
Richards, E., and B. O'Brien. *Misreading Scripture with Western Eyes*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2012. 220 pp. Paper, \$16.00.

The authors of this book are apparently student and teacher, both from a conservative, evangelical background. Thus the book offers reflection on practice.

When I was part of the pastoral team in a large multicultural church in the Washington, DC, area, we pastors envied pastors of (presumably) all-White “First churches” down the road from us. This book is written for those churches making the transition from mono-cultural to multi-cultural. And since multicultural congregations are increasingly the norm, this book will be helpful to Christians worshiping in multicultural settings and to pastors of these congregations. It will also be useful to those leading out in home missions and short-term mission trips.

Beginning with easier topics, such as race and language, it progresses to more difficult topics: individualism, shame/honor, time, and the self-centeredness of North American (church) culture.

In all, this volume will help Westerners take a studied look at themselves and how they read the Bible, in helpful contrast to the intentions of the writers.

Each chapter ends with a list of “Points to Ponder,” which will guide conversations and study groups. The last (unnumbered) chapter offers the reader five recommendations to becoming a multicultural congregation.

Berrien Springs, Michigan

BRUCE CAMPBELL MOYER

Stump, Eleonore. *Wandering in Darkness: Narrative and the Problem of Suffering*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010. xix + 668 pp. Hardcover, \$110.

Eleonore Stump says she has wanted to write this book all her adult life (vi). It brings to fruition years of reflection on the topic and incorporates material from various series of lectures, including the Gifford Lectures of 2003, with which it shares its title. In view of its sweeping scope and meticulous construction, *Wandering in Darkness* certainly rates as one of the most important books on the topic to appear in recent years.

“Wandering” may aptly describe the experience of suffering, but it hardly applies to this discussion. Like an experienced guide, Stump takes her readers on a well-planned itinerary at a deliberate pace. She tells us just where we are going at the outset, reminds us of our destination at regular intervals, and carefully explains what everything she directs attention to contributes to our progress.

On the other hand, the word “problem” correctly identifies the philosophical objective of the book. Its overarching purpose is to provide an effective response to the problem of evil, the challenge that suffering poses to the credibility of theism. Invoking a familiar philosophical distinction, Stump repeatedly asserts that her objective is to provide a defense, not a theodicy. In

contrast to a theodicy, which seeks to provide morally sufficient reasons for God to allow suffering in *this* world, a defense seeks only to describe a *possible* world that contains both God and suffering. And whereas the claims of a successful theodicy *must* be true, it is sufficient for an adequate defense if its claims *may* be true (19, 155, 377, 389).

Stump is also specific as to the sort of suffering she has in mind. Suffering comes in many forms, from animal pain to genocide, but her concern here is not the suffering of sentient beings in general, but only the suffering of “mentally fully functional human beings” (4, 378).

To construct the general framework of her defense, Stump employs the thought of Thomas Aquinas, in particular his view of the human good (81). On Aquinas’s account, the ultimate proper object of love is God; the ultimate good for any human person is shared union with God (95); and the ultimate end of the love of persons is “union with God shared in the union with other human beings” (91). Love can achieve its goal, however, only if the one loved is undivided, and the perpetual obstacle to love in human experience is a “willed loneliness,” which results in a divided self. Neither God nor other human persons can enjoy union with someone who is alienated from herself (156). God’s remedy for this universal post-Fall affliction, as Aquinas describes it, is a surrender to divine grace. Operative grace is active in divine justification; cooperative grace, in sanctification. Together, they bring about the moral and spiritual regeneration “which is requisite for internal integration, which is necessary for all love” (172).

For Aquinas, suffering plays an integral role in this healing process. It is “God’s medicine for the psychic disorder of post-Fall human beings.” And because suffering helps to “ward off the worst things” that can happen to us— isolation from God—and “provide the best thing”—“glory in shared union with God” (398-401), there are “morally sufficient reasons” for God to allow it (396).

Helpful as Aquinas’s thought is in addressing the problem of suffering, Stump says there are important facets of the experience that he does not account for. Besides a loving union with God and others, human flourishing also requires something quite different, namely, “the desires of the heart” (Ps 37:4-5), and suffering results when someone fails to get the desires of her heart or has and loses her heart’s desire (7). A successful defense must therefore envision a way for us to achieve the desires of our hearts in a world where suffering interferes.

To do this, Stump argues, we must go beyond conventional analytic philosophy, with its preoccupation with knowledge. Since desires of the heart are intensely personal, the suffering involved in losing them is intensely personal as well, and we can grasp its distinctive qualities only by looking at the experience of individual, concrete sufferers. This is why narratives are essential to the sort of defense that Stump has in mind. Only narrative makes available second-person knowledge, or “Franciscan knowledge” (51), that is, intimate or shared knowledge of another person’s experience. As the discovery of mirror neurons demonstrates, human beings are capable of

sharing, indeed participating in, the experiences of other persons (69-71); and personal stories, or narratives, are the means by which such knowledge becomes available.

Stump considers the loss of the heart's desires in the biblical narratives of four representative figures—Job, Abraham, Samson, and Mary of Bethany. Taken together, she maintains, these four characters provide “an iconic representation of the panoply of human suffering,” in which all the modes of suffering are present. In their stories we find the pain and agony of the innocent victim, the evil of self-destruction, the heartsickness of losing what one loves the most, and the misery of being unwanted and shamed (375). In their “messy richness,” these accounts “inform in subtle ways our intuition and judgments, just as real-life experiences do” (373). These stories do much more than illustrate abstract philosophical points. They provide direct insight into the actual experience of suffering.

Not only do these four narratives reveal the distinctive qualities of individual sufferings, they also show that sufferers who are originally denied their heart's desires may ultimately achieve these desires within a personal relationship with God. “[W]hen a person weaves her heart's desires into a deepest desire for God,” Stump says, “it is possible for those desires to be transformed [. . .] so that even the worst external circumstances are not sufficient to prevent their being satisfied somehow in the union of love with God” (473). What the sufferer thought he or she most wanted, and failed to realize, is ultimately gained in “refolded” form within an intimate, second-person, relationship with God. In a union with God, each sufferer does, in fact, find the desires of his or her heart fulfilled. Remarkably, “the suffering that breaks the heart yields for the sufferer the desires of her heart” (479).

Moreover, within this intimate relationship with God, *mirabile dictu*, not only does the sufferer achieve a new form of what was lost, what he or she ultimately achieves seems to the sufferer “more worth having than what she originally hoped for” (473). Mary of Bethany, for example, enjoys a reunion with her brother Lazarus that is richer than what she hoped for before Jesus raised him from the dead. What Samson gained in his relationship to God at the end of his life was greater than everything he lost through betrayal and humiliation. And to cite a nonbiblical example, after the one thing John Milton desired more than all else, viz., the triumph of the Puritan cause, was lost, he wrote the majestic poetry for which he is known. But in that poetry, which would not have come about had Puritanism succeeded, the movement he cherished achieved an expression that was arguably greater than what his original vision entailed (469).

This concept of the way in which the desires of a person's heart may ultimately be received returns us to the essential theme of the Thomistic defense, and the integration of these two components completes Stump's response to the problem of suffering. Recall that for Aquinas the supreme human good, the essential requirement for human flourishing, is union with God. With the realization that the desires of the heart can ultimately be fulfilled in intimate relationship to God, we find a defense that addresses both

concerns. Within an intimate connection with God a person can realize both the fulfillment of human flourishing and the achievement of one's heart's desire. "When a person takes God as her deepest desire, what is highest on the scale of objective value and what is deepest on the scale of subjective value for her becomes the same for her." This weaves into a unity all the things a person cares about, her flourishing and all her heart's desires, which she now desires as gifts of God (449).

In sum, the Thomistic defense, when complemented by the insights contained in biblical narratives, provides an answer to "the central question" that suffering poses to religious belief" (455). There are, indeed, morally sufficient reasons for God to allow suffering.

By any standard, *Wandering in Darkness* is a remarkable achievement, well deserving of the generous praise it has received. It presents the work of a mature scholar addressing a fundamental philosophical question, drawing on a lifetime of careful research, thoroughly conversant with all the relevant discussions of the topic, as well as the various subtopics and secondary issues surrounding it. Moreover, the discussion is not merely informed, informative, and intellectually stimulating; it is personally moving. It obviously flows from the author's profound investment in the issue, and it is virtually impossible not to be drawn into the sort of personal concern that radiates from its pages.

Impressive as it is, this proposal, as do all treatments of suffering, leaves us with some lingering questions. One concerns the limited scope of the suffering Stump addresses, given the extensive, not to say elaborate, nature of her argument. Granted, one cannot do everything in a single book, as she says; but even though it is certainly worthwhile to address the suffering of fully functioning adults, there are other forms of suffering that pose enormous obstacles to theism. The suffering of children and the horror of the Holocaust, for example, are frequently cited as the most obvious reasons to question God's existence. One wonders how the defense Stump formulates would address such phenomena.

Another concern involves the limited time frame that factors into Stump's defense. In their well-known responses to the problems that suffering presents to theism, Marilyn McCord Adams and John Hick invoke the concept that human life will continue beyond death and that it is in the life to come that the negative effects of suffering will ultimately be redeemed. Granted, Stump seems to hold out the possibility that this is where some will finally enjoy union with God (Job's first ten children, for example), but the idea does not play a significant role in these reflections. Instead, the sufferings of the four figures that receive her detailed attention—Job, Abraham, Samson, and Mary of Bethany—all experienced an intimate union with God before their earthly lives ended.

Then there is a question that seems to hover over every attempt to reduce suffering as an obstacle to belief in God. Is the net effect of suffering's presence in the world ultimately positive or negative? Granted, Stump maintains that some good things are irrevocably lost in this life, and the hope provided by the stories she analyzes and the Thomistic defense she appeals to is "the

redemption of evil, not its elimination” (479, cf. 256). But she also maintains that the sufferer will regard the benefits eventually acquired following the loss of her heart’s desire “more worth having” than what she originally hoped for. If so, we have to ask if anything of real significance is truly lost. If the good things that eventually follow, and necessarily presuppose, suffering prevent us from regretting that it ever happened, one has to wonder if its net effect is really negative. In spite of Stump’s insistence that suffering is essentially negative and must be opposed and resisted, her defense leaves me with the impression that the potential gains that follow suffering outweigh the loss it involves.

But this presents us with a dilemma that seems to attach to any defense or theodicy. The more we emphasize the negativity and horror of suffering, the less effective our attempts to defuse its power will seem. Conversely, the more effective our responses to suffering become, the more we appear to minimize its negative character. *Wandering in Darkness* leaves me wondering if, in Stump’s scheme of things, the particular benefits to which suffering can lead within one’s intimacy with God ultimately outweigh the pain of the suffering itself. I see a similarity here to Marilyn McCord Adams’s view that horrendous evils will be ultimately defeated because their victims will come to see them as making an irreplaceable and indispensable contribution to their intimate relationship with God.

The neglected alternative is that, whatever gains may come about in the wake of suffering, its presence in the world involves a net loss. In other words, our present world is a tragic world. The distinctive goods that could only be realized in the wake of suffering do not, in the final analysis, lead to its “defeat” in the way that some have argued. Instead, the world would have been better, all things considered, had suffering never come about. To some, this will seem to limit or detract from the power of God to overcome suffering and/or to underestimate, if not undermine, the good things that can be achieved in response to it. But elevating the potential benefits that can come about through suffering—or if not exactly through suffering, through creative responses to suffering—seems to minimize the negativity of the experience and turn it into something ultimately beneficial.

Whatever her response to such concerns might be, there is no doubt that Stump’s remarkable achievement will attract admiration and stimulate discussion for years to come.

Loma Linda University

RICHARD RICE

Ulrich, Eugene. *The Biblical Qumran Scrolls: Transcriptions and Textual Variants*, vols. 1-3. Leiden: Brill, 2013. xvi + 796 pp. Paper, \$99.

It was in the extremely sensitive political situation of post-WWII Palestine, right before the outbreak of the 1948 war, that the first manuscripts were discovered close to Qumran near the Dead Sea and Jericho. The Bedouin Muhammed edh-Dhib was the first to accidentally find the first three scrolls,