human beings in the context of the doctrine of creation. It is likely to be valued as much as a work of reference and a guide to the literature as for its relentlessly pursued, overarching argument.

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Oliver D. Crisp, *Approaching the Atonement: The Reconciling Work of Christ*

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Oliver Crisp's book is an introduction to the various theories of atonement – Christ's reconciling mankind to himself through the life and death of Jesus Christ. The (broad) format of the book is this: each chapter outlines a different account of the nature of the atonement, the various objections that account is susceptible to and concludes with a summary assessment. All the main players are represented.

Chapter 3 deals with the ransom theory of the atonement, the author having already discussed and dismissed in chapter 2 the idea that this account was the near-unanimous belief of the early church fathers. This is the view that Christ's death ransoms humanity from the possession of Satan. Crisp helpfully points out that ransom theories should be considered distinct from *Christus Victor* theories, but ultimately concludes that both theories have no viable mechanism.

Chapter 4 deals with Anselm's satisfaction view. It is important to note that penal substitutionary theories are a species of satisfaction theories, and therefore one should not read the Reformers back into Anselm. Crisp thinks Anselm's view is more robust than it is given credit for.

Chapter 5 lays out the moral exemplar view: Jesus reconciles us to God by the power of his great moral example. Hick and Socinus are taken as representatives. Crisp considers exemplar theories to be insufficiently weighty to do the work of atonement by themselves.

In chapter 6 the celebrated penal substitutionary theory – Jesus suffers the punishment we deserve on account of our sins – is discussed. Crisp thinks the objections against it (that it is in conceptual difficulty in its suggestion that an innocent person can be genuinely punished for sin, and that it 'valorises violence') are weighty. He suggests that the considerations he makes in chapter 10 will reduce some of the difficulties with the theory.

Chapter 7 discusses governmental and vicarious penitence doctrines of the atonement. Governmental theories emphasise the rectoral rather than the retributive justice of God. God must show that he is not indifferent to sin, and therefore Jesus suffers. The discussion of the vicarious penitence theory draws on John McLeod Campbell's suggestion that Christ offered penitence on behalf of sinful humanity, not that he was punished in their place. Crisp sees merits and costs in both theories.

Crisp breaks form and devotes the whole of chapter 8 to the problem of 'atoning violence' – an issue I consider entirely unworthy of such extended discussion. The concern is that 'violent acts are morally objectionable, so that bringing about reconciliation or atonement through violent means is morally unsustainable. … For how can God be involved in acts of violence?' (pp. 131–2). It might be thought that there is no getting round the problem because the crucifixion is obviously violent. But there is wriggle room because, as Crisp points out, one does not need to affirm that the violence present was part of the atoning means. Bizarrely, Crisp objects to the view that 'God has an intention to harm Christ in the atonement, even if it is for redemptive purposes', because such a view makes violence 'a morally permissible means to some greater good end, which is morally troubling when applied to the divine nature' (p. 140). Remarks like this are incredible in the light of the scriptural witness. Did not God command the penalty of death by stoning under the Mosaic law? Did not God repeatedly threaten violence through the prophets? 'I will send famine and wild beasts against you, and they will rob you of your children. Pestilence and blood shall pass through you, and I will bring the sword upon you' (Ezek 5:17, ESV). Are not these cases of violence for a righteous and holy end? God himself declares, 'I am the Lord, who strikes' (Ezek 7:9, ESV). Complaints about 'atoning violence' are merely symptoms of the moral softness and obtuseness of our age.

Chapter 9 considers the thought that these many theories of atonement might be combined together into one (a 'mashup' view), or that any account can only ever catch an aspect of the atoning mechanism (a kaleidoscope view), and in chapter 10 he suggests that focusing on the relation of union with Christ might be a profitable way forward.

In summary, I found the prose of the book rather plodding, the discussion not always as rigorous as one would wish and there was an absence of fresh insight. Yet it remains an informative introductory overview to the topic.

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