

**Wolfgang Vondey, *The Scandal of Pentecost: A Theology of the Public Church* (T & T Clark, New York: NY, 2023). 280 pp. RRP \$192.90 hardback**

The bifurcation of theory and practice within theological pursuits has contributed to the privatization of faith since the Enlightenment Era. Such segregation generates individualistic and ahistorical hermeneutical methods. Theological endeavors dependent upon the segmentation of theory and practice produce theological methodologies incapable of supporting theology in the public realm. Wolfgang Vondey advocates in *The Scandal of Pentecost: A Theology of the Public Church* a robust public theology will require embracing ecclesiological structures whereby Pentecost serves as the primary theological and public narrative. Vondey proposes a repositioning of Pentecost as a public expression of faith, arguing that the prevailing portrayals of Pentecost as a predominantly private affair fall short of capturing the fullness of the Pentecost narrative. Repositioning Pentecost in a public sphere exposes the resistance from those in the marketplace who are unable to harmonize the existing social and religious norms with the claims by the disciples that Christ poured out the Spirit upon all flesh. It is this tension that Vondey classifies as the Scandal of Pentecost.

The foundation of Vondey's proposition is that a public ecclesiology with roots in the Pentecost narrative transcends both the historical and phenomenological dimensions of the Pentecost. Christians should understand Pentecost as a public event in which the world experienced the advent of the Church that was conditioned both by the historical and cultural realities of the day and by their implications beyond the historical event. Pentecost becomes the public advent of the Church that symbolizes the space where God and humanity collide. Vondey proceeds to outline from the Pentecost narrative several events in which the outpouring of the Spirit challenges existing social and religious norms.

The first scandalous event observed within the Pentecost narrative is aesthetic. Charging the disciples with drunkenness was an attempt to disparage and naturalize the implications of the Spirit being poured out upon all flesh. The linguistic behavior that emerged from the outpouring of the Spirit serves as the next scandalous event observed in the text. The tongues of Pentecost resists the imperialist attitude embedded in the pursuit of a universal language, instead embracing God's multilingual vision for the earth. Vondey asserts the aesthetic and linguistic scandals of Pentecost signify that the way of Pentecost leads through the body.

The linguistic and aesthetic scandals of the Spirit's outpouring upon all flesh suggest that embodiment is necessary to the development of a public theology centered upon the Pentecost. The anthropological implications of scandalous behavior imply Pentecost is at the core an embodied event. Pentecost rejects the dominant view of Judeo-Christian tradition, which dismisses the dualism of the flesh and spirit, by proposing that flesh is the medium for

human reception of God's Spirit. Pentecost as a scandal of the flesh advocates an ecclesiology in which the Church exists as a community of flesh, baptized by the Spirit-baptizer, Jesus Christ.

The scandal of Pentecost culminates by drawing awareness to the human capacity for witness to God in the world. Vondey asserts that an anthropological conscience of both pneumatological and Christological dimensions of Pentecost must embrace an embodied human witness that is grounded in both the material body and the lived body. The body of Christ, empowered by the Spirit, closes the chasm between an anthropology of power "from above" and "from below", resulting in a human prophetic witness free from the restraints of both a triumphal anthropology that glorifies human nature, and a realist anthropology that surrenders to human sinfulness. The public witness of the church at Pentecost is the receiving of the power of the Spirit for the purpose of disturbing it to all of humanity. The church's resistance to elevate Divine empowerment over ordinary humanity serves as a prophetic witness to the scandalous nature of the Pentecost.

*The Scandal of Pentecost: A Theology of the Public Church* by Wolfgang Vondey thus employs Pentecost as the advent of a public expression of the Christian faith, by directing attention to the means by which the Pentecost narrative challenges dominant cultural sensibilities in a compelling manner. Vondey builds a strong argument that the scandal of Pentecost is the springboard from which the church can exercise theology within a public sphere. The aesthetic and linguistic scandals of Pentecost become pathways to embodied scandal and prophetic scandals capable of witnessing to the Spirit poured out upon all flesh—which serves as the ultimate scandal of Pentecost. This colliding of God with humanity, manifested in the outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost, functions as the transformational agent of humanity and as the basis for a robust and strong public theology. Vondey's books challenge Pentecostals to think deeply and critically about the public dimensions of theology through the lens of Pentecost.

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