

Denys Turner, *Dante the Theologian*

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Denys Turner's new book reads Dante's *Comedy* as a work of theology: not simply a poem with theological content, but a work in which theology is done as poetry, and poetic language becomes the most appropriate means of conveying theological truth. Dante, Turner argues, wrote the *Comedy* 'simply for truth's sake – for truth's sake you write theology because there is something that needs saying that calls for it, and you write poetry because that is the only way truthfully to say it' (p. 1). Building on recent work that recognises medieval women religious as theologians (e.g. Caroline Walker Bynum's work on medieval women religious, and Turner's earlier work on Julian of Norwich), Turner makes the case for a 'wholesale revision of what counts as theology in the Middle Ages' (p. xiii), a revision that invites us to rethink the methods and very nature of theology. Turner likewise shows that Dante has significant contributions to make to twenty-first-century theological debates. The book is rich, lucid and insightful, cutting across disciplinary boundaries and offering much not only to those working in theology, but also to those working in Dante studies, literary studies and medieval studies.

The first chapter frames the book as a whole and offers important reflections on theology as poetry, and on the relation between fiction and truth – the ways in which Dante's narrative fiction of a journey through the three realms of the Christian afterlife can, precisely because it is fiction, get at theological truth. The chapter likewise examines the possibility and implications of expanding what is defined as theology and of treating Dante 'as belonging within the family of theologians though he is no Thomas Aquinas or Bonaventure' (p. 15).

The rest of the book is divided into three parts, each made up of a pair of chapters. Part I, 'Hell' (chapters 2 and 3), explores Dante's *Inferno*, including the self-entrapped condition of those in *Inferno*; the nature of Dante's journey through hell as being purgatorial (he travels through it rather than remaining in it eternally); the question of whether there is a state of eternal punishment and, particularly, the question – if there is no such state, is there still theological value to be found in *Inferno*? Turner argues for reading *Inferno* as an anti-narrative, a narrative that 'describes a state of affairs that is at once impossible and revealing' (p. 92). Hell as Dante describes it cannot exist, yet *Inferno* is a necessary fiction, revealing truths about the psychology of evil and the social world that an evil will creates.

Part II, 'Purgatory' (chapters 4 and 5), turns to *Purgatorio*, the second *cantica* of the *Comedy*, and investigates Dante's conception of free choice, grace, original sin and the nature of conversion. Reading Dante alongside Augustine's conversion story in *Confessions*, Turner explores the difference between moral reform and a more radical 'conversion ... of understanding' (p. 187); the role of grace in conversion and its paradoxical relation to freedom (the two joined in a 'causal mutuality': 'grace ... caus[ing] the freedom through which alone it works', p. 198); and the relation between conversion and narrative – how conversion entails a reinterpretation of the events that came before it, a rewriting of the story.

Part III, 'Paradise' (chapters 6 and 7), moves to the last *cantica* of the *Comedy* and examines, among other concerns, conceptions of the mystical; the difference between the eternity of hell and that of paradise; and types of silence and their relation to language. Turner argues that paradise is a 'place of learning' (p. 259), though this is not a learning that happens through striving or repentance or desire for something lacking, nor is it a learning that could ever fail. This learning 'is not hard means to a joy separately defined, for the joy is in the learning itself' (p. 274); it happens, for example, through and as smiles. Turner offers here a particularly beautiful reflection on smiles, music, communication and love.

This summary, of course, has not done justice to the variety and richness of Turner's arguments. The book is illuminating and thought-provoking, and, particularly in its treatment of the interrelation of poetry and theology, is a significant contribution to debates in both Dante studies and theology.

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Oliver D. Crisp, *Participation and Atonement: An Analytic and Constructive Account*

(Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2022), pp. xi + 259. \$29.99

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It is an instance of *fides quaerens intellectum* that the universal church confesses the irreducible fact that Jesus saves and yet, on the basis of the range of biblical imagery, has held open the question of exactly how this redemption is secured. The present volume by Oliver Crisp, professor of analytic theology and director of the Logos Institute at the University of St. Andrews, offers a 'representational union account' of Christ's work as his most recent contribution to this central task of reflecting on the atonement (p. 179). The argument is rich and stimulating, broadly Reformed in its convictions, and the product of ongoing revision over the last fifteen years. In what follows, I will briefly describe the structure of the argument and then offer some appreciative concerns and comments.

The argument builds naturally in three parts. Part 1 addresses preliminary issues, starting with a taxonomy of those 'different levels of theological explanation' encompassing motif and metaphor, doctrine, model and theory (p. 32). This is followed by discussion of the kind of necessity that attaches to God's costly work of atonement. Might not God simply have resolved the situation by sheer will and no payment at all, or perhaps by treating some form of payment as if it were more valuable than it actually is? Crisp concludes that, contrary to such voluntarist notions of divine justice as *acceptilatio* or *acceptatio*, God's work in Christ 'must have an intrinsic, objective moral value...at least proportional to the sin it atones for' (p. 46).

Part 2 displays the author's expert grasp of the Christian tradition. Four approaches to atonement are each given their own chapter: moral exemplarism, ransom, satisfaction