

Atonement. By Eleonore Stump. Pp. xvi + 538. (Oxford Studies in Analytic Theology.) Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. isbn 978 0 19 881386 6. Hardback £60; e-book n.p.

Eleonore Stump's *Atonement* marks a new peak of completion in her own theology, drawing together insights from many themes in her particularly capacious and compassionate world of thought. It provides a full and full-throated treatment of this major doctrinal theme, and it does so clearly and expansively. Stump's own proposals display a remarkable coherence both in broad structure and detail, and the argument proceeds with methodical care and attentiveness.

Union with God, defined as mutual second-personal presence in shared attention, reaching its peak in mutual indwelling, is defended as the ultimate human good, and its attainment is outlined. In the events of the Passion, Christ takes into himself the sinful psyches of humanity, while cessation of resistance in the will is all that is required for a person to receive the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, a 'metaphysically great' presence which is the formal cause of sanctification in grace. The love demonstrated in the cross represents God's best option for melting hearts to bring about this surrender to divine love, while both eucharist and suffering, understood in relation to Christ, help the person in grace to avoid returning to rejection of God and hardness of heart. All of this is contrasted with 'the Anselmian interpretation' of atonement, for which, in Stump's reading, Christ's death is in some way the condition of divine forgiveness, bringing about a change in God. If there is a single idea which underlies Stump's many arguments, it is rather that God must be conceived as always wholly and fully loving, always-already forgiving, and so *at-one-ment* (as it is rendered in the first chapter) must be understood exclusively as the process of bringing human beings to share in that love.

Taken as a positive proposal, Stump's account is stimulating. While it draws explicitly on Newman, her approach to the perpetually knotty problems of the Agony in the Garden and the Cry of Dereliction, as expressive of Christ's mental encounter with the sin of the world, falls meticulously into line with her general philosophical account of interpersonal presence and knowledge. Indeed, the fit is partly aided by the fact that Stump's is in a sense a psychologizing account of closeness between the human and the divine. Drawing on contemporary accounts of mind reading, empathy, and 'shared attention' – one of her recurrent themes – Stump's account of both the end and the means of union with God conforms almost entirely to the categories of human relationships. Some readers might favour this, and it does not seem in principle impermissible as an interpretative frame on central Christian questions. When it comes to evaluating the arguments of others, however – and here I mean both Stump's opponents and, to a significant degree, her sources – the tendency to reduce all conceptualities to the field of interpersonal relations conceived on the analogy of human (but not necessarily bodily) love raises serious questions.

I am not the first reviewer to find that Stump's Aquinas is has a distinctive physiognomy, but Thomas is such a multifaceted figure that perhaps some of the lines in his face appear rather different when seen in different lights. That the shade of the never-resolved controversy *de auxiliis* seems to hover over central aspects of her argument, and her presentation of Aquinas, may merely speak to the fundamental nature of the questions which Stump addresses. Nevertheless, her position on the human will and its response to grace – that it lies in the will not only to resist God but also to cease resisting God; that this is not a positive act but merely a cessation of resistance; and furthermore that this cessation is a precondition for the reception of grace which God cannot in any way bring about – might seem surprisingly

libertarian even to a seventeenth-century Jesuit. Stump cites the need for anti-Pelagianism throughout her text, but this is principally an ontological anti-Pelagianism: all *good things* come from God, but it is nevertheless on the entirely free surrender of the human will to divine love that salvation *wholly* depends. It is, as she often says, the single point supporting a structure of grace like an inverted pyramid.

I find both this claim and the reading of Thomas which supports it ultimately unpersuasive. Certainly, this rendition of libertarianism cannot be fitted into the paradigm of ‘non-competitive relations’. On any such view, the freedom of the act of the human will cannot be contrasted with its causal dependence on the divine will, even if worries as old as Augustine about how and to whom God grants grace therefore remain deep and troubling. Stump’s rejection of the position of Eckhart in favour of Aquinas, seeing the latter as advocating the dissolution of the human will into the divine does not really address this point, which concerns the difference of relation to God over-against all creaturely relations. Stump’s treatment seems, in fact, to come from a very different imaginative world than readings of Thomas which stress these features of his thought. As with non-competition, so some traditional asymmetries in the structure of Christian thought seem to be lost in this: for us to have the power to sin, it need not be the case that we must have the power to cease from sin.

A similar question of imagination lies at the root of Stump’s engagement with Anselm, or rather, with ‘Anselmianism’. Perhaps, taken as nothing more than the sum of its dominating metaphors and transposed freely across contexts, an Anselmian style of thought about the atonement suffers from the crudities which Stump finds in it: a God whose justice must be placated by death so as to be changed into forgiveness, a cross without any intrinsic connection to the life of grace, a double punishment inflicted both upon Christ and upon the damned. There may well be some ‘Anselmian’ interpretations which suffer from these weaknesses. Not really present in Stump’s counterargument, however, is any sense of Anselm’s overriding passion for right order, *rectitude*, his sense of the cosmos as re-ordered by the Cross, or his ontologically far stronger understanding of the incorporation of humans into Christ made possible through his taking on of human nature. The interpretative frame of interpersonal relations leaves no room for so foreign a conceptuality. The argument against ‘Anselmianism’ cannot fully succeed, if only because important structures of Anselm’s argument are not addressed by it.

This interrogation of Stump’s engagement with others should not detract from the strengths of her own positive project. As a constructive proposal for those who share her terms of reference, Stump’s work is coherent, powerful, intriguing, and above all, humane. Just this quality of humanity marks her writing as it marks the priority and depiction of God’s love in her argument: it is perhaps the most lasting impression made by the book, and if those accustomed to different ways of understanding God’s loving and ordering action in the world might ask for more, in this sense they would be gravely wrong to ask for less.

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