

Eleanore Stump. *Atonement*. Oxford Studies in Analytic Theology. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. xv+538 pp. \$85.00 (hbk); \$35.00 (paper).

Junius Johnson
Independent Scholar

Eleanore Stump's work on the atonement comes as a salutary entry into a discourse that is breaking down the barriers between what counts as philosophical and what counts as theology. Stump herself is well positioned to do this, for her previous work has often gone beyond what might be termed philosophy of religion into theological reflection proper, and it has done so with competence and sensitivity. Seen from this perspective, the present work stands as something of a *magnum opus*, both in its scope and in its achievement. It is a detailed and lengthy project, and would defeat any attempt to give a comprehensive overview in a short space. I will therefore focus on just three things: the nature of her account of the atonement, the main challenge she sets herself, and what I consider the most important contribution this work makes to reflection on the Christian doctrine of atonement in general.

At the outset, Stump divides most atonement theories into two models: those of an Anselmian sort, and those of a Thomistic sort. These are broad categories, populated by many different atonement theories, and Anselm and Aquinas themselves represent but one example of each. The choice between them represents the first great choice in the developing of a theory of the atonement.

Anselmian doctrines of the atonement are those that see "the chief obstacle to the remedy for human sin [...] in something about God" (21). Therefore, what needs to be addressed for humans to be saved is this situation in God: for example, that God's justice must be satisfied, or that God must be paid what God is due, etc. One problem Stump sees with such views is that they do not explain why there should be anything required from the particular human to be saved: if the obstacle to union is on God's part, and this is satisfied in the death of Christ, why is salvation not self-acting for all humans (25)?

It is easy to see this problem as resulting from an account of Anselmian doctrines that is insufficiently nuanced. Stump herself says that the *chief* obstacle is something about God; that does not impede that there be other obstacles that are real and that must be dealt with. One such obstacle might be precisely the need for the sort of higher order willing of what God wills that figures so prominently in Stump's own version. Such an answer is, of course, lacking in Anselm (unless by deep implication); but this does not mean that all Anselmian versions lack something of this sort. It is possible to feel that there is something of a reduction of all Anselmian theories, as if the common objections to Anselm's satisfaction theory are problems for all such theories. But Stump feels justified in rejecting this entire camp out of hand,

because it just does not seem possible to her that there be any problem on God's side of the equation.

Thomistic atonement theories, by contrast, find the obstacle to union with God in human beings. Here, "the chief obstacle to human salvation is that a human will does not will the good or even want to will the good" (23). The main problem Stump formulates for this view is the question of what the connection is between justification and sanctification, on the one hand, and Christ's passion and death on the other. As she says: "it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that, on the Thomistic kind of interpretation, Christ's passion and death are irrelevant to the remedy for the problem of human sinfulness" (30). Stump's flagging of this problem indicates that she intends her Thomistic view, in contrast to Aquinas's, to solve this difficulty.

Stump is also concerned about forward- and backward-looking aspects of human sin. Anselmian models do not, she argues, address the fact that the human nature is prone to sin (the forward-looking problem), nor do they address the backward-looking problems of shame and guilt (25-7). Here it might be said that, in requiring that the doctrine of atonement also deal with the suffering of the victims of sin, Stump is trying to make it do too much. Perhaps this particular difficulty belongs rather to the doctrine of eschatology. Here, I am put in mind of Julian of Norwich's great deed: something God will do, distinct from salvation, that will make it such that all manner of thing shall be well.¹

Nevertheless, this is a major concern for Stump's account, to such an extent that if this were the only problem with Anselmian positions, and Thomistic positions did not have this problem, it would be enough to motivate the choice of the Thomistic account, with its attendant difficulties. And, indeed, one can see the attraction of attempting a solution with the doctrine of atonement rather than eschatology: eschatological solutions like Julian's run the risk of lacking resources to offer those in the midst of the troubles of this life. Stump's concern here then is as much pastoral as theological and philosophical. This will be seen more clearly shortly.

Nevertheless, the decision that Anselmian doctrines are unsalvageable and the choice for a Thomistic sort is made on the basis of the doctrine of love: "In my view, on the best account available of the notion of love, the God of the Anselmian interpretation is not a loving God. For this reason, [such interpretations] are unsalvageable" (115). The account of love she has in mind here, it must be said, is a Thomistic one; so one might allege that what this amounts to is the claim that if we start thinking with Aquinas, Anselmian interpretations don't work, therefore we ought to continue with Aquinas. However fair or unfair this may be, Stump's allegiance to a Thomistic account of love is well documented and no accidental feature of her thinking.² It is also helpful that she qualifies her statement: perhaps Anselmian versions could be salvaged with a different understanding of love, but this understanding of love is the best she has come across, and so we ought to begin there, even if it to some extent pre-motivates a Thomistic account.

¹ See Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, Trans. Elizabeth Spearing (New York: Penguin Books, 1999), 85-6.

² See for example Eleonore Stump, "Love, by All Accounts," *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 80:2 (2006), 25-43.

We are, then, in the midst of an account of the atonement of the Thomistic sort, which places the barrier to human salvation in humans rather than in God, and which faces the challenge of identifying a meaningful link between Christ's passion and death and the work of atonement.

The goal of atonement, Stump argues, is union between God and the human person to be saved. The nature of this union, developed over chapters four and five, is "mutual closeness and mutual personal presence of the most significant kind" (117). This personal closeness is unfolded in great detail; its key features are that it is second-personal, requiring shared attention and built upon the type of mind-reading and empathy that neuroscience correlates to the mirror neuron system (129 ff.). What is important about all of this is that the desired union therefore requires the kind of mutual openness by which each person opens the self to the other and invites the other in, and also responds to the invitation of the other and enters in.

Now, "...on Aquinas's account of love, God desires the good for every human person and desires to draw every person to union with God. As long as Paula does not resist God's help or reject God's grace, God's desires of love for Paula will be efficacious and will produce increasing goodness in Paula" (205). What in this picture requires anything of Christ? Is it that Paula can only form "the global second-order will to have, through God's help, a will that wills the good, universally understood" (204) that is the content of justification and sufficient for salvation (208) because of the work of Christ? It is certain that she can only acquire this as a result of God's grace: Stump argues that to say otherwise would be Pelagian (206). But what about the passion and death of Christ is necessary for God to be able to offer this grace?

It is important to keep in mind the goal of both justification and sanctification: "A union of love between God and a human person is what justification and sanctification aim at and effect" (228). But for such a relationship to exist, both persons must open themselves up to the presence of the other. In the passion, Christ opens himself as far as possible (that is to say, completely) to all human persons, thereby fulfilling one side (the divine side) of the requirements for intimate personal union. This opening requires the passion, because it requires the type of mind-reading and empathy discussed in chapter four, which chapter five makes clear will convey to Christ the understanding of what it feels like not only to have done evil, but to have *willed* evil. So, one part of what Christ's passion accomplishes is that it is God doing what God must do in order to be open to union with human persons.

The human nature of Christ is the chosen instrument of this divine opening to human persons. Does it need to be so? Is God only able to be available for the relationship of union because God has become human? Such a conclusion would be premature, for this opening of self is not all the work that the passion and death of Christ perform. There is also a moral influence component.

Christ's suffering is meant to overcome any resistance we have to accepting divine love based out of a fear of being vulnerable before an all-powerful and all-good God. The suffering simultaneously removes a perceived threat inherent in God's superiority and moves to empathy. When it is realized that this suffering is undertaken for her sake, a human heart is further softened (265-7).

In this connection, the section on exclusivism (282-86) is especially important. There Stump considers the case of those who have no knowledge of the passion of

Christ, and yet are still considered to be saved (it matters little whether they be taken to be the patriarchs, whose awareness of the coming salvation was probably insufficiently specific to motivate moral influence, or Karl Rahner's "anonymous Christians"). For if it is possible to come to salvation apart from the knowledge of what Christ has undergone, then this knowledge is not a necessary condition for salvation, and it ought to be excluded from the specific account of how Christ's saves.

This problem arises just to the extent that a version of moral influence does not attribute to Christ's work on the cross any efficacy outside the realm of the epistemological. If the salvific work happens not only in the influence the life of Christ has on me through my awareness of it, then it may still work even if I have never heard the Gospel. But if it is limited to my awareness that Christ has done such and such for me, then such awareness is ineluctable if I am to be saved. Stump's solution to this worry also therefore reveals what is objective, as it were, about the work of Christ: namely, the opening of the human mind of Christ to the influx of all human psyches, such that every human (past, present, and future) actually indwells Christ on the cross (286). This is a (conditionally) necessary condition for the mutual indwelling of any human person and God, for it is God opening Godself up to the divine side of this mutuality. Without it, even if a human person somehow willed such a mutual indwelling, there would be no corresponding movement on the part of the divine, and so this personal presence would not be possible.

And so the moral influence component takes a side seat, as Stump makes clear: "So although the passion and death of Christ is a most promising way of manifesting the love and forgiveness of God to those who need to come to Christ, a most promising way is still not a necessary way, not even for a perfectly good God (*contra* Anselm)" (285). Such a person who comes to God apart from knowledge of what Christ bore for her nevertheless comes to God through Christ, because her coming to God is only possible because of the actual opening for indwelling that Christ accomplishes on the cross. And so there is an exclusivism ("no one comes to the Father except through me"), but it is not an exclusivism that requires that everyone assent to Christian doctrines.

So, to backtrack to some of our earlier concerns, it may not have been necessary for God to become human in order to open Godself up to all human persons, as Christ does on the cross. But Christ's becoming human is an important part of the moral influence component; and so these two together make it greatly fitting that God became human. Even this fittingness will not convert into necessity, however: God is allowed to have reasons for God's choices that we know not of.

Likewise, the solution to the problem of why salvation is not self-acting is clear: God does whatever God can and must do on God's side, but God cannot *also* do what is required on the human side. Here we must draw from one of the richest parts of the book, which also happens to be the heart of Stump's constructive proposal: her reading of the temptation of Christ in the wilderness and Christ's anguish in the Garden of Gethsemane.

Stump reads the temptations as being an intellectual battle between Christ and Satan over the best way to save human persons. Satan's goal is to get the human mind of Christ to come to a false understanding of the best way to save humans, and in so doing, to save fewer than he otherwise would, or none. The first temptation is the one

of concern here: it is a temptation to unilaterally save humans; that is, apart from our will, or even by doing violence to our will. Christ's rejection of this shows God's commitment to the freedom of the human choice to enter into this relationship. And this is more than a divine preference: the relationship cannot truly be mutual if one side is forced into it. Salvation cannot be self-acting because human persons cannot automatically enter into the relationship if the relationship is to be of the right sort. We have something we have to do, namely, to still the resistance of our will so that God may create a will to will the good in us.

One question remains. It is clear what work the passion of Christ is doing with regard to the atonement, both in terms of the subjective (moral influence) and objective (opening of the divine persons to human persons for mutual indwelling) dimensions of salvation. But why does Christ have to die? Why is the suffering of the passion not enough? Perhaps Stump could reply by pointing to John 13:1, that "having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end." That is to say, the demonstration of love and vulnerability that the passion is would stop short of being conclusive if it stopped short of that greatest love of laying down one's life for one's friends (Jn 15:13).

To conclude, I want to point to what I think is the major contribution of this doctrine of the atonement. I spoke earlier of Stump's emphasis on guilt and shame, and the need for a remedy to these. This is one of the most creative, rich, and exciting parts of Stump's account, and an area where I think she supplies something that is not to be found in Aquinas. I consider the focus on guilt and shame, whether one agrees with the particulars or not, to be an extremely salutary intervention in discussions of the doctrine of atonement, and the major contribution of this volume.

This comes home when we come to Christ in Gethsemane, who takes on the sin of the world by gaining within himself something equivalent to first-personal knowledge not just of what it is like to do evil, but of what it is like to delight in doing evil. This, Stump argues, is what "astonishes" and "amazes" Christ: "But what might, even so, be a surprise to Christ, and a great shock, is what that evil feels like when it is within him. It is one thing to know *that* there is sadistic cruelty, for example; it is another thing entirely to have some non-propositional, as-it-were mind-melding knowledge of it, some feeling shared with the psyche of a human person who is addicted to such cruelty" (275). This is identification with the sinner at a level that goes beyond what is often asserted, and it is powerful. For, as Stump lays out earlier (49-52), the shame a sinner feels may often be harder to release than the guilt: "In consequence of what he has done, he himself can have the opposite of a desire for himself; he can find himself ugly and repulsive. And so a person who is unable to forgive himself for evil he has done can be characterized by self-loathing as well as self-laceration" (49). This type of feeling can certainly be a barrier to coming to the holy and gracious God, because one feels that one dare not, and that if one dared, it would only end badly, and (and this is the greatest barrier) that if one were well received, even forgiven, that it would not be right: one does not *want* to be forgiven, which seems such an injustice.

How different does it look when one approaches the eyes of one who not only knows what one has done and how horrible it is, but has also felt in himself, for your sake, *why* you would want to do that, who has first-personal knowledge of the

experience of wanting and loving that evil? We can see how attractive this is, for those who are oppressed by the sort of shame we are discussing often find the fellowship of others who have committed a like sin and have come to hate it more tolerable than fellowship with those who have not.

This is my highest praise for this book, and alone is enough to recommend it for serious theological study: I expected analytical rigor and theoretical insight from Stump, but I was unprepared for depth of mercy and compassion this account offers to those possessed of true knowledge of their sin. This is easily among the most *humane* accounts of the atonement I have ever encountered. One may be unconvinced by the rejection of Anselmian theories, or the endorsing of a Thomistic strategy, or the particular outlines of this account; but I hope that this reorientation to the problems of guilt and shame becomes a more established part of atonement discussions going forward.