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McNall's "The mosaic of atonement: An integrated approach to christ's work" (book review)

Steve Emerson
California Baptist University

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Book Reviews



McNall, J.M. (2019). *The mosaic of atonement: An integrated approach to christ's work*. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic. 320 pp. \$34.99. ISBN 9780310097648

Joshua M. McNall, Assistant Professor of Theology at Oklahoma Wesleyan University, offers a balanced and accessible integration of four classic explanations of the work of Christ in his monograph *The Mosaic of Atonement: An Integrated Approach to Christ's Work*. McNall rejects approaches to the doctrine of the atonement that either elevate one classic model above all others, or conversely are satisfied with simply chronicling some of the historical options without connecting them to each other. Instead, he constructs a mosaic out of four atonement models, arguing that each of them contributes equally important and vital elements to an integrated portrait of the work of Christ. McNall's is a work of systematic rather than historical or biblical theology. He is interested in constructing an atonement model that makes sense in the modern, scientific world, though founded on Scripture and church tradition, rather than attempting to survey the breadth of explanations for the work of Christ that past theologians have developed. The result is a judicious and humble presentation of Christ's atoning work that is fully conversant with current scholarship on the doctrine of the atonement.

McNall organizes his work around a detailed examination of the four classic atonement theories that he integrates into his atonement model, with a section each on recapitulation, penal substitution, *Christus Victor*, and moral influence. Although he refers to Anselm at several points, he never discusses in any depth Anselm's satisfaction theory of the atonement. The recapitulation theory sets the foundation for his model, drawing ideas from Irenaeus to explain how Christ's identity as the true Adam allows him to act on behalf of the entire human race. Building on this foundation of Christ as the representative human, McNall goes on to connect penal substitution with *Christus Victor* in the middle two sections by demonstrating that the victorious, triumphant, God-glorifying work of Christ is accomplished through the obedient suffering that resides at the heart of the penal substitution theory. Because of the centrality of penal substitution to his model, McNall here goes into greater depth than in his other sections addressing current criticisms of this theory, arguing that the concept of penal substitution is biblical, was taught by the early church, and when properly understood reflects positively on the nature and character of God. Finally, McNall integrates elements of the moral influence theory into his

atonement model, reshaping ideas from Peter Abelard and Rene Girard to explain how the empowering work of the Holy Spirit enables Christians to respond with love to Christ's loving sacrifice. In doing so they become part of his victorious work, functioning as his hands in spreading his atoning work around the world.

McNall writes for an academic audience with the heart of a teacher, in a very readable and accessible style, one that will be appreciated by undergraduates being exposed to the doctrine of the atonement for the first time, while at the same time providing enough depth of content for graduate and seminary students. He writes from a perspective that is broadly Evangelical, and his respectful treatment of the scholars whose ideas he considers will resonate well with open-minded readers across denominational boundaries and theological perspectives. McNall's thoughtful examination of the work of Christ will prove highly useful to students and faculty at institutions with a curriculum that includes theological education.

Reviewer

Steve Emerson, California Baptist University