Marilyn McCord Adams, *Christ and Horrors: The Coherence of Christology.* Current Issues in Theology 4. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006. 344 pp. Paper. ISBN 9780521686006. $31.99.

Marilyn McCord Adams' opening question encapsulates much of her book's promise, as well as its potential problems: "What does Christology look like, if rescuing the world from horrendous evils is the Savior's principal job?" (ix). Effectively a sequel to her *Horrendous Evils and the Goodness of God* (Ithaca: Cornell, 1999), this volume gives its predecessor's theodicy a christological direction, with a resulting soteriological accent. Inevitable human participation in, and vulnerability to, horrors—evils that destroy any chance at positive meaning-making in the lives of their perpetrators and victims—demand that Christ himself participate in horrors in order to defeat them, a portrayal of the atonement that Adams defends with convincing skill. But newcomers to philosophy and atonement theory had best strap in: phrasing horrific problems as *toxic* and *non-optimal*, this study entails thorough metaphysical engagement that may prove overwhelming. Adams' casting of Christology as a question of *roles* and *jobs* is effective, but this categorization isolates her theory from other soteriological motifs.

Adams follows an introduction to her natural theology's methodological problems with a cosmological hypothesis: essentially, "divine participation in horrors defeats their *prima facie* life-ruining powers" (40). She also explains the scope of the horrors themselves and the biblical basis for her experiment. This explanation continues in the next chapter, shaping the effects of Christ's work as horror-defeater. Themes of *vulnerability* and *healing* emerge here, developing into crucial insight later on, as with the need for Christ himself to be vulnerable, possessing a mind that could be "blown" by the magnitude of evils experienced during his "horror-studded" earthly career (69–71, 142 and 197). Two of the philosophically heaviest chapters show how Adams construes Christ as God-man, with the Incarnation as central to God's *unitive* aims for creation, first in psychological parlance, then on metaphysical terms. Julian of Norwich and others provide support for a subsequent theory of inclusivity: Jesus is "powerful and resourceful enough to trample the chaos, calm the storm of our inward

dysfunction," yet also one "to Whom the human experience is not alien, Someone to Whom the worst has happened, Someone to Whom a human nature still belongs" (168).

This theory precedes Adams' central theme, the primacy of Christ as the core of cosmic coherence (Col. 1:15-20). Here the author begins to balance her metaphysically-high Christology with a materially-low aspect, grounded in the Incarnation's immanence, the potential for horror-defeat and healing (mediated through the church) within this material world, and the deeply embodied sense of anticipated human resurrection. Two final chapters complete Adams' study, with the first on Christ's cultic role as priest and victim in sacrificial contexts. The second is like unto it: Christ is ever present with his people at the altar, in corporeal "impanation" (so that interaction is metaphysically possible, as Christ's "bread nature" body is seen, touched, hungered for, and ingested as Eucharistic nourishment (304–06, following earlier articles).

Much of Adams' work is commendable. The interwoven logic of philosophical Christology and soteriology is virtually seamless, even when the author draws from a wide array of ecclesial-historical and biblical sources—though textual indices would have made productive additions to her thorough subject index. Adams' delineation of horrors is precise, comprehensive in addressing the needs of perpetrators and victims, sensitive to those who unwittingly visit horrors upon others, literate (invoking Dostoyevsky), ontologically indebted to Tillich, and politically savvy (briefly incorporating the threat of torture and beheading, evoking horrors from both sides in the Iraq conflict); if her readers question her interpretation of sin as merely symptomatic of the deeper problem of participation in horrors, they are still forced to grapple with her cogent argument for Christ as rescuer, a motif richly ingrained in the New Testament.

This leads to the first of two complications: Adams defines her appeal to Scripture as systematic, not historical. She offers her succinct understanding of Scripture early in the volume, where the NT serves as a data set for positing a theological agenda. Some readers may struggle with her articulation, as her attempt to establish the coherence of

NT Christology risks undermining the cohesion of the NT canon. She defines the NT documents as "*a variety of loosely integrated systematic proposals* which—insofar as Scripture is authoritative—demand the Christologian's serious consideration"; they reflect "*an attempt to re-systematize*, to offer complementary and overlapping theological interpretations of, Jesus' human career" (22–23, italics hers). This definition fails to account for Paul and the authors of Hebrews and Revelation, who are seldom directly concerned with the details of Jesus' "human career," and it leaves the reader wondering how the "loose integration" of material can be referred to as *Scripture* with a capital *S*. This ambivalence itself may be useful, as Adams draws from it a compelling picture of the crucifixion as the cursed conclusion of Jesus' mission to save human persons from the ruinous power of horrors—hinting at the cosmic scale of horror-perpetration, and the great pains God takes in overcoming such evils. Adams' synthesis is sound, but educators will want to supplement her work with other recent volumes, such as Hans Boersma's *Violence, Hospitality, and the Cross: Reappropriating the Atonement Tradition* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2004), to keep students from neglecting alternative atonement perspectives.

The second difficulty takes the form of a surprising absence. Concerned throughout with Christ and his atoning role and work as horror-defeater, Adams never mentions the *Christus Victor* motif of triumph over sin and hell, neither in the form original to Gustaf Aulén, nor in those developed by Boersma, René Girard, Thomas Finger, or Gregory Boyd; Denny Weaver's *narrative* Christus Victor approach represents a lost opportunity for dialogue, in emphasizing narrative (matching Adams' attention to God's "soteriological plot," 189) and non/violence. The distinctions Adams draws between atonement frameworks (apocalyptic, legal, etc.) are not as rigid as she claims: as Christ's "job descriptions" inform one another, Adams' participatory rescue is an invaluable counterpart to triumph. Some acknowledgement of this interrelationship would have made a powerful case still more persuasive.

Matthew Forrest Lowe

McMaster Divinity College