

gleaned from Miller's work, it is that woman's unexplained absence that has left the most indelible mark on my heart and mind.

**Fiona Reynolds**

*Fiona Reynolds is a Church of Scotland minister currently working for the Diocese of Edinburgh in the Scottish Episcopal Church.*

<https://doi.org/10.15664/tis.v30i2.2673>



Reviewed works:

**Oliver D. Crisp, *Participation and Atonement: An Analytic and Constructive Account* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2022), pp. xi + 259, ISBN 978-0801049965. £19.99**

**W. Ross Hastings, *Total Atonement: Trinitarian Participation in the Reconciliation of Humanity and Creation* (London: Rowman & Littlefield, 2022), pp. 320, ISBN 978-1978702158. £35.00**

Oliver D. Crisp's *Participation and Atonement: An Analytic and Constructive Account* (*PA*) and W. Ross Hastings' *Total Atonement: Trinitarian Participation in the Reconciliation of Humanity and Creation* (*TA*) are two in a recent slew of offerings on atonement. One rationale for placing them in conversation is that both treat the relation between atonement and notions of participation. For both, Christ's incarnational participation in humanity facilitates (1) Christ's act of atonement, and (2) humanity's participation, through the Spirit, in the divine. Such phrasing, however, masks the differences in their approach and conclusions. For the student of atonement, it is, perhaps, what emerges in the dialogue between these differences that is most instructive.

*PA* is a culmination of sorts. Written over the course of more than a decade – Crisp not only published extensively during its gestation, his views were revised, rethought, and developed – it has one motivating question: 'What is the mechanism by means of which Christ's work reconciles fallen human beings to God?' (*PA*, p. 3).<sup>1</sup> Throughout the book's three parts, Crisp approaches it with trademark analytic rigour. In Part III,

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<sup>1</sup> Emphasis in original whenever italics are used in quotes.



‘the heart of the volume,’ Crisp offers a new account. This account, dubbed ‘the *representational union account*’ (p. 7), is an updated version of his ‘*realist union account*’, first advanced in *The Word Enfleshed* (2016) – to which *PA* is in many ways a companion piece. Parts I and II, which set conceptual parameters and engage four traditional accounts, provide the groundwork for Part III’s constructive work.

Also divided into three parts, Hastings’ *TA* has different motivations, both apologetic – ‘answering objections to the theology of atonement and, in particular, penal substitution’ (*TA*, p. 1) – and constructive – ‘to expound the atonement in a positive and sane way and to participate in and perpetuate the ongoing expression of the deep devotion of the church’s response to the atoning work of God on behalf of reconciled humanity’ (p. 2). The ‘problems’ to which Hastings attempts an apologetic response are threefold: (1) modern sensitivity to violence, (2) the objections of feminist theologians, and (3) an emerging analytic approach to theology. The first two have become standard fare in publications treating atonement. The third is more novel. Hastings’ particular target is the questions analytics are asking regarding ‘the *justice* of one entity being punished in the place of another’ (p. 2). While he provides no elaboration or examples, Hastings does suggest a solution: ‘*participation* as the key dynamic or mechanism underlying atonement’ (p. 2). It is toward this end Hastings directs his constructive approach. It too is threefold, expressed as (1) a foundation, (2) a framework, and (3) a fullness. For Hastings, reflections on atonement must be built on a Christological and therefore Trinitarian *foundation*. From this, a *framework* for understanding atonement – participation – emerges, which, because it is the undergirding mechanism of atonement, should inculcate an attitude of *fullness* that embraces all biblical motifs and theological models. *TA*’s three parts work through these sequentially.

If this shared notion of participation, as integral to atonement, provides grounds for placing these works in conversation, Hastings’ third ‘problem’ and proposed solution establishes them. Crisp is not only one of the leading figures of the analytic theology movement, but with *PA* his account of atonement turns in exactly the direction Hastings takes aim: Crisp attempts to provide an account ‘that is vicarious, reparative, and representational in nature but that is not a penal substitution’ (*PA*, p. 146). While Crisp’s *realist union account* ‘was a species of penal substitution’ (p. 148), his updated *representational union account* is not. One factor motivating this shift – ‘whether it is possible for the sin and guilt of one individual to



be transferred to another individual remains a real difficulty' (p. 145) – restates the centre point of Hastings' analytic target – 'the *justice* of one entity being punished in the place of another' (*TA*, p. 2). Additionally, for Crisp, participation – ultimately and best understood as *theosis* – as the realisation of God's intention in creation is one element of the doctrine of salvation. The other element is atonement. Thought this way, atonement is the mechanism by which the reconciliation of alienated humanity with God is made possible, and participation (*theosis*) is the consequence.

That Crisp understands as a consequence of atonement what Hastings understands as its mechanism is, in part, a function of how they define their terms. To this endeavour, Crisp dedicated his first chapter, Hastings his fourth. Both restate a previous work of Crisp's.<sup>2</sup>

Crisp's restatement is almost exactly that, and it is aimed at clarifying the doctrine's conceptual context in order to clear the ground for properly engaging with its substance. Because, he avers, (1) 'Scripture does not give us a prepackaged doctrine of atonement' (*PA*, p. 10); and (2) the Church has not provided a 'creedal framework for the discussion of atonement' (pp. 10–11); it should not be surprising that (3) theologians have provided 'different and sometimes incommensurate ways of thinking about Christ's reconciling work' (p. 11). Together this has led to a variety of ways of talking about atonement. It is this Crisp wants to get clear about.

Crisp identifies five terms – motifs, metaphors, doctrines, models, and theories – and suggests they encapsulate 'different levels of theological explanation' (p. 32). Motifs are 'recurring themes or ideas' (p. 17), that may or may not be metaphorical. Metaphors 'provide important building blocks' for doctrines and models. Together they provide 'partial windows into the doctrine' (p. 32). As conceptual wholes, doctrines are more complex. They 'provide a comprehensive account of a particular teaching about a given theological topic' and are usually 'dogmatically minimalist in nature' (p. 23). Models 'thicken up the dogmatic minimalism of atonement doctrines' (p. 23). They are 'pictures' offering 'simplified descriptions' of what would 'otherwise be too complex to be rendered into a whole that is immediately comprehensible' (p. 25). Models, therefore, 'are more modest in their explanatory ambitions than doctrines' even as

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<sup>2</sup> Crisp, "Methodological Issues in Approaching the Atonement", in ed. Adam J. Johnson, *T&T Clark Companion to Atonement* (London: T&T Clark, 2017): 315–33.



they are ‘often more detailed in the metaphysical stories they provide in order to make sense of the doctrinal claims they seek to explain’ (p. 31). Theories are the most comprehensive because they attempt to offer a way of thinking about ‘different models of atonement relative to one another and to the doctrine of atonement’.

Amidst his discussion of the foregoing five terms, Crisp raises another: mechanisms. Christ’s work is aimed at the reconciliation of humanity to God and a mechanism of atonement provides the means by which that reconciliation is achieved. Doctrines and models, unlike motifs and metaphors, provide mechanisms for atonement. As an illustration Crisp offers ransom accounts, suggesting that because they do not provide a mechanism they should be understood as a motif or metaphor.

While Crisp is clear that what he offers is only one way of understanding these terms, his conceptual precision allows him to work methodically, carefully, and consistently. Hastings, for his part, wants to ‘move beyond’ Crisp’s ‘methodological clarity’ (*TA*, p. 73). Hastings acknowledges that Crisp would describe what he is doing in *TA* as offering a theory of atonement. However, Hastings is suspicious of the word theory, associating it with ‘a rationalism inappropriate to the mystery that is atonement’ (p. 75). In its place, he suggests the term ‘framework’ where ‘all the metaphors are acknowledged’ (p. 75). For Hastings, metaphors, motifs, and models, are interchangeable terms and are roughly equivalent to models in Crisp’s schema, although Hastings wants to emphasise the metaphor because ‘models are based on metaphors’ and ‘can hardly be distinguished from metaphors’ (p. 78). Curiously, despite his reservations, Hastings also uses ‘framework’ and ‘theory’ interchangeably, equating both with the mechanism of atonement. Thus, on Hastings’ reading, participation is the framework of atonement because it is the ‘common thread in the mechanism of each’ metaphor or model of atonement. This ‘common thread’ Hastings also calls ‘a *common dynamic* within all the “metaphors”’ (p. 74). For Hastings, participation is both mechanism and framework because its presence within each model allows it to function as the ‘framework or mechanism of the atonement that subsumes all the models’ (p. 259). However, Hastings also describes participation as ‘the primary model or theory in atonement theology’ because ‘from it flow[s] all the models’ (p. 272). Collapsing his previously established terminological division, in Hastings’ hands participation becomes model, mechanism, theory, and framework.



Hastings' title, *Total Atonement*, is designed to emphasise his focus on the totality of atonement. Alongside 'the totality of creation and redemption', 'the totality of the *person* of Christ', and 'the totality of the persons of the triune God,' Hastings wants to affirm 'the totality of many biblical and theological motifs (models)' and 'the totality of participation' (*TA*, p. 4). However, in collapsing the conceptual content of each term into the others by asserting that participation is both model and mechanism, theory, and framework, there is a risk that atonement itself collapses into participation, the two becoming one. If this is the case, the question of how reconciliation is achieved – how God's participation in humanity brings about humanity's participation in the divine – remains.

It is this question of how reconciliation is achieved – what he calls the mechanism of atonement – that motivates Crisp. And it is his conceptual clarity that allows him to avoid the kind of conceptual collapse risked by Hastings. This also undergirds his conclusion that atonement is not the totality of salvation. Atonement and participation are 'two elements' (*PA*, p. 187) of the one salvation of God, one facilitating the other. Christ's participation in humanity, on its own, does not achieve the desired reconciliation. A mechanism of atonement is required. This need for a mechanism is why most moral exemplar accounts of atonement do 'not yield a doctrine of atonement' even as they 'provide a way of thinking about Christ's life and ministry that is theologically salient' (p. 60). Similarly, it is thinking through atonement's mechanism that moves Crisp away from penal substitution. In exchanging it as a mechanism for one 'where Christ's atonement is a *vicarious, reparative, and penitential act of soteriological representation*' (p. 148) the mechanism of his updated *representational union account* is dependent upon Christ's participation in humanity but is not exhausted by it.

As this shift illustrates, Crisp's relationship with penal substitutionary accounts is not straightforward. While he is critical, his updated account continues to owe 'much to this doctrine' (p. 57). Of the objections he discusses – the problems of sensibility, arbitrariness, divine justice as retributive and inexorable, and transference – the last, Crisp maintains, 'remains perhaps the most significant intellectual problem that defenders of penal substitution must address' (p. 145): 'can the liability for penal debts be transferred from one individual to another?' (p. 144). In seeking a 'middle way' (p. 146) between satisfaction and penal substitutionary accounts, Crisp ultimately decides they can't. To explain why, Crisp employs



conceptual distinctions between notions of substitution, representation, and satisfaction. Here, representation functions as the ‘middle way’. For Crisp, ‘*representation is where one individual acts or speaks on behalf of another person or entity*’ (p. 190), ‘*substitution*’ involves ‘*an act whereby one person or thing is replaced by another person or thing*’ (p. 190), and ‘*satisfaction [...] is an act by means of which the conditions of a moral or legal standard are met*’ (p. 191). Each is vicarious and reparative, none is reducible to the others, and the distinction between representation and substitution is particularly important. As a representative Christ can act on behalf of humanity but Christ is not a substitute for humanity on which the wrath of God is focused in order to satisfy penal demands.

The representation-substitution distinction is also addressed by Hastings. Again, however, his conceptual distinctions are much looser. He affirms J. I. Packer’s description as ‘odd’ those who assert – as Crisp does in his revised account – ‘that Jesus’ death was vicarious and representative’ but ‘deny that it was substitutionary’ (*TA*, p. 221). Ultimately, Packer proclaims, ‘it is a distinction without a difference’, and to describe Christ’s death as vicarious – as Crisp does in his revised account – just is to describe it as substitutionary<sup>3</sup> – which Crisp does not. Despite quoting this approvingly, Hastings immediately reintroduces a distinction: ‘as a representative [Jesus] suffers with us, but as a substitute he suffers for us’. For him ‘*both are true*’ and both are enabled by a ‘participative theology’. The reintroduction of a distinction makes more sense conceptually. It is also more in keeping with Hastings’ desire to ‘adopt an attitude of *fullness*’ where ‘*truths in tension [...] must be held together for the whole truth to be approached,*’ instead of ‘reductionism’ (p. 3) that collapses them into one. It is this desire, perhaps, that enables Hastings to conclude with Jada Strabbing that from among the available options penal substitution is ‘the only one that allows us to be morally transformed and restored to right relationship with God’ (p. 238), even as it is ‘firmly ensconced in participative, filial categories’ and flows from a participatory model which is ‘the primary model or theory in atonement theology’, from which flow all the models” (p. 272).<sup>4</sup> Whether one agrees with these assertions or not,

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. J. I. Packer, “What Did the Cross Achieve? The Logic of Penal Substitution”, *Tyndale Bulletin* (1974): 3–45.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. Jada Twedt Strabbing, “The Permissibility of the Atonement as Penal Substitution”, in ed. Jonathan Kvanvig, *Oxford Studies in Philosophy of Religion*,



Hastings' ultimate conclusions regarding the totality of atonement – that (1) its scope is 'the whole world and its sins', (2) 'it involves the whole history and being of Jesus Christ', and (3) it covers 'every aspect of the nature of sin and its consequences' (p. 294) – provides a challenge to future thinking about atonement.

Where Hastings provides a constructive challenge, Crisp makes a constructive attempt. Whether one is in agreement with his construal of the mechanism of atonement as a vicarious, reparative, and penitential act of soteriological representation or not, Crisp makes clear that the theologian of atonement can no longer be as conceptually loose as they may have previously. Crisp's methodological precision has demonstrated that the act alone not only clarifies theological propositions, it opens up theological opportunities. As with his '*dogmatically minimalist* way of framing Christian doctrine' (*PA*, p. 21), this too 'is a theological virtue' (p. 22). If, as Crisp claims on the one hand, *theosis*, or the uniting of God's creatures to God, is God's ultimate aim in creation and atonement is the mechanism by which God reconciles fallen humanity to Godself; and, as he claims on the other hand, scripture is 'theologically underdeveloped' containing 'hints, intimations, motifs, metaphors, narratives' rather than 'ready-made account[s]' or 'full-orbed understanding[s]' (p. 10), then the theologian's conceptual clarifications in the service of theological constructions are of paramount importance.

Together, *PA* and *TA* make clear that atonement is total and an adequate explanation of what that means requires conceptual clarity and careful theological construction. Toward that end, both make constructive contributions and both are worth the attention of those with an interest in participating.

**Benjamin Keogh**

*Benjamin Keogh is a PhD candidate in Systematic and Historical Theology at the University of St Andrews.*<sup>5</sup>

<https://doi.org/10.15664/tis.v30i2.2674>

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vol. 7, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 239–70.

<sup>5</sup> The author is a PhD candidate under Oliver D. Crisp.

