this victory among the many. I wish to propose, however, that texts like Revelation 5:9 imply that Christ on the Cross gave his life for the many and in a way that opens space for them in all their particularity and diversity within his risen body, the Church. Thus, the question that the Book of Revelation causes us to ask is how the Atonement anchors the contextually diverse reach of the Spirit depicted at Pentecost in Luke’s Acts. How are we to understand the movement at the Atonement from Israel to all peoples?

The following additional points could be made at this point about Revelation 5:9-10. The lamb does indeed overcome to redeem Israel. He is “slain” or “slaughtered” in 5:6 like the paschal lamb of Israel. Yet, this lamb “overcomes” according to 5:5, for the “lion of the tribe of Judah, the root of David, has triumphed”. Yet, the fact that the lamb overcomes for all peoples in 5:9 means that the image of the paschal lamb has transcended a Jewish nationalistic notion of atonement. Bear in mind that, according to Daniel 7:13-14, all peoples of the world praise the Son of Man. In his triumph on the Cross and in the Resurrection, the lamb of Revelation 5 has redeemed or purchased for God a people from all the diverse peoples of the world. This phrase “redeemed for God” in Revelation 5:9 literally means “purchased” or “ransomed” for God (ἡγόρασας Θεῷ). As Kevin John O’Brian notes, this term referred in the ancient world to the “redemption” or the purchasing of freedom from slavery: “Herein lies the significance of the lamb. Just as the blood of the paschal lamb signified the deliverance of the people of Israel from slavery and bondage in Egypt, so too the blood of the Lamb signifies the deliverance of God’s people from slavery to sin and death.”² This new Exodus, however, is to involve a global redemption that expands the kingdom of God to include all nations, tribes, and tongues.

The larger context in the Book of Revelation of the deliverance of all peoples through the slain lamb constitutes this new Exodus. As God delivered Israel from bondage in Egypt using plagues, so also does he deliver people from among all nations using plagues in the Book of Revelation (e.g., 16:2-15). In fact, the new Exodus in Revelation now points to the deliverance of all nations who will worship the Messiah King as freed peoples. Note the “song of Moses and of the Lamb” that will be sung to the Messiah by people of all nations in Revelation 15:3-4:

² Kevin John O’Brian, “Revelation 5:5-14,” *Interpretation* 53(2), (April 1999): 178-79.

And [they] sang the song of God's servant Moses and of the Lamb:

“Great and marvellous are your deeds,
 Lord God Almighty.
 Just and true are your ways,
 King of the nations.
 Who will not fear you, Lord,
 and bring glory to your name?
 For you alone are holy.
 All nations will come
 and worship before you,
 for your righteous acts have been revealed.”

In the evil city of Babylon, according to Revelation, human beings “are sold as slaves” (Rev. 18:13) but in the city of God, the lamb of God will have redeemed all peoples from slavery in every sense of the word. And the power of that deliverance currently sustains them in their battle against the forces of darkness. Indeed, the saints purchased for God by the lamb have no fear of the devil or of death. In the victory and authority of their Messiah, they too triumph over Satan the accuser:

Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say:
 “Now have come the salvation and the power
 and the kingdom of our God,
 and the authority of his Messiah.
 For the accuser of our brothers and sisters,
 who accuses them before our God day and night,
 has been hurled down.
 They triumphed over him
 by the blood of the Lamb
 and by the word of their testimony;
 they did not love their lives so much
 as to shrink from death (Rev. 12:10-11).

The diverse inclusivity of all peoples in Christ's representative atonement maintains its significance throughout the Book of Revelation. In Revelation 7:9-10, for example, John sees the inclusively diverse heavenly throng praising God and the lamb for their salvation:

After this I looked, and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the

Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice:
 “Salvation belongs to our God,
 who sits on the throne,
 and to the Lamb.”

After praising God and the lamb for salvation, they are then led to drink from the “springs of living water” (7:13). Even in heaven, the liberated saints are designated as coming from “every nation, tribe, people, and language”. They maintain their connection to their heritages. Passing through the Cross and through the heavenly portal did not dissolve the significance of the diverse paths they took in their journeys towards God.

One may ask at this point, could not Revelation 5 and 7 simply indicate that the redeemed people, although coming from diverse backgrounds, have since left them behind? Significantly, the eschatological fulfilment of the lamb’s victory in Revelation 21 does not give us this impression. Note Revelation 21:22-24: “I did not see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendour into it.” Notice that in the heavenly city at the fulfilment of God’s salvific plan, the “nations” walk by the light of the lamb and their kings bring the “splendour” of the nations into the city in honour of the lamb. No matter how one interprets this text, it seems clear that its author does not want his readers to conclude that the redeemed enter eschatological fulfilment leaving their diverse cultural identities behind.

A few further points in this text bear noting. First, there is no need for a temple in the heavenly city; the Father is immediately present through the lamb, who is the radiance of the Father’s glory (cf., Heb. 1:3). The presence of God permeates the heavenly city making the existence of a temple in the traditional sense of the word unnecessary. God present to us and through us in heavenly communion is the temple. As John Christopher Thomas puts it, “The

relationship between God and his people in the holy city Jerusalem represents complete integration of God with his people.”³ In fact, Thomas notes further that the holy city is shaped “as a cube like the holy of holies”.⁴ The concentration of the light and glory of the divine presence in the city functions as a kind of holy of holies for the new creation (Rev. 21).

Second, notice that the nations walk by the light of the lamb, and their kings bring the splendour of their peoples into the heavenly city in honour of the lamb. I agree with Thomas concerning the heavenly city in this text: “There could be little doubt that the hearers would understand this language to mean that the nations who walk in its light are those who have experienced his salvation.”⁵ No sun or moon is needed because of the light of the glorified Christ (Rev. 21:23), but the nations and their kings walking by this light is not just a physical phenomenon. As Thomas notes, walking by the light in the Johannine tradition is profoundly spiritual in implication.⁶ The implication here is that the “splendour” brought before the lamb arises from countless diverse testimonies of praise from the experience of glory radiated through the lamb but experienced concretely and diversely among the populations that inhabit the new earth as well as the heavenly city. Those who bring their splendour into the heavenly city in honour of the lamb have been shaped by him into a “kingdom and priests” to serve God (5:10).

Third, it is the glorified lamb who radiates the beauty, truth, and purity of the Father’s glory to transform the nations. This fact harks back to Revelation 5:9, where the lamb who overcomes at the Cross and the Resurrection may be said to represent all peoples in all their diverse paths and contexts. Those diverse peoples who now walk by the light of the lamb were

³ John Christopher Thomas and Frank D. Macchia, *Revelation* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2016): 383.

⁴ Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 383.

⁵ Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 384.

⁶ Thomas and Macchia, *Revelation*, 384.

represented by Christ in all of their diversity at the Cross. He rose to glory on their behalf so they may be transformed by this glory and reflect it. The Gospel of John in fact tells us that the Word of the Father who mediated creation on behalf of the Father “was the light of all mankind” (Jn 1:4). John says further that the darkness could not overcome this light (1:5). Indeed! The lamb redeems people unto God from every tribe, language, people, and nation, and the door of hope in the far future remains open! Not only does Revelation 7:9 depict a diverse chorus of people “from every nation, tribe, people and language” praising the lamb in heaven, but in the new creation, the heavenly city’s doors remain open to them all as well: “The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendour into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there” (Rev. 21:24-25). Obviously, the diverse contexts from which the people of God come are not forgotten, not in heaven nor in the heavenly city.

Fourth, although the lamb in Revelation 5:9 dies to triumph over sin and death for all peoples and nations, the initial response among the nations is not entirely positive! In the very next chapter, the seals broken open by the lamb occasion a massively violent campaign “bent on conquest” (6:2). War, famine, and death follow. “The nations were angry” says 11:18, but God’s wrath meets that anger, “destroying those who destroy the earth”. Yet, there were obviously rays of hope unleashed by the witness of Christ through the people of God. Let us not forget that a uncountable multitude came out of the Tribulation and now occupy the heavenly chorus of praise to the lamb (7:9-14). Interestingly, Isaiah 60:1-3 speaks prophetically of the rising of glory over the people of Israel and the nations of the earth while the world is still dark, yet this light offers hope for everyone: “nations will come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your dawn” (v. 3). The church fathers saw this rising of the light as fulfilled in the risen Christ and the eventual coming of all the nations to this light as fulfilled in texts like Revelation 21:22-24.

Surely, this overcoming of the darkness by the light of Christ who conquers at the Cross for all peoples (Jn 1:4; Rev. 5:9) occurs while the world is still overrun by darkness. The Book of Revelation bears abundant witness to this fact, as does our world today, but the day is coming in which the nations will come to this light and walk by it. That is the hope offered by Revelation 21:22-24.

Does Christ erase differences? I propose that the victory of the lamb's redemptive death in the new creation according to the Book of Revelation does not erase our unique differences as people. I am not saying that, according to Revelation, the old creation remains fundamentally unchanged in the new creation. After all, Christ himself in the Book of Revelation is glorified in ways that go beyond how he looked in the flesh. According to Revelation 1:16, looking at his face resembles gazing at "the sun shining in all its brilliance!" No doubt we will be changed to reflect the brilliance of divine glory as well, perhaps not to that degree, but profoundly, nevertheless. John's depiction of the new creation as involving kings and nations obviously draws raw material from the world as John knew it. My point rather is that our diverse humanity transcends historical fulfilment, because that humanity was taken up into Christ's risen life. In eschatological fulfilment, the diversity of our physical and cultural uniqueness, although purified and glorified, is not erased by union with Christ – not in the Book of Revelation, not at the Cross, not in the life of the Spirit, not in heaven, and not in the new creation.

I do not think the eschatological endurance of our diverse humanity should be ignored because it has profound theological importance – one which is significant to the message of Revelation and to the multi-contextual message of the churches today. According to Revelation 5:9, Christ opens himself on the Cross (and by implication at the Incarnation in uniting to flesh by the Spirit, Luke 1:35) to all the peoples of the world, to "every tribe and language and people

and nation” to redeem or to liberate them so they can flourish precisely as God created them, in all their uniqueness, to flourish. Christ annihilates sin and death at the Cross but not the concrete and diversely unique humanity objectively embraced and potentially liberated in that event. This view of the Atonement has profound implications linking it to the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost as cherished among Pentecostals.

The Link between Atonement and Pentecost: A Theological Reflection

Most Pentecostals rightly note that the Holy Spirit in Acts does not dissolve human diversity but rather embraces and transforms it into a vehicle of the praise and witness of the people of God. As noted above, the Book of Revelation indicates that this pneumatological embrace of human diversity at Pentecost is rooted in how Christ opens his life to humanity in all its diversity at the Atonement. How must we understand this rootage theologically? With the exegetical insights I have noted above from the Book of Revelation in mind, I will explain here more precisely how the Atonement leads to Pentecost.

I start by focusing on the issue of Christ’s representation of humanity at the Cross. Of course, Christ represents God at the Cross “reconciling the world to himself” (2 Cor. 5:19), but Christ also represented humanity by paying our debt to God, or the “ransom” necessary for our freedom (Rev. 5:9). How do we understand more precisely Christ’s representation of humanity at the Cross? Regardless of which theory of atonement one highlights, some notion of Christological representation of humanity is involved. Revelation 5:9 has Christ redeeming us by purchasing our salvation by his death. His death was a ransom that secured our freedom, as in Mark 10:45. He represented us by paying our debt to God. The Lord has laid on him the iniquity of us all in Isaiah 53:6. He died for our sins (1 Cor. 15:3) and was delivered up for our transgressions (Rom. 4:25). Christ bore our sin in his body on the Cross (1 Pet. 2:24). In Christ,

“one died for all” (2 Cor. 5:14). In representing us, Christ’s goal in the Atonement was to overcome sin and death and fulfil justice on our behalf. He did this so as to provide the means by which we can be reconciled to God by faith in him. Indeed, Christ was delivered up for our transgressions but raised for our justification (Rom. 4:25). The Cross also points in the direction of a new way of life. In representing us, Christ also functions as the last Adam who opens up a new path to being human that reflects the way of the crucified Christ, or the love of God given for the world. The saints in Revelation willingly suffered death in their witness to the world, overcoming hostilities by the blood of the lamb poured out for humanity (Rev. 12:11). Paul also writes movingly that he is crucified with Christ so that he may live “by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

Christ represents humanity in its diverse concreteness in many different contexts. Viewing Christological representation as a differentiated reality is due in part to the involvement of the Spirit in Christ’s self-giving at the Cross. The Book of Revelation implies as much by referring to the lamb who ransomed people from all nations on the Cross having eyes that are the seven spirits sent by God “into all the earth” (Rev. 5:6). The seven spirits are global! An argument can be made that these seven spirits actually are the “seven-fold Spirit” or the Spirit in his fullness (“seven” may indeed symbolise fullness). This point is shown by the fact that the seven spirits appear at the opening triadic greeting of the Book of Revelation right where the Holy Spirit is expected (1:4-5). Also, Revelation 5:3 insists that no creature in heaven or on earth can look upon the scroll. Only God, only the lamb, can look upon it. And, yet, the lamb’s eyes, which are the seven spirits, look upon it! This fact places the seven spirits on the divine side of the God/creature divide. Thus, one could argue that the lamb who ransoms all peoples in Revelation 5:9 bears the seven-fold Spirit or the Spirit in his fullness to be sent throughout the

earth! The Spirit in his fullness at the Cross? Yes, for it is by the Spirit that Christ embraces humanity in all its diversity at the Cross. One may also refer here to Hebrews 9:14, where Christ offered himself for us on the cross “by the eternal Spirit”. Christ on the Cross followed the leading of the Spirit in his embrace of all peoples in all their diversity. The Spirit in Acts will later follow the lead of the crucified Christ in resting upon all of the diverse peoples of the world that Christ had earlier represented.

There is more to say about Christ’s representation of humanity in all its diversity at the Cross. Wolfhart Pannenberg proposes that, at Christ’s death, Christ transcends, even dies to, his own particularity as a man of his time and place in order to represent a diverse body from every people and nation as their Lord and Head. Christ transcends his own particularity at the Cross in order to open space for ours! In other words, Christ does not cause us to leave behind our human particularity at the Cross; he leaves behind his in order to open space for ours in his own ecclesial and eschatological body! In this light, Pannenberg opposes a “Christological totalitarianism” that has Christ obliterating the diverse uniqueness of humanity in his act of redemption on the Cross.⁷ Christ represents all of humanity in all its historical particularity; he wins the victory for them all, opens his life potentially to them all. As Miroslav Volf writes of Christ at the Cross, “Far from being the assertion of the one against the many, the cross is the self-giving of the one for the many.” Of the unity among diverse peoples occasioned by the reconciliation of the Cross, Volf writes further, “Unity here is not the result of ‘sacred violence’ which obliterates the particularity of ‘bodies’ but a fruit of Christ’s self-sacrifice which breaks

⁷ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, vol. 2 (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1994): 432-34.

down the enmity between them.”⁸ In Ephesians 2:11-22, the cross thus reconciles Jews and Gentiles into a united diversity, precisely because Christ does not obliterate their diversity by taking their place as their representative. Christ rises as the Head of his Church that will incorporate a variety of peoples and giftings, breaking down the enmity among them to do so. At Pentecost, at the expanding boundary of the Spirit-empowered Church, Christ welcomes them all to incorporate them into his own life with all their wonderful God-given diversity. The tongues of Pentecost signify this.

Some readers may express a degree of hesitation at this point. Does not the gospel call us to deny our former selves in order to identify exclusively with Christ? Didn’t Paul write, “I no longer live but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20)? Paul thus refers to the “old self” involving a body ruled by sin. Christ died and rose again so this body could be “done away with” or “annulled” (καταργηθῆ) in terms of its claim on us (Rom. 6:6). Paul thus characterised his former life prior to his union with Christ as filled with distinctive privileges of which he boasted as a Jew, but his achievements only led him down the path of grievous and disobedient confidence in his flesh; Paul in his zeal even persecuted the Church. His new-found devotion to Christ, however, caused him to abandon his former life and consider it refuse so as to win Christ (Phil. 3:4-11). The idea that Christ’s death and resurrection abolished our unique humanity often emerges in the resistance of some Christians to any cherishing of bodily or cultural diversity in the church. This resistance can take the form of a protest. Doesn’t a focus on this diversity emphasise our differences, thus giving rise to division? Are we not at risk of drawing attention away from our unity in Christ? Especially if marginalised peoples seek social justice, the charge of divisiveness

⁸ Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1996): 47.

can be levelled with even greater intensity. To support such a protest, the idea that our bodily and cultural uniqueness has been abolished in Christ and is replaced by a new self that considers such uniqueness insignificant can be invoked. Who cares what race or sex we are or what unique path our people have taken in history? None of that matters now! It's all been replaced by a Christological identity that supersedes it all!

Some support the above protest by arguing that in passing through the cross towards the life of the Resurrection, we lay our earthly selves down with all of their glories in order to take on the glories of the risen Christ. This proposal requires more careful definition. In point of fact, according to Paul, we lay down our sinful self – that which is driven by pride, under condemnation, and headed for destruction. For example, Paul's reference to the "body ruled by sin" (σῶμα τῆς ἁμαρτίας) that will be done away with has been translated "body of sin" as though we are to regard our bodies as sinful through and through and unredeemable. Based on this understanding of this text, some think it best to give our earthly bodies and particularity no regard, along with everything distinctively connected to it.

In rejecting this viewpoint, the great interpreter of Romans, James Denney, notes that the use of the genitive in σῶμα τῆς ἁμαρτίας (body of sin) is qualitative rather than possessive. The phrase may thus better be paraphrased as, "the body of which sin has taken possession".⁹ This rendering implies that our embodied existence can be delivered and renewed after the image of the crucified and risen Christ, the image of the Father's love. When Paul writes in Galatians 2:20, "I no longer live," he means that he no longer lives as a self in isolation. When Christ living in him becomes the decisive source of his new existence, such isolation disappears. His

⁹ James Denney, "Romans," in W. Robertson Nicholl (ed), *Apostles, Romans, 1st Corinthians*, vol. 2 of *Expositor's Greek New Testament* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 2002): 633.

“I” is no longer alone, for he now belongs to another (in life and in death, Rom. 14:8). He lives now by faith and in conformity to Christ. The Cross does not obliterate the self; rather, it saves it from self-centred isolation, centring it instead on Christ and his cause in the world. This rescue creates space for us to embrace others in all their uniqueness as well.¹⁰ When Paul says in Galatians 3:28 that there is no male nor female, no Jew nor Gentile, in the body of Christ, he is not seeking to have all that is beautiful about such distinctions reduced to insignificance – only the sinful ways of asserting or responding to these distinctives in our fellowship together so they become barriers to our mutual respect and cooperation. We would thus be justified in interpreting this text in our time to mean that one is to reject unjust privileges or distorting stereotypes.

Love fashioned after the Christ of the Cross does not denigrate what God has created – the variety of bodies, languages, and cultures that have blessed this earth and this history we currently occupy. Love does not disrespect the uniquely embodied existence of various peoples. True, flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 15:50). We cannot evolve from this earthly existence to the immortality of the risen Christ! Yet, by representing peoples in all their earthly diversity, Christ rises to glory in a way that incorporates that diversity into his body and does it in a way that grants it eternal significance! Of course, Christ is indeed the supreme goal of all we are and become, both in this life as well as the next. Truly the beauty of which we partake as creatures of God in our current historical contexts does not serve as an end in itself. The unique intercontextual nature of our life in the Spirit is devoted above all else to the cause of Christ, of divine love in the world. Paul was a Jew when he was among the Jews and a Gentile

¹⁰ Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 50-51.

when he was among the Gentiles, not only to enjoy an intercultural experience but also to serve the cause of Christ in all of these diverse contexts (1 Cor. 9:20-22). But this earthly beauty matters. We are not Gnostics. We do not believe that the new creation leaves the old creation entirely behind.

Part of the problem is that we are accustomed to interpreting Christ's representation of us at the Cross entirely in negative terms. Christ takes our place as sinners. He takes on our sin and condemnation; he bears our suffering and death. He takes our place, descends into the pit of our despair so as to rise up and open a door of hope to an entirely new future. And, of course, all of this is marvellously true – but also one-sided. If this was all that we see, we might well conclude that the Cross abolishes us in order to create something entirely new, radically disconnected from our former existence.

However, there is also a positive side to Christ's representation of all peoples, in all of their diversity, on the Cross. Christ takes up into himself not only our sin so as to abolish it, but he also takes up our frustrated and unfulfilled yearning for God so as to fulfil it, a yearning that God put there not only by creating us in his image but also by leading us throughout our unique paths of suffering and hope, paths sustained by divine grace and leading in the direction of the Cross. The self, created by God, is abolished in its sinfulness but made new in fulfilment of its graced capacity for God, a capacity that takes many forms just waiting to be unleashed as vehicles of the Spirit. The many tongues of Pentecost in fulfilment of the Cross serve as an example of such vehicles.

Conclusion

The Atonement is that place where Christ represents all of us in all our colourful diversity, just as Revelation 5:9 implies. On the Cross, Christ lays down the limits of his own

particularity as a person of a given time and place to open himself to a vast diversity of persons “from every tribe and language and people and nation”. On the Cross, he follows the leading of the Spirit in offering this vast diversity of persons his embrace, and he rises in the fullness of the Spirit to incorporate them all into his risen life. He does so in such a way that does not dissolve their diversity but rather cherishes and uses it to bear diverse witness to the glorious love of God in the world. The outpouring of the Spirit for all flesh at Pentecost and the many tongues that give voice to the Spirit at that event is the fruit of the Cross. And that marvellously diverse witness is not forsaken at the heavenly gates, where people of every nation and tongue praise God and the lamb (Rev. 7:9), nor at the gates of the New Jerusalem where the kings of the nations bring the praises of the nations before the lamb of God in all his glory (21:22-26). Indeed, the risen and exalted Christ does not forsake the rich diversity of persons with whom he has come into solidarity, for he has made them all in their uniqueness forever members of his body. He will never dissolve their uniqueness to make room for his image. Indeed, his very image in tandem with the work of the Spirit of Pentecost creates space for otherness and cherishes it, sanctifying and freeing it to be all that God ever intended it to be. Walking in the way of the Cross challenges us to relate to one another in the same way, repenting so that we also open space in our lives for others in all their otherness.

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Abstract

Many separate the atonement from Pentecost to the degree that the link between them is lost. I wish to explore that link. The link is based on the insight that the cross of Christ is not limited to Israel. Rather, Christ seeks at the cross to open his life to all peoples, redeeming persons “from every tribe, and language, and people, and nation” (Rev. 5:9) and breaking down the wall of hostility between them (Eph. 2:14-16). The Spirit is poured out on all peoples at Pentecost in loyalty to the cross and for the sake of the crucified and risen Christ.