

Khaled Anatolios. *Deification Through the Cross: An Eastern Christian Theology of Salvation*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2020. xxii+464 pp. \$50.00 (hbk).

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Khaled Anatolios's *Deification Through the Cross* is unlikely to be labeled "analytic theology." It does not engage modern analytic philosophy, it repudiates the use of "models," and does not pursue the kind of clarity and precision of language valued by the analytic community. Still, this book is an immensely valuable resource for theologians of any stripe interested in issues related to atonement, deification, salvation, or surrounding themes. In this review, I shall first offer a summary of the book. Then, I shall offer a brief assessment, pointing to particular strengths and weaknesses. Finally, I shall offer points of potential engagement for analytic theology.

1. A Summary

The book aims to set forth a "theology of salvation" (38). As the subtitle suggests, Anatolios is writing within the Eastern Christian tradition, but he explicitly seeks to avoid an artificial division between East and West (38). While his work is rooted in the Eastern tradition, he consistently finds points of agreement and dialogue with Western theologians (38-39).

In the introduction, he describes "Three Impediments to the Joy of Salvation" (2-24) and three "Positive Requirements for Contemporary Soteriology" (25-31). The first impediment is the eclipse, or rejection, of atonement. The scandal of the cross, he says, has become foolishness not only to Jews and Greeks, but also to Christians (2). The second impediment is his criticism of the "'Models of Salvation' approach" (7). It is unclear what does or what does not count as a "model," but one of his criticisms of the approach is that proponents "fail to achieve clarity and consensus" not only about the content of salvation or atonement, but also about what they mean by model (7). He suggests, instead of piling up models, theologians "generate normative statements that are in principle applicable to any candidate for a Christian 'model' of salvation" (23). The final impediment is the "lack of experiential access to this doctrine" (23). He argues salvation is something we not only passively receive (though we do passively receive it) but also something we participate in. The three positive requirements, or what he also calls "prescriptions," for contemporary

salvation accounts are as follows: fidelity to the Canonical Scriptures (25-27), the normativity of Tradition (27-30), and the normativity of liturgical experience (30-31).

After identifying the impediments and prescriptions to a doctrine of salvation, he states his goal: offering a constructive proposal in which Christ's salvific work is characterized as what he calls "doxological contrition" (32). The proposal includes the defense of two theses: "(1) Christ saves us by fulfilling humanity's original vocation to participate...in the mutual glorification of the persons of the divine Trinity" and "(2) Christ saves us by vicariously repenting for humanity's sinful rejection of humanity's doxological vocation and its violation and distortion of divine glory" (32). The "coinherence" of these features he designates as "doxological contrition" (32). Given his second impediment, he adamantly avoids referring to doxological contrition as a "model" (or anything of the sort), but the book's premise is that doxological contrition "discloses important dimensions of the deep structure of the Christian understanding of salvation" (32).

The book is divided into two main parts. Part I provides the basis, and justification, for doxological contrition. Part II features the more constructive task of "a systematic exposition of a soteriology of doxological contrition" (37). The three chapters in Part I attempt to anchor—and define—doxological contrition in relation to the Byzantine liturgy (chapter 1), Scripture (chapter 2), and conciliar Christian doctrine (chapter 3).

In chapter one, Anatolios shows how the theme of doxological contrition arises from engagement with the Byzantine liturgy. He is upfront about this but is also insistent that it is grounded in Scripture and tradition. With careful attention to how the drama of sin and salvation unfold in the experience of a Byzantine worshipper, he argues that this experience—"having its source and goal in Christ"—is best characterized as "doxological contrition" (69). Doxological contrition, as an experience, is not easily defined, but it is, in short, a "dialectic of repentance and praise" which "constitutes the essence of the experience of salvation" (83). "The liturgy," he says, "does not seek to explain how Christ...remains glorious even in his humiliation. It simply reveals that reality and invites us to partake of it and enact it" (86).

The critical assumption here is that the liturgy actually mediates salvation and, in doing so, invites us to participate in it. He calls this a "liturgical salvation from below," by which he means "salvation is not something Christ merely brings about; it ultimately consists in being 'in Christ'" (87, 89). He is aware of the dangers of language in theology like "from below" (or "from above") and so is careful—like any analytic theologian could hope—to clarify what he does *not* mean by this language (restricting the scope of data to only liturgy or separating the humanity from the divinity of Christ) and what he *does* mean: "I am simply proposing that the liturgical experience of Christian discipleship can throw light on the mystery of Jesus Christ himself as the source and in some sense the inner content of that experience" (89).

In chapter two, Anatolios turns to doxological contrition in Scripture. He is aware of potential misconceptions about the hierarchy of authority in virtue of the chapter on liturgy preceding the chapter on Scripture. However, Anatolios insists that he is not elevating liturgy above Scripture nor attempting merely a "scriptural stamp of validation" onto his theory, but instead seeks to allow "the general form of this

conception be more specifically informed and constructed from a direct reading of the Scriptures” (95). Instead of a smattering of proof-texts, he prefers to focus intently on “three key moments in the Scriptural story of salvation” (96): the Exodus (97-114), Israel’s return from exile (115-140), and Christ’s salvific work (140-162). In each of these Biblical scenes, he emphasizes the role of sin (understood as a desecration of God’s glory) and the necessary contrition or repentance required for that glory to be restored. This move from contrition to a return to a share in God’s glory is fully and finally embodied in Jesus Christ (165).

In chapter three, Anatolios develops the themes of glory and contrition in conversation with the doctrinal conclusions of the seven ecumenical councils: Nicaea (169-177), Constantinople (177-190), Ephesus (190-203), Chalcedon (203-208), Constantinople II (208-211), Constantinople (211-219), and Nicaea II (219-222). In addition to historical expositions of the councils and their main defenders, Anatolios argues that some of the “fundamental aspects of the soteriological reasoning” of these councils contribute to his understanding of doxological contrition (222-226). This concludes Part I.

Part II begins with three critical chapters: on the mutual glorification of the Trinity (chapter 4), on human participation in that glorification (chapter 5), and on the “doxological weight” of sin (chapter 6). In Part I, his task was expository and exegetical; in Part II, his task is more systematic and theological. He engages theologians ancient and modern, Eastern and Western, to show how the theme of each chapter is crucial to the Christian doctrine of salvation. In chapter four, he engages “Nicene hermeneutics” (233-241), Catholic theologian Matthias Sheeben (241-252), and Orthodox theologian Dumitru Staniloae (252-262). In chapter five, his interlocutors are Irenaeus and Anselm (268-276) and Palamas and Nicholas Cabasilas (276-282). In chapter six, he focuses on the “weight” of sin, including engagement with von Balthasar (299-303) and Anselm (303-311). Space does not permit a summary of these fruitful engagements that would approach sufficiency, but by listing them I hope to show both the impressive width of Anatolios’s engagement with the Christian theological tradition and, even if the subtitle betrays his account as an “Eastern” one, extensive engagement with the Western tradition.

The final two chapters are the culmination of the work. In chapter seven, “Salvation as Reintegration into Trinitarian Glorification,” he offers “an account of how the interactivity of divinity and humanity in Christ brings about our deifying inclusion into the intra-trinitarian mutual glorification” (313). Returning especially, with lengthy exposition, to Sheeben (313-331) and Cabasilas (340-383), he adds a survey of Aquinas’s notion of “vicarious repentance” (331-340). As the chapter title suggests, Anatolios’s account of Christian salvation is best understood as reintegration into the divine glory. On account of the person, work, death, resurrection, and ascension of Christ, human persons are invited into the inner-glorification of the three persons of the Trinity. Christ’s suffering is thus understood as vicarious “contrition for human sin” which itself, in turn, promotes the divine glory (376).

In chapter eight, after the systematic summary in chapter seven, Anatolios compares (and contrasts) his account with other modern accounts of salvation, including that of “Liberation Theology” (385-394), “Girardian Mimetic Theory” (395-

410), and “Penal Substitution” (411-422). In each comparison, Anatolios charitably finds points of accord and even points where the respective account can contribute to or correct doxological contrition, but also points of discord and where doxological contrition might be useful in avoiding the dangers of the respective account. In a brief conclusion, he returns to the three requirements or prescriptions (which he here calls “criteria”) (423) and offers brief summaries for how he has accomplished each.

2. An Assessment

Overall, the book is remarkably consistent both in tone or style, but also in its strengths and weaknesses. As his previous work would suggest, Anatolios especially excels in ecumenical spirit¹ and historical rigor.² In addition, he should be commended for offering a way of understanding salvation that is at once grounded in the tradition and, at the same time, fresh and innovative. Two chapters especially illustrate these strengths.

Consider, first, his chapter on the exposition of Scripture (chapter 2). Even if, at times, the passages surveyed seem *ad hoc*, there is no denying that the explored passages are crucial to the Scriptural story of salvation. And while it is unclear the degree to which the twin themes of glory and contrition are especially emphasized over other themes, he aptly shows how God’s glory and the contrition of God’s people are critical to the Scriptural narrative. His theology of salvation is thus Scriptural in the sense that its themes are readily consonant with the Biblical story of salvation.

The second chapter that emerges as particularly strong is the final chapter in which he puts doxological contrition in dialogue with liberation theology, mimetic theory, and penal substitution (chapter 8). For instance, he gives a careful and charitable analysis of J. I. Packer’s account of penal substitution (411-415). Anatolios shows how his own preference for the terms “vicarious” and “representative” secure what Packer is eager to affirm in the “substitutionary” component of atonement—namely, that Christ does something *for* us that we cannot do for ourselves—but avoids closing off our inclusion in Christ’s act. He concludes, however, that penal substitution’s emphasis on the passion of Christ is a potential corrective for doxological contrition, too. Likewise, Jon Sobrino’s liberation account of salvation can both offer something constructive to doxological contrition—namely, an “identification of the body of Christ with people who suffer” (390)—and be corrected by it—namely, by including a transcendental dimension to the divine-human relation (394).

At the risk of resorting to an analytic cliché, one weakness is lack of clarity around key terms. To be fair, the project he calls a “liturgical salvation from below” (87) does not lend itself to the kind of clarity the analytic community prizes. He is, after all, insistent on a move away from “models” and towards the lived experience of salvation. This strikes me as a worthy goal and a valuable contribution to theological

¹ Stephen F. Brown and Khaled Anatolios, *Catholicism & Orthodox Christianity* (New York: Infobase Publishing, 2009).

² Khaled Anatolios, *Retrieving Nicaea* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2011).

studies on the nature of salvation. Still, he tends to use contested words without being clear what he does, or does not, mean by them. One example is his use of “deification.” He draws this conclusion that proves critical for his account: “ontologically, the human worship of God consists in a deifying inclusion in trinitarian life to the extent that the Father sees the form of his Son in the worshipping of the human being” (283). The reader is left wondering, however, how this amounts to deification “ontologically.” In particular, in what sense does the human actually *become* or *participate* in the divine? Or is the human only *seen as* divine in “the form of the Son?” On the other hand, the book does evince a kind of snowball effect of clarity: with each passing chapter, we get a much better sense of what he means by words such as deification. Still, this reader would have benefitted from greater clarity at the outset.

Related to this weakness is a worry about the role of Christ’s physical suffering and death in his theology of salvation. As he admits, “a possible objection” to his approach is that it renders Christ’s physical death “superfluous” (406). Insofar as salvation is conceived of as human “reintegration into Trinitarian glorification” (313), it is not clear why Christ had to die in order to save humanity. Appealing to Girard’s “scapegoat mechanism,” he responds that Christ’s vicarious contrition “cannot be merely an inner experience but must be dramatized within a spectacle that fully manifests humanity’s sin” (406). He adds, “it is only through the cross and death of Christ that this saving spectacle is manifest” (406). But he does not say *why* this must be the case, leaving somewhat confused his final conclusion that “the path of Christian salvation is the path of deification through the cross” (429). Some further explanation of this would have been beneficial.

3. Potential Engagement for Analytic Theology

In order to point to potential points of engagement, I shall first identify a few existing works that could prove fertile ground for dialogue. Then, I shall offer a more general way that mutual, constructive dialogue could transpire between Anatolios and the analytic theologian.

Three existing analytic works on salvation or atonement that could find dialogue with this book useful are Eleonore Stump’s, Oliver Crisp’s, and Joshua M. McNall’s. Stump’s seminal *Atonement* would find a shared interest with Anatolios in what Stump calls “mutual indwelling.”³ Both Stump and Anatolios are eager to preserve a thick account of union with God as necessary to salvation. In addition, both explicitly engage Anselmian or Thomistic accounts of atonement. Stump, however, more explicitly outlines the role of Christ’s suffering in atonement, particularly in her exposition of the cry of dereliction (chapter five), the temptations of Christ (chapter eight), and the eucharist (chapter nine). Some of her work could even be used to fill out Anatolios’s understanding of Christ’s vicarious contrition, which could make Christ’s suffering and death more tightly integrated into his understanding of salvation. Like Stump’s, Oliver Crisp’s account of salvation as participation shares much in common with Anatolios, since both emphasize the role of participation in, or

³ Eleonore Stump, *Atonement* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 143–67.

deification by, Christ's salvific work.⁴ A comparison, or contrast, between how each understands this participation could illuminate both accounts. On the one hand, Crisp's metaphysical lucidity would be a welcome addition to Anatolios's use of participation. On the other hand, Anatolios's emphasis on the liturgical and doxological dimensions of participation introduce what could prove a decisive difference between the two understandings. In any case, a dialogue between these works could be mutually beneficial. Finally, Joshua McNall's *The Mosaic of the Atonement*, like Anatolios, favors an integration or "reintegration" of biblical themes instead of isolating models.⁵ McNall and Anatolios take very different paths towards this destination, but their respective defenses of why the destination is worth visiting are worth comparing and considering. In particular, they are worth considering because their compelling—even if slightly different—cases against the isolation of particular models in favor of a fuller picture are at least implicitly a critique of how much modern theology, especially analytic theology, thinks about the atonement or salvation.

Finally, there is plenty of opportunity for constructive, mutual dialogue between Anatolios and the analytic theologian. Above, I offered some criticisms of Anatolios, but these can be partially excused because of what Anatolios is trying to do. He explicitly withholds "full elaboration" of this account of salvation and is instead only interested in "securing the foundations for a soteriology of doxological contrition" (377). He gives, with admittedly "tantalizing...brevery and incompleteness," a sketch of the specific outworking of doxological contrition in the life, suffering, and glorification of Christ, but notes that more work needs to be done (382). The analytic can thus take up this invitation for further work in at least two ways. On the one hand, Anatolios's theme of doxological contrition can offer a corrective to some analytic models or accounts. He regularly emphasizes themes sometimes foreign to analytic theologians, but they are themes rooted in Scripture, the Christian theological tradition, and, more importantly, the lived experience of salvation. In her own work, the analytic theologian would do well to be sensitive to these concerns and Anatolios's work can be a helpful starting point for doing so. On the other hand, the analytic theologian could bring more clarity to Anatolios's account and develop it further. Since Anatolios is clear that he is sketching only the foundations of a theology of salvation and not a specific model, I found myself consistently wondering what an analytic model of doxological contrition might look like. Such an account could be perhaps advance our understanding of important matters pertaining to salvation and atonement.

In conclusion, Anatolios's book is a welcome addition to work on the theology of salvation. Western and analytic theologians may even be especially interested in the—to the Western and analytic eyes—often foreign manner in which he covers often foreign themes. To be sure, any theologian working on salvation, atonement, deification, and the like will be better off for having read this book.

⁴ Oliver Crisp, *Analyzing Doctrine: Toward a Systematic Theology* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2019), 199–216.

⁵ Joshua M. McNall, *The Mosaic of Atonement: An Integrated Approach to Christ's Work* (Zondervan Academic, 2019), 22.