

Book Review

Who Is the Holy Spirit? A Walk with the Apostles

Amos Yong

(Brewster, MA: Paraclete Press, 2011) xiii + 203 (pre-publication) pages

Reviewed by Dr. Charlie Self, Associate Professor
Assemblies of God Theological Seminary, Springfield, MO

Amos Yong is the leading Pentecostal theologian of this era. He is a prolific writer and unafraid to bring his skilled mind to bear on difficult topics. His previous and present works propose new ways of integrating Pentecostal theology and issues of disability, ecology, political power, and scientific inquiry. The combination of deep humility and broad research, with the infusion of global scholarship, are demonstrated in each of his writings.

This work is different from prior academic tomes. The community dynamic underlying this work on the Holy Spirit is an adult Christian education class in a local church. Though an academic theologian, Yong is a Pentecostal Christian who begins with Scripture. When the Holy Spirit is present, everything changes: for individual believers, local churches, communities, nations, and every sphere of human engagement. Yong acknowledges his debt to Lukan and New Testament scholars, including Martin W. Mittelstadt, Associate Professor of Biblical Studies at Evangel University.

Yong takes the reader on a journey through the Book of Acts, with frequent references to the Gospel of Luke. The same Holy Spirit descending upon Jesus at His baptism comes upon 3,000 people at Pentecost. The author divides his study into eight parts, corresponding to the progress of mission in the Book of Acts. Acts 1:8 serves as the key

missionary verse while the rest of Acts is viewed as the work of the Spirit empowering transformed people to take the good news beyond the confines of Jerusalem. He highlights the impact of the Spirit's work in each community and domain of God's Kingdom.

The impact of the Holy Spirit is more than just an individual experience. While this is essential and primary, it is insufficient if believers are going to appreciate God's work in the world. It is here that the breadth and depth of the author's brilliance and practicality shine through. He offers several poignant insights:

- Part 1 focuses on the fact that the Spirit is poured out on all people—men and women, Jerusalem and Diaspora Jews, and even disreputable Cretans. The Holy Spirit creates “new social structures and relations ... overturning the status quo” (p. 14). The promised restoration of Israel is happening, but in a way surprising to the recipients!
- Part 2 reveals that the Holy Spirit creates a new “economy of salvation” with the call to repentance, faith, baptism, and community (Acts 2-3). This salvation is personal, but it is lived out through “house to house” hospitality, generous help for the poor, and gifts of healing.

- Part 3 centers around the expanding church in Judea (Acts 4-6) as old hierarchies give way to united compassion and fellowship (Acts 6). This new community is also anointed to witness under persecution and be peacemakers in the midst of a hostile political and religious climate.
- Part 4 (Acts 6-7) provides a portrayal of Stephen's critique of Jewish resistance to the Spirit and reminds believers that God's election of Israel was for the evangelization of the nations (Isa. 49:6). Stephen's prophetic review of the Old Testament history angers the power-brokers of Temple Judaism and a zealous Pharisee named Saul approves of the stoning.
- Part 5 (Acts 8-9) moves the Spirit-empowered church beyond the confines of *Eretz Yisrael* Judaism to the highways and nations, including the disabled (a eunuch) and the transformation of Pharisee Saul into the Apostle Paul. Jesus showed grace to outsiders (Luke 4, 7); therefore, the Holy Spirit opens doors to Ethiopians, Samaritans, and persecutors. Enemies are now friends and eat at the same table.
- Part 6 (Acts 10-14) unveils the fullness of the Spirit's work as the gospel goes to non-Jews. As chapters 11-14 unfold, the reader sees the good news reaching the pagan, polytheistic world of the Roman Empire. Yong confronts the reader with a provocative question: "How is the Holy Spirit presently at work in people of other faiths?" The audience at Cornelius' house was prepared for Peter's message. When the Holy Spirit fell (resulting in praises and speaking in tongues), it was a new day.
- Part 7 describes the missionary expansion of the church from the Jerusalem Council of Acts 15 forward, with special emphasis on the fact that women are equally anointed for leadership and mission. Luke 8 and 10 remind believers that Jesus had devout, generous female followers. The women of God are included in all major events of salvation-history—from Elizabeth and Mary to Anna; from the women of Easter to Philip's daughters and Lydia. The "world is turned upside down," and God creates a new social order.
- Part 8 brings all of these threads together as Paul's journey to Rome parallels the Lord's pathways to the Cross. The gospel means a new community and a new creation. Yong challenges the reader to really walk in the Spirit, forging new fellowship, new discernment of the powers believers must confront, and new hope that God is working in all domains, not just individual experiences.

This work is recommended as a text for undergraduate work, graduate reflection on teaching, and all adult learners.