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### Review Of "The Actuality Of Atonement: A Study Of Metaphor, Rationality, And The Christian Tradition" By G.E. Colin

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## The Journal of Religion

Several times throughout this book he broaches the subject of anticipation of the future as *the* key to solving certain aporias into which traditional and modern metaphysics falls. For instance, Whiteheadian process thought upholds the individual and processive nature of reality while ultimately failing to be coherent because “it cannot treat wholeness and individual discreteness as metaphysical principles of equal importance” (p. 125). In the end, Pannenberg charges, process thought robs God of a necessary metaphysical criterion of deity: infinity or absoluteness.

Similarly, Pannenberg criticizes Hegelian thought for an opposite failure. It neglects the contingent and historical aspect of reality in its overwhelming emphasis on the Absolute, which unifies everything. In the end, he charges, Hegel “eliminated the difference between God and the world, thereby replacing the concept of God with that of the absolute Idea” (p. 152).

Pannenberg’s critiques of these (and other) metaphysical concepts of God and the world are extremely cogent. His historical and logical analyses meticulously reveal their inner aporias. But his proposed solution to these aporias—the concept of anticipation—is more asserted than actually defended. *If* it is a metaphysically and theologically defensible idea, it certainly signals a creative advance in thinking about the God-world relationship. However, one suspects that two entirely distinct and incompatible notions of the relationship between the future and the present are stitched together and covered with the idea of anticipation. Either anticipation is prolepsis—the real presence of the future in advance—or it is subjective and provisional preapprehension of the future, in which case there is never any absolute meaning or identity in history. Pannenberg wants it both ways: “By anticipating its essential form in the process of its own formation, a being’s substantial identity is linked together with the notion of process” (p. 125). The question Pannenberg must yet answer is whether this assertion is logically coherent as a *metaphysical* solution to the dilemma of identity and process.

ROGER E. OLSON, *Bethel College*.

COLIN, GUNTON E. *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality, and the Christian Tradition*. Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1989. xiv+222 pp.

This book by Colin E. Gunton, professor of Christian Doctrine at King’s College, University of London, is a theological retrieval of the idea of atonement with the help of current work in philosophy of metaphor. The traditional doctrine of the atonement portrays the manner by which God and world are reconciled through the substitutionary death of Jesus Christ. On the whole, Gunton agrees with this formulation and argues that recent discourse analysis demonstrates how the classical metaphors for atonement drawn from the battlefield, slave market, law court, and sacrificial altar can be rehabilitated in the face of the critics of the traditional doctrine.

Gunton considers the critics of traditional atonement theory—for example, Kant, Schleiermacher, and Hegel—as unable to account for the objective ontological change effected by God in reconciling the world to God’s self through Jesus. Enlightenment and Idealist theologians emphasize the role of Jesus as moral or historical exemplar and do not take seriously the classical christological metaphors—Jesus as victor, judge, and sacrifice—for identifying Christ’s true nature as God’s reconciler. Using current metaphor analysis to argue that tropes

are vehicles of knowledge and not mere ornaments of style, Gunton writes that these three metaphors elucidate who Jesus Christ really is; they are not mere figures of speech incidental to specifying his person and work. The body of the book is devoted to analyzing these key metaphors, and it concludes with a case-study application of the atonement doctrine to contemporary ecclesiology.

Though he is not a narrow defender of Christian orthodoxy, Gunton is not sufficiently critical of the problems associated with the retrieval of the classical and biblical imagery for describing God's reconciling work. Take, for example, his recovery of the image of Jesus as sacrificial victim. To repristinate the language of bloody sacrifice to describe the Divine's reconciling efforts is to come dangerously close to sacralizing the violent death of victims (be it the death of Jesus or someone else) as necessary for the working out of salvation-history. Gunton uses Hebrews to make his case for blood atonement and seems unaware of the social implications of his proposal, but a more biblically nuanced and culturally sensitive theory of atonement (or better, reconciliation) emerges from an antisacrificial reading of the Jesus story. In this account, Jesus' death is the tragic result of human sin, not the necessary sacrifice in a cycle of divinely mandated violence (here, René Girard's work is an important corrective to the traditional approach; see, e.g., *The Scapegoat* [Baltimore, 1986]). *The Actuality of Atonement* tacitly concedes that slave imagery is no longer useful for describing God's relationship to humankind; my suggestion is that the same immanent critique needs to be applied to the classical presumption that God demands the spilling of blood and the destruction of victims in order to effect redemption.

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SCHARLEMANN, ROBERT P. *Inscriptions and Reflections: Essays in Philosophical Theology*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1989. 254 pp.

In some cases, collections of an author's major essays are not especially significant because the essays in question only restate what is found elsewhere in the author's work. This is not the case with this collection. It is an important publishing event in contemporary philosophical theology. Three of the essays are previously unpublished. Five have appeared as chapters in other collections, and eight have appeared as articles in journals. The collection as a whole expresses a powerful and rigorous emerging theological agenda. Ranged in three groups (ontology and theology, science and culture, and pluralism), the essays address a variety of topics (liberal learning, music, politics, pluralism, models, language, trajectories of current Protestant theology) and offer close studies of some important figures (J. Goethe, G. W. F. Hegel, F. Schelling, K. Barth, P. Tillich, and M. Buber). Their framework is largely though not exclusively the intellectual and cultural tradition of continental philosophy and theology from Hegel to deconstruction. In spite of the diversity of consulted movements, figures, and themes, the book is not simply a potpourri. What then is its unity and accomplishment?

Various kinds of radical theology have discovered ways to employ Nietzschean and postmodern thinking to perpetrate once and for all a decisive theocide. God—and with God theology itself—is “ended.” Sensing the metaphysics hiding behind what purports to be mere historical and discursive analyses, Robert P. Scharlemann uses Heidegger's method of *Destruktion* to deconstruct the history of theism. The result is both a proposal about God and—correlative to that—a