



---

Volume 58 | Issue 2

Article 9

---

2015

## Naselli and Snoeberger's "Perspectives on the Extent of the Atonement: Three Views" (Critical Review)

Paul Hartog

*Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary*

*The Christian Librarian* is the official publication of the Association of Christian Librarians (ACL). To learn more about ACL and its products and services please visit <http://www.acl.org/>

Follow this and additional works at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/tcl>

---

### Recommended Citation

Hartog, Paul (2015) "Naselli and Snoeberger's "Perspectives on the Extent of the Atonement: Three Views" (Critical Review)," *The Christian Librarian*: Vol. 58 : Iss. 2 , Article 9.

Available at: <http://digitalcommons.georgefox.edu/tcl/vol58/iss2/9>

This Critical Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ George Fox University. It has been accepted for inclusion in *The Christian Librarian* by an authorized editor of Digital Commons @ George Fox University. For more information, please contact [arolfe@georgefox.edu](mailto:arolfe@georgefox.edu).

# Critical Review

---



## **Perspectives on the Extent of the Atonement: Three Views,**

edited by Andrew Naselli and Mark A. Snoeberger. Nashville: B &H Academic, 2015. 256 pp. \$24.99. ISBN 9781433669712.

*Reviewed by Paul Hartog, Professor and Director of Library Services, Faith Baptist Bible College and Theological Seminary, Ankeny, IA*

This volume takes the customary “multiple views” approach of several authors building a theological case in a debated topic, followed by responsive interactions with the opposing contributors. Carl Trueman, who represents the “definite atonement” perspective, is the Paul Woolley Professor of Church History at Westminster Theological Seminary. John Hammett (the “multiple intentions” view) is Professor of Systematic Theology at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary. Grant Osborne, the voice for “general atonement,” is Professor of New Testament at Trinity Evangelical Divinity School. Thomas McCall assisted with the “general atonement” responses to the other authors, due to Osborne’s recent health limitations. The editors of the volume are Andrew Naselli (Bethlehem College and Seminary) and Mark Snoeberger (Detroit Baptist Theological Seminary), who contributes an introductory survey of the debate’s salient factors (pp. 1–17).

Carl Trueman’s deft representation of definite atonement emphasizes the larger framework of biblical theology as a whole and also the broader history of the church. Trueman insists that “we need to understand exactly what questions the church asked that led to the formulation [of definite atonement] as we have it” (p. 200). He argues that the extent of the atonement is best seen as “a necessary inference” of the nature of the atonement (p. 22; cf. p. 54), contending that a substitutionary representation necessitates a limited atonement (contra confessional Lutherans and others). He also highlights the unified intention of the Trinitarian members and Christ’s high priestly mediatorial work (with the latter perhaps functioning as his polemical ace card). Trueman maintains that a particularist atonement “results from seeing the New Testament teaching on Christ’s atonement as an antitype to the Old Testament typical sacrifices,” and he traces the Old Testament trajectories of both priesthood and offering (p. 31; cf. p. 208). In structuring this analogical case, he dismisses the distinction between provision and application (pp. 31–32), at least in the case of Christ, while acknowledging that not all Israelites were ultimately saved (p. 44 n. 37). And he draws upon the “double payment” objection (p. 41), although others have challenged such argumentation by citing Ephesians 2:3 (cf. p. 165).

Grant Osborne's chapter takes up the cause of general atonement as the "better and more holistic" view (p. 127). He admits that his argument for general atonement is grounded in a specific iteration of that position, as found particularly in Wesleyan-Arminianism (pp. 83-84). In perhaps a surprising move, Osborne spends twenty pages of his essay listing and examining biblical texts that seem to favor particular redemption (pp. 85-104). He emphasizes a universal love of God and the resistible nature of divine grace. "A huge question here is whether people can reject God's will and whether his drawing power can ever fail to achieve its purpose" (p. 124). He thus argues for a universal adequacy of Christ's atonement that is not experienced apart from personal faith made possible by "prevenient grace" (p. 117, 126). Osborne's stance also entails a prescient faith view of election (pp. 104, 126). Less convincing tactics include his subdued explanation of God's "efficacious" purpose (pp. 96-98), his assumption that Jesus prays for the unbelieving world (implying unanswered christological intercession; pp. 99, 126), and his loose application of the charge of "hyper-Calvinism" (p. 111; cf. pp. 137, 218). Moreover, the Great Commission's mandate to proclaim the gospel universally is used as evidence (p. 118; cf. p. 139), even though most supporters of definite atonement integrate a general offer within their system.

The final perspective is the multiple-intentions view of the atonement, authored by John Hammett. He maintains that there are three intentions in the atonement: universal, particular, and cosmic (p. 149). God's redemptive intentions in the atonement, therefore, must be differentiated as provision (universal) and appropriation (particular; p. 153). Accordingly, one should not overlook "the distinction between objective provision and subjective application" (p. 164), because Christ died to provide salvation for all and to secure the salvation of some (p. 170). "But these two intentions – to objectively provide forgiveness for all and to subjectively apply it to some – are not contradictory" (p. 171; cf. 135). A weaker link in the chapter may be the attempt to connect the particularist application of the atonement to subjective moral influence views (pp. 179-180). And Hammett's discussion of physical healing in the atonement only focuses upon the "health and wealth gospel" types, without taking into account more restrained versions (i.e., as found in the Christian and Missionary Alliance tradition; p. 192). Furthermore, pages 160 and 161 discuss shifts in tenor among nineteenth-century Calvinistic Baptist confessions of faith without reference to the influential New Hampshire Confession of 1833.

The book concludes with an irenic wrap-up by Andrew Naselli: "Our major goal," he declares, "is to help Christians better understand this controversial issue and consequently disagree with their brothers and sisters in Christ in a God-glorifying way" (p. 214). Glimpses of such collegiality appear among the volume's contributors. Hammett acknowledges "that every system does have problems, that there are places where 'modesty in the face of unfathomable mystery' is the only appropriate

response” (p. 78). “The issue is not whether there is a problem,” concurs Trueman, “it is simply in which part of the system the problem manifests itself” (p. 58). Osborne even admits, after a thorough examination, that he appreciates the definite atonement perspective “more than I ever thought possible” (p. 104). “Finally,” declares Osborne, “for both sides a great deal more humility is needed. We are all guilty of theological arrogance, thinking we know more than we do” (p. 126).

Both Trueman and Osborne contend that one cannot address isolated proof texts apart from broader theological concerns (pp. 22-23, 126-127). Such an admission raises underlying questions concerning the hermeneutical interplay of biblical exegesis, biblical theology, and systematic theology. Regarding historical theology, both John Calvin and John Owen are in the upper trio of most commonly cited sources, per the index (along with Thomas Schreiner). Jacob Arminius, however, is curiously neglected in the index (although he appears on pp. 7, 159, 160, and 201 in the text). Kevin Bauder, whose work is mentioned on pp. 31-32 and 76, is also overlooked by the index. On the other hand, the index inadvertently reduplicates Isaiah 53:4. There are a few other small errors as well. Leon Morris is misquoted: “There is not one instance in the New Testament of the use of this verb (to draw) where the resistance is unsuccessful” (p. 102 n. 68). Obviously the last word should be “successful” (as in the original source) rather than “unsuccessful,” and “instance” replaces an original “example.” Moreover, “identity” on p. 8 should be “identify.”

Multiple views volumes cannot possibly do justice to all of the available options. The introduction admits, “In the middle we could have isolated models such as Amyraldism, English hypothetical universalism, and the recently defended ‘classical position’” (p. 6). More specifically, Osborne’s chapter openly functions within a Calvinist-Arminian polarity (pp. 83-85). But the elephant in the room (or in this case, the missing elephant in the room) is the lack of a confessional Lutheran voice among the volume’s official disputants (cf. pp. 63, 71, 73, 83 n. 8, 159). This oversight may only bolster the Lutheran complaint of being consistently sidelined when theological teams are chosen, even though Martin Luther chronologically preceded both Calvin and Arminius. In addition, other theological topics could have solicited further development if space had permitted, including the relationship to infant salvation (cf. p. 181 n. 116) and the connection between headship, representation, and union (cf. pp. 13, 82, 164, 175).

Nevertheless, in a final commendation, this helpful collection of three disparate positions productively directs its energies to generating explanatory light rather than polemical heat. The essays may not greatly transform the long-standing debate, but they will graciously inform it. The work thus stands as an admirable monument to robust yet instructive and charitable disputation. †