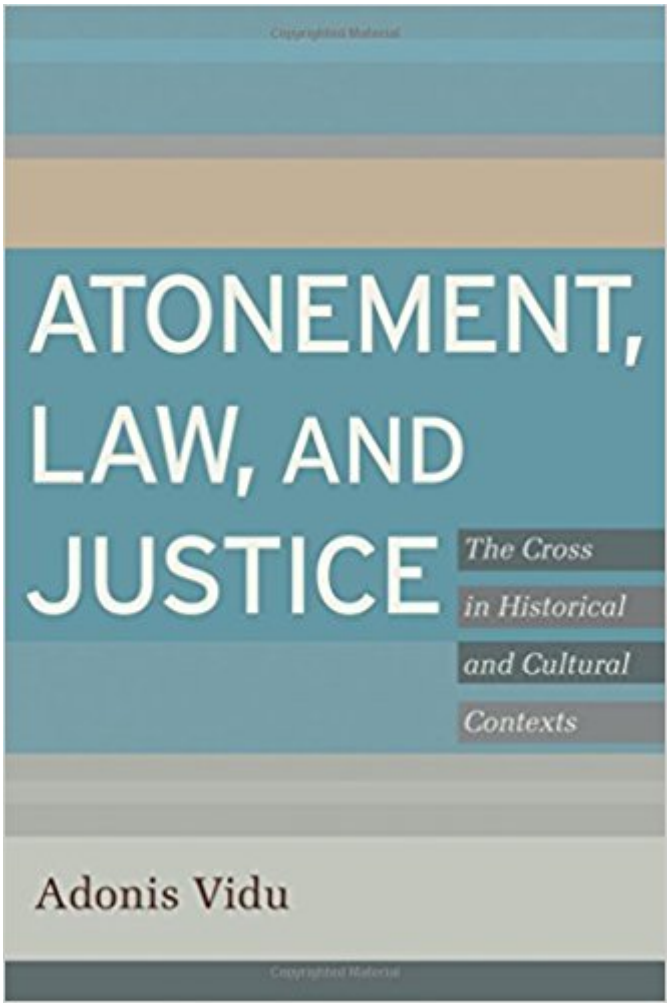
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Atonement, Law, And Justice: The Cross In Historical And Cultural Contexts



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Synopsis

Offers an in-depth analysis of the legal and political contexts within which various major atonement theories arose and provides a helpful resource for contemporary discussions.

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Customer Reviews

Atonement, Law, and Justice provides a critical reading of the history of major atonement theories, offering an in-depth analysis of the legal and political contexts within which they arose. The book engages the latest work in atonement theory and serves as a helpful resource for contemporary discussions."Adonis Vidu has written a learned, thoughtful, and intriguing study of the history of atonement as it relates to concepts of law and justice.Ã Â Of particular interest in the current context of wider discussions of the doctrine of God is Vidu’s articulate exposition and defense of atonement in relation to divine simplicity. This is a fascinating and significant book that repays careful reading."--Carl R. Trueman, Paul Woolley Professor of Church History, Westminster Theological Seminary, Pennsylvania"Adonis Vidu does much more than provide a meticulous and perceptive overview of the history of atonement theology.Ã Â He argues that we understand this history properly only by tracing the medieval interlacing of justice and law and their disentanglement in the modern period. And by linking the doctrine of divine simplicity to God’s agency in the crucifixion, Vidu presents a nuanced plea for the inclusion of the role of punishment in a fully-orbed understanding of the death of Christ."--Hans Boersma, J. I. Packer Professor of Theology, Regent College, Vancouver; author of Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross"The story of how the Christian doctrine of the atonement developed is both fascinating and important. Too often, however, it is told

without proper attention to the importance of various intellectual contexts. In this work, Vidu calls clichÃƒÂ©s into question and works to show how different models of the atonement are related to varied notions of justice and law in the Western intellectual tradition. It is a work that will open further inquiry, and it will repay careful study."--Thomas H. McCall, associate professor of biblical and systematic theology, Trinity Evangelical Divinity School

Adonis Vidu (PhD, University of Nottingham) is associate professor of theology at Gordon-Conwell Theological Seminary in South Hamilton, Massachusetts, and is the author of several books, including Theology after Neo-Pragmatism. He previously taught at Emmanuel University and at the University of Bucharest in his home country of Romania.

Vidu's primary thesis in this book is that "the history of atonement thinking could be read as an ongoing conversation with the history of thinking about justice and the law." He is clear on the fact that he does not think justice theories explain the development of atonement theory, rather that theologians are influenced by contemporary theories of justice and that contemporary atonement theories also influence theories of justice. In order to show the relationship between theories of justice and atonement theories Vidu takes the reader on at +2,000 year long journey detailing various theories of justice and their relationship to atonement theories. He begins by tracing the contours of justice and divine forgiveness in ancient Greece and Rome, however this is primarily for the purpose of setting up a discussion of Patristic thoughts on justice, the law, and Christos Victor (or dramatic theories of atonement). Here he covers Gregory of Nyssa and Augustine's understanding of law and of atonement. Vidu goes on to address what he calls the "Legal Revolution" during the medieval period. During this period law became more professionalized than ever, and canon law came to the forefront. This created a shift from the patristic age, which saw justice as primarily about reconciliation to seeing justice as objective and commensurate with divine justice. This leads the the "legal based" atonement theories of Anselm and Aquinas, though Dun Scotus bucks this trend. However Dun Scotus deviation from the norm can still be understood as participating within the same overall conversation - except he concludes that law is completely arbitrary, so atonement need not have occurred in a way that "satisfies" the conditions of justice. Vidu also discusses Abelard's atonement theory, which contrary to popular belief still has justice at its center point. Eventually we get to the Reformation, here the relationship between Law and Atonement becomes even more complicated - due to diverging views of the nature and purpose of the Mosaic law. This variance in views on the Mosaic law leads to a split between how Luther

(crudely anti-law) and Calvin (crudely pro-law) understand the atonement. Modernity however represents a completely different shift in the conversation. During modernity morality was severed from legality and law began to be defined primarily as the will of the people. This led to the search for atonement theories which emphasized morality over the legal nature of atonement. Finally we get to the postmodern period which Vidu believes is tied together by its rejection of violence within atonement. Post-modernism has rejected any and all violence and has rejected law as a form of perpetuating violence, and therefore tries to disentangle God from this violence, thereby rejecting violent atonement theories.The most interesting chapter in the book is the final chapter, Adonis Vidu's discussion of atonement theory and divine simplicity. In this chapter he argues that tradition by and large has always affirmed Divine Simplicity the upshot of this affirmation is that it will affect the way we describe divine action. Unlike all other agents God's actions spring uniquely from his nature, in the sense that they have unity in ways that are unlike human agents. Human agents are fragmented in a sense, we often feel "a strife of attributes," God however experiences no such strife because God is simple. That is, there is no action of God that is more just than loving or more loving than just, etc. because all of God's actions are motivated by all of God's attributes, which just are God's being. Vidu notes that this has several implications for atonement theory:1) God never enacts certain traits more than others - God simply is his attributes. This makes the opposition of love and wrath impossible. While his attributes remain distinct they are never in competition.2) There is unity in divine action. This means that the Father cannot stand against the Son, etc. The Godhead is the subject of each divine action, the works of the trinity are undivided.3) God is not moved from wrath to mercy. Divine simplicity and immutability does not allow this. There can be no change in how God feels about humanity, only his treatment of humanity has changed.The final upshot of his thesis is that since God - being simple - acts in different ways than human beings do, we cannot strictly speak about law, justice, and atonement as tough God were simply some really big, wise, powerful human being. God's justice, and how he enacts justice, is different than our justice and how we enact it. At best we can speak of God's justice analogically, not univocally.Overall this was a very fascinating book. A couple of my biggest takeaways were that -1) The Patristic theologians (contrary to popular belief) really were concerned about justice, though their understanding of justice is different than ours,2) Abelard's moral exemplar theory (unlike modern moral exemplar theories) really is concerned about justice too, and3) Divine simplicity is vital to the doctrine of atonement.If you are looking for a book that is both a survey of atonement theories in their historical and cultural contexts as well as a constructive contribution to the atonement conversation then look no further, because you get both of those things in Atonement, Law, and Justice. This book is definitely a

contender for my top books of 2014 list.Note: I received this book courtesy of the publisher in exchange for an impartial review.

Atonement, Law and Justice: The Cross in Historical and Cultural Contexts by Adonis Vidu is a dense work that seeks to explore how atonement theory has been understood throughout various cultures. What Vidu especially seeks to demonstrate is how understanding of the role of law and punishment in society affected a theology of the cross and vice versa.Vidu accomplishes this by going through the thinking of the Patristics, Medieval theologians, Reformation theologians, Modern (or Enlightment) thinkers, and Postmodern thinkers. He normally highlights the thinking of the most influential thinkers and draws parallels to thinking about the role of judges, punishment and retribution in society at that time.He concludes at the end of this massive study that the doctrine of divine simplicity is needed in order to recapture the heart of penal substitution. Since all of God's attributes are perfectly aligned (balanced? I am not sure a good word for this), we must not construe God as either more or less loving at the cross.In one of my favorite quotes from the book, Vidu states "First, simplicity dictates that no matter what solution we come to on the issue of hell, we must not construe God as less loving, more just than loving, Second, theologically, the doctrine of simplicity helps us to say that, although God is fully present in all the majesty of his attributes, in each divine action, given the contingencies of the circumstances of those actions, certain traits are more easily recognizable by human selves." (Loc. 5411)There lies the heart of this book. Vidu seeks to reestablish the doctrine of penal substitution by reminding the reader of a very old doctrine, the doctrine of simplicity. I love that! I love how Vidu draws his massive study together and places it squarely here. I couldn't agree more. Again and again, Vidu demonstrates how by simply reminding ourselves how God is balanced in all he does, we can regain a healthy understanding of the atonement.However, I cannot recommend this work for everyone. It is a tough, tough read. It is nuanced, and one must have a firm grasp on atonement theory as well as legal theory. I am rusty on legal theory throughout history so this made the work extremely trying to read. It is heavily footnoted and thorough. It reads like a dissertation.Keep in mind, however, that as far as a historical work on the atonement goes, I think this is a winner. His chapters on the Pastristic thinkers and Reformation thinkers were great. It is a necessary work for those engaged in historical theology to read. For the pastor (or those with limited time), read the last chapter where Vidu essentially recaps his entire book and begins constructing his argument. It is a great chapter and boils the whole work down well.*Thanks to Baker Academic for providing a free review copy of this work in exchange for a fair review.*

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