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BOOK REVIEW

Eleonore Stump. *Atonement*. Oxford Studies in Analytic Theology. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018. xv + 538 pp. Hbk. ISBN 978-0-1988-1386-6. \$80.00.

Eleonore Stump's (Robert J. Henle, S. J. Professor of Philosophy at St. Louis University) *Atonement* sits as the ninth entry in the Oxford Studies in Analytic Theology series. Analytic theology weds the rigors of analytic philosophy to the tools of theological and biblical studies to offer fresh, clearly articulated perspectives on various topics. Stump builds on her earlier works *Aquinas* (2003) and *Wandering in Darkness* (2010), as well as numerous lectures and presentations, to propose a novel, Thomistic interpretation of the atonement. *Atonement* is divided into four parts which together form a lengthy but richly engaging text.

Part I, "What is Wanted, What is Needed to Get What is Wanted, and What Will Not Work," consists of Chapters 1 through 3. According to Stump, what is wanted is an interpretation of the doctrine that is "coherent, morally acceptable, and consistent with both other theological doctrines and with biblical texts relevant to" atonement (36). What is needed is a means by which human persons can will a desire for the good of God and by which they can be united with God (which is the love of God in Thomistic terms) despite the guilt and shame (either real or imagined) of moral wrongdoing. However, what will not work to provide what is wanted and needed is an interpretation of atonement which does not properly account for God's willing the desires of love for human persons.

Part II, "What is Wanted: What it is Not and What it is," explicates Stump's interpretation in detail across Chapters 4 through 7 and is the heart of *Atonement*. Her Thomism entails that the all-loving God is present to human persons at all times

and in all spaces simultaneously and that which separates human persons from God must be located in humanity, not the divine. Stump unpacks this issue in the philosophical and psychological language of personal presence and mutual closeness, both of which are necessary to the union wanted in the second desire of love. God is personally present and close to human persons consistent with God's omnibenevolence and omnipresence, but the guilt and shame of human persons terminally inhibit both, and therefore, the willing of the desires of love for God. Thus, what is wanted is a defeater of human guilt and shame that resolves this difficulty for human persons even *in* their guilt and shame. That defeater is found in Christ's crucifixion because in the crucifixion Christ bears all the guilt-inducing and shame-causing evil of humanity.

In importing philosophical and psychological language into her interpretation of atonement, Stump leans heavily on concepts like mind-reading. Mind-reading is the means by which "one person knows intuitively what another person is doing and thinking, as well as something of the motive and emotion with which that person is acting" enabled by the brain's network of mirror neurons (158–59). Mirror neurons fire when one person sees another performing some action or being some way and provides a kind of replication of their mental state to the observer. Though the depth to which Stump theologically exegetes such concepts surpasses what can be engaged here, she generally proposes the functionality of Christ's crucifixion is to be found in his mind-reading of "the mental states found in all the evil acts human beings have ever committed" while on the cross (164). Thereby, Christ becomes "mired in the painful simulacrum of the stains accompanying all human moral evil" even while remaining entirely innocent himself (165). In this way, the guilt and shame which separate humans from God are taken into and transformed by God into honor, for, as Stump later comments, "it is hard to see what could count as a greater honor than being deified" (357). All this having been accomplished by God, what remains is for one to will the good of God and to be united with God.

The latter half of Part II addresses how human persons are able to love God. Stump suggests that one can either actively

resist willing the good (our natural state post-Fall), actively will the good (something only possible through God's grace), or quiesce. It is only when one quiesces that God infuses them with the Holy Spirit and enables them to will the good of God and to be united with God. Stump writes of a quiescent person, Paula:

When God gives Paula the grace of justifying faith while her will is quiescent, God is infusing grace into Paula's will when it has ceased to reject grace but has not accepted it either . . . Paula's will is just inactive. But the inactivity is a surrender, not a mere calm of indifference, because in moving into that quiescence Paula feels her quiescence as a letting go of resistance to God and God's grace (208–9).

This quiescence is justification, whereas sanctification comes about through willing what God wills through love. Such an account is not only rigorous in its philosophical theology and psychology but also offers a thoroughly lucid explanation of why justified Christians continue to sin or fall away from the love of God and neighbor. Through a tie-in with the ethos of the twelve-step program Alcoholics Anonymous, she illustrates that in the same way a recovering alcoholic may choose to drink again, so too can any Christian choose to begin resisting God's grace and to will against God.

Further applications of Stump's interpretation of the atonement continue in Chapters 8 and 9 in Part III, "What is Needed to Get What is Wanted and the Atonement of Christ." What is wanted is quiescence to God's will so that the sanctification process can begin and what is needed to get what is wanted is a set of tools that aid in this task. Stump works to show the usefulness of various biblical narratives and the Holy Eucharist in aiding quiescence and perseverance in the love of God throughout life. Both matter greatly to her account because it is through their employment that one can better see that for each person,

the whole complicated structure of justification and sanctification, with the interweaving of grace and free will, has to rest on . . . her surrender to God's love so that God can give her the operative grace of justification without violating her will (288).

Part IV, "The Desiderata for an Interpretation of the Doctrine

of the Atonement,” concludes the volume in Chapters 10 and 11 with concerns for further conceptual clarity of the interpretation presented in Part II, particularly focusing on the solution offered for human guilt and shame.

Atonement makes significant contributions to contemporary soteriology, but it is not without issues and two are notable here: Stump’s exceedingly harsh take on what she calls “Anselmian” interpretations of the atonement and her flat rejection of any sense of salvific exclusivism (71). Regarding the former, Anselmian interpretations suggest “God is somehow required by his honor or goodness or justice or some other element of his goodness to receive reparation, penance, satisfaction, or penalty to make up for human wrongdoing” (71). Having defined the term, she claims all Anselmian interpretations are incompatible with God’s justice, goodness, and love. Stump’s evaluation of Anselmian interpretations sits at the core of why her account is so palpably different from other accounts of the atonement; she views a staggering amount of atonement theory as irremediably wrongheaded. Multiple defenses are given for this stance, but none are ironclad enough to warrant its breadth. For example, one of her objections is launched at penal substitution via the claim that one cannot imagine that God’s justice is served in punishing “a completely innocent person” in the place of a guilty one (78). However, such a charge cannot hold without a willingness to discard the longstanding acceptance of vicarious liability for various criminal acts in the Western legal systems (e.g., the legal doctrine *respondeat superior* or “let the master answer”). William Lane Craig makes the case for the soundness of vicarious liability through a dialogue between biblical, theological, and legal sources in his *Atonement and the Death of Christ* (2020). That said, one generally fails to see how at least some Anselmian interpretations might not be compatible with God’s justice unless a broader rejection of justice as it is commonly understood is also assumed.

Regarding the latter, Stump again alleges an incompatibility with God’s love, this time regarding exclusivism. In so doing, she asks: “How could a loving God exclude people from himself for not sharing views that they may not ever have heard or that

they heard and in good conscience rejected” (283)? Stump’s solution is to propose that “the one thing needed for salvation . . . is not the acceptance of Christian theological doctrines or a commitment to a set of Christian beliefs, but rather coming to Christ” (289). Yet, it is unclear how the intimacy wanted elsewhere is maintained on this view or what it entails. An appeal is made to narratives such as the princess and the frog to elucidate this notion: “The princess knows the frog, but she knows nothing about the prince who has been bewitched to be in the form of that frog. She knows the frog exists, but she does not know that the prince exists; and so, *a fortiori*, she does not have true propositional beliefs making mention of the prince” (283). Perhaps such non-propositional knowing suffices for the human-God relationship in life, but is one to imagine a person who wholeheartedly rejects the idea that Jesus is God nevertheless finds joy in fellowship with that very God in the beatific vision? Here, Stump’s worry to avoid the perceived “problem of exclusivism” seems to run afoul of the mutual intimacy she has already argued for at length (282). Perhaps what she suggests suffices for human relationality with God ante-mortem, but it is difficult to see how the same can be said for those who no longer see in a mirror dimly, but instead, see God face to face (1 Cor 13:12).

While both of these concerns are substantial, and others might raise more, *Atonement* is of tremendous luminary value. It not only offers a philosophically and theologically rich interpretation of atonement but does so in conversation with psychological and literary sources in a way that benefits the academy and parish alike. Despite the density of Stump’s interdisciplinary interpretation of atonement, great care is given to ensure conceptual intelligibility for those journeying with her through this exercise in analytic theology. Such is especially palpable in her ability to draw on profoundly helpful examples from popular literature like *The Lord of the Rings* series. Positively, portions of the interpretation offered which might have been difficult for anyone but narrowly focused experts to grasp are opened up to significantly audiences.

Additionally, the style in which Stump writes is all too capable of capturing a reader’s attention and it is difficult to imagine

any who, having been so captured, could not reap scholastic and spiritual benefits alike from their engagement. For example, the beautifully pastoral way in which Stump addresses guilt and shame in all their pervasiveness provides applications for *Atonement*'s suggestions to parochial ministry which are rarely found in volumes of this sort. And so, while it may not be the best read for persons without at least some formal theological instruction, this book has far too much potential import for the theological and ecclesiological laity to be consigned to the shelves of academic libraries alone. In fact, there are few contemporary works that exhibit so many hallmarks of excellence as *Atonement* and thus, this volume is earnestly commended to interested readers of all kinds.

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