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Review of *Christ and Horrors: The Coherence of Christology* by Marilyn McCord Adams

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Christ and Horrors: The Coherence of Christology. By Marilyn McCord Adams. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. xii + 331 pages. \$89 cloth, \$33.99 pb.

A starting point (and subtitle) for Marilyn McCord Adams's study is that the Christ is "the One in Whom all things hold together" and that Christology is the "centerpiece of systematic theology" that integrates the creed. Christology is likewise the point "from which we reason up to the Trinity, down to creation, out through the Church to the world" (1).

Adams then explores the shape of Christology in light of the book of Job instead of Adam's fall, understanding the savior's role in terms of rescuing humanity from *horrors* instead of sin. In this regard, Adams offers a fascinating and creative synthesis of Christology and theodicy. She understands "horrors" in terms of evils so terrible that those who are victimized by them experience dehumanization, degrading the meaning-making structures and value of their lives. For example, Nazi concentration camps "aimed not merely to kill but to dehumanize their victims, by treating them as worse than cattle to break down their personalities and to reduce their social instincts to raw animal aggression and self-preservation" (33).

The anthropology of our human situation is that "God has created us radically vulnerable to horrors." We have been created as "embodied persons, personal animals, enmattered spirits" in a world of "non-optimality" and scarcity (37). Bad things happen to us in this "horror-infested" world (45). In a world like this, our horror-participation" is "inevitable" (189). Ultimately each person will face the depersonalization and degradation of death (208-209).

Adams urges that justice is not the answer for horrors. Our capacity to cause horrors "unavoidably exceeds" our ability to experience or even to grasp the horrors we perpetrate. When it comes to causing horrors, we know not what we do, so that there is a "vast surplus left over" in terms of moral responsibility for any perpetration of horrors (35). The badness of the horrors caused by the perpetrator is "unavoidably beyond his/her powers fully to conceive" (37). Punishment of the perpetrator will not make the victim whole, and retributive

justice (“imposing horror for horror . . . torturing and beheading terrorists who torture and behead”) will merely degrade those who impose it (37).

The answer for horrors is not justice but Christ. Instead of magically preventing our horrors, Christ shares the horrors with us, and “binds Himself to the human race in a mutuality of horror-defeat” (201). Adams states that God’s solidarity with us in horror-participation serves to weave our experience of horrors “into the warp and woof of our own witting or unwitting intimate personal relationship with God” (40). This defeats the meaning-destroying and life-ruining powers of the horrors.

The Divine Word, the Son, takes our human nature for us and our salvation. The meaning of his human life seems to be utterly destroyed as he is victimized by the horrors perpetrated upon him. But then the “ironic reversal takes hold” as Christ “defeats the power of horrors to destroy the positive meaning of our lives, and so fulfils the positive purpose of His own human career” (275).

Christ embraces the sacrifice of suffering and identification with us in our horrors. Adams’s soteriology is participatory, not forensic. God is with us and for us in the midst of the worst of our horrors, and we are not cut off from our deepest meaning by horrors. We may even participate in God’s generous defiance of the horrors. For example, Adams notes that martyr priests have offered themselves to others “in ways that risk further horror-participation,” bearing witness “to the outrage of human horror and to the faithfulness and resourcefulness of God,” and challenging others “to scorn horror-producing powers of darkness, and to fill up the sufferings of Christ (Colossians 1:24)!” (312). In this regard, Adams is close to William Stringfellow, who urged defiance of the powers of death as embodied in the horrible social evils of his day.

Adams situates theodicy within the coherence of christology in a way that is convincing and most interesting. *Christ and Horrors* can be a challenging book to read, and I believe it will be helpful for students with significant background in theology. I would be reluctant to use this book with undergraduates.

—Robert B. Slocum