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## Book Reviews

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**Gerhard, Johann.** *On Good Works*. *Theological Commonplaces XX*. Edited by Joshua J. Hayes, Benjamin T. G. Mayes, and Aaron Jensen. Translated by Richard J. Dinda. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2019. 368 pages. Hardcover. \$59.99.

The publication of *On Good Works* is the thirteenth in the current series from CPH, a series that continues to exemplify high-quality translations, editorial helps, and physical products. In addition, this volume is of particular interest because of its extensive coverage of the topic “good works,” unmatched by any other Lutheran treatment in English. Gerhard begins the volume by addressing the various kinds of good works, but devotes most of his attention to the question of the *necessity* of good works and the *merits* of good works. His comprehensive treatment of these questions, grounded thoroughly in Scripture, carefully distinguishes in what manner the Bible teaches the necessity and merits of good works from misunderstandings, errors, and false teaching.

Good works are not necessary in order to attain righteousness before God and salvation. This is impossible, for one who lacks righteousness cannot do the good works that would be needed to make him righteous. Nor are good works necessary in the sense of compulsion; they are not to be forced out of the unwilling—indeed, they cannot be. Rather, good works are necessary in a cause-effect relationship. That is, good works necessarily come forth from the person who is good, who has been regenerated by the Holy Spirit in Christ. More than this, however, good works are necessary in relation to God’s will: good works are not arbitrary, but align with and conform to God’s will. This is to say that God’s commands are good and people ought to strive to pursue them.

The question of merits is not a major point of discussion in Lutheran theology today, as Lutherans agree that works merit nothing for salvation. However, the topic was hotly debated with Roman Catholics in Gerhard’s time, and interesting insights can be gleaned from Gerhard’s presentation. For example, the question of non-salvific rewards is rarely addressed today, yet Gerhard gives considerable attention to it. He distinguishes between “essential” rewards, those offered freely in the Gospel, from “accidental” rewards, particular rewards given to the pious according to their works and suffering (115). Rewards are given in accordance with works, yet these works do not merit eternal life. Eternal life is given as a free gift, through the

merits of Christ, even while those who receive eternal life through faith will experience different gifts and rewards in their state of eternal life. Indeed, some accidental rewards and accidental punishments are received even in this life. Gerhard importantly points out that where his opponents have interpreted some passages to say that eternal life is the reward of good works, these passages in fact express that good works bear testimony to faith, and that salvation is given freely through this faith, while other, accidental, heavenly rewards will be given in accordance with the works (187–193; Ps 62:12; Matt 16:27; Luke 6:38; Rom 2:5–6; 1 Cor 3:8; Gal 6:8; Rev 22:12).

A final chapter addresses the question of the loss of faith through sin, popularly known as “mortal sin,” but which Gerhard helpfully labels “sins against conscience.” Not all sin drives out faith and the Holy Spirit, for faith and the Holy Spirit abide to forgive sin. But the person who sins and fails to repent, but believes acceptance of sin abides along with faith and the Holy Spirit, has actually cast out the Holy Spirit and lost faith.

As with the other volumes in this series, this book should have wide appeal, both to those who want to read carefully Gerhard’s account of good works, and also to those who would use it as a key scriptural reference on the topic.

Gifford A. Grobien

**Kilcrease, Jack, D. *The Doctrine of Atonement: From Luther to Forde*. Foreword by Roland Ziegler. Eugene, Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 2018. 183 pages. Softcover.**

Gerhard Forde’s writings are found on the shelves of some LCMS pastors. Critiquing Forde’s doctrines of the law and the atonement is Jack Kilcrease, a member of the synod’s Commission on Theology and Church Relations. Customarily when Lutherans speak of Christ’s death for sins, they have in mind a doctrine of that atonement that Christ offered himself to God as a sacrifice for sins. For late Luther Seminary professor Forde (d. 2005), Christ’s death is not a propitiation for sin, but God “make[s] a unilateral decision to forgive sin without any fulfillment of the law” (115). God speaks and it is done without atonement. Law for Forde does not belong to God’s essence, but is existentially understood “as a concrete reality within human experience” (106–107). In a bait and switch maneuver, justification by faith is put in the place of a doctrine of the atonement, which was understood by Luther, the Confessions, and the classical seventeenth-century Lutheran theologians as an act in which God offers up Christ as an atonement for sin, and in turn, Christ offers up himself (26–65). Kilcrease lays the groundwork for his critique of Forde by laying out the current Lutheran theological climate in taking to task George Lindbeck’s claim that doctrines have no truth claims and so they are no more than statements that “regulate how communal discourse

and practice operate” (5). This means that each church body has its own way of expressing the truth.

In chapters 3 and 4, Kilcrease challenges Forde’s proposals that his views are those of Luther, the Confessions, and the seventeenth-century Orthodox theologians who “held to the doctrine of penal substitution as a corollary of the proper articulation of the doctrine of justification” (65). For Forde, justification does not depend on atonement, but is accomplished by preaching. Chapters 4 and 5 are both titled “Modern Rethinking of the Lutheran Doctrine of Atonement.” The first is subtitled “Moderate Revisionists,” surveying the views of Werner Elert, Gustaf Aulén, and Gustaf Wingren. The second is subtitled “Radical Revisionists,” surveying the views of Wolfhart Pannenberg, Robert Jenson, and Eberhard Jüngel. Following his analysis, Kilcrease gives the “Evaluation,” based on “The Confessional Lutheran Paradigm” (23–25). In chapters 6 and 7, Kilcrease addresses how Forde came to his views on law, atonement, and justification.

Our readers may have already come across Forde’s views as early as in 1984 set forth in the section entitled “The Work of Christ” in the Jenson-Braaten *Christian Dogmatics* (2:11–104). A critique by now vice-president Scott Murray followed in 2002 in CPH’s *Law, Life, and the Living God* (123–133). Forde’s influence can be seen in the more recent book *Confessing the Gospel: A Lutheran Approach to Systematic Theology* (1:9–11). Forde’s arguments are more theologically than biblically presented, and when he resorts to the biblical references, he readjusts them to support his view that Jesus did not see his death as atonement. The earliest proclamations contained in Acts do not refer to Jesus’ death as atonement. Those that do in Acts and the Gospels, along with Jesus’ prediction of his death and its value as propitiation, were read back into the Gospels under the now-discounted later Hellenism. (Recall that centuries before Jesus lived, Palestine was Hellenized.)

In the foreword to Kilcrease’s work, Concordia Theological Seminary Systematics Department Chairman Roland Ziegler writes, “The doctrine of vicarious satisfaction had never been without its detractors” (ix).

David P. Scaer

**Perrin, Nicholas. *Jesus the Priest*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2018. 368 pages. Softcover. \$32.00.**

If Jesus is a prophet, a priest, and a king, which of those offices is most important? This second in a planned trilogy of books expands on Perrin’s 2010 *Jesus the Temple* in centering the identity of Jesus on his priesthood. You may be uninterested in or opposed to *ranking* the offices of Christ, but Perrin’s contention is that prophecy and kingship are subsumed in the priesthood Jesus exercises. He

wants to redirect historical Jesus research toward Jesus' relationship to holiness, away from the abstractions of liberal Protestantism native to that subdiscipline.

The reader will find several obstacles to profiting from this intriguing project. The first hurdle is the baggy, chatty style Perrin employs, reminiscent of his mentor, N. T. Wright. Perrin's diffuseness is prolific in the creation of strawmen, piling rhetorical questions on top of anachronistic words such as "hero" for Jesus, but it is unsuccessful in clarifying his meaning. Like Wright, he bemoans "post-Enlightenment" presuppositions that he presupposes his readers have but holds himself responsible only for clarity and precision in his historical Jesus research methodology, not for his articulation of Western intellectual history.

The methodology of historical Jesus research is the second and much larger hurdle. One feels great sympathy for Perrin's obvious effort to present a maximal picture of the messianic claims and priestly work of the historical Jesus. Yet each time Perrin plays within the rules of historical Jesus research, mentioning that this or that passage is "highly probable" or rejected only by the "most radical of skeptics," one wonders what the reward could be for playing this game. The logical circularity of historical Jesus research with its purported grasp of "authentic" and "inauthentic" Jesus tradition apart from any measure of authenticity external to the Gospels is unquestioned.

This desire to play the game of historical Jesus research exists strangely alongside a completely uncritical acceptance of rabbinic evidence. Perrin does not engage the historical criticism of the Talmud that Jacob Neusner pioneered. Evidence from the Talmud Bavli, produced in the Persian Empire in the sixth and seventh centuries AD, is called forth as support for points Perrin is making about first-century AD Palestine. Why not accept the historical criticism of the Talmud? Historicizing the varieties of ancient Judaism would likely obliterate vague entities Perrin conjures up such as the "ancient Jewish mind" and the inchoate group of "ancient Jewish readers."

The book is valuable for its various close readings of Gospel pericopes, especially Perrin's correlations of Old Testament texts such as Ezekiel 36 and Daniel 7 with the teachings and works of Jesus in the canonical Gospels. If you buy the book, skip around for the strictly exegetical sections, where Perrin has riches in store for any reader. Walk around the hurdles, unless you want to try clearing them, and enjoy the rest.

Adam Koontz

**Bennema, Cornelis. *Mimesis in the Johannine Literature*. Library of New Testament Studies 498. New York: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2017. 246 pages. Hardcover. \$114.00.**

Recent academic scholarship on the Gospel of John has been hesitant, even resistant, to the idea that this Gospel has an ethic, that is, that this Gospel gives an account of a way or manner of life that is true to the human project as such. One significant reason for this understanding of John's Gospel has been the common view that John's Gospel arises from an early Christian sect, something like the Qumran sect, which is withdrawn from the world of men and lives according to a special "ethic" true to its own unique and special community. Fortunately, that view is giving way to a more realistic and historically factual interpretation of John's Gospel as central to the Christian movement, albeit of a different articulation than that, say, of Paul.

Within this context, *Mimesis* by Cornelis Bennema comes as a very welcome book indeed. It is Bennema's contention that his book is the first full study of the concept of "imitation" in Johannine studies. He begins with a survey of recent studies on the ethics of John's Gospel and of a renewal of interest in the subject (1–22). Yet, the specific idea of "imitation" has been lacking, and it is Bennema's intention to make good this deficit. Indeed, "imitation" is a pervasive theme in the Johannine literature, claims the author (23). Concluding his introduction on previous and contemporary studies on ethics in John, Bennema gives his own working definition of *imitation*: "person B represents or emulates person A in activity or state X [in order to become like person A]" (25). Bennema explains the brackets: "this relates to the believer—Jesus and believer—God mimesis . . . rather than the divine Son—Father mimesis." He continues: "In relation to the believer—Jesus mimesis, for example, Jesus (person A) functions as a virtuous role model who sets the example (activity or state X) for the believer (person B) to imitate in order to become like him (person A)" (25–26). Thus, mimesis "consists of creative, cognitive, volitional actions for which a person is responsible rather than a mindless cloning for which one might not be held accountable" (21).

The strength of Bennema's book lies in his second chapter in which he, with admirable thoroughness, identifies and analyzes the various "mimetic expressions" in the Johannine literature. His statistical summary of these expressions, with corresponding charts, is helpful, as is his distinction between "performative" and "existential" mimetic expressions and his evaluation of the "mimetic strength" each expression possesses. By "performative," Bennema means those expressions that correlate one action in view of another (e.g., John 15:9: "As the Father has loved me, also I have loved you"). By "existential," he means those

actions that correspond to a state of being (John 17:11: “That they might be one as we”). Other chapters discuss more specifically the “divine mimesis” (Son—Father), the “believer—Jesus/God mimesis” (the longest chapter because this mimesis is the most common in the Gospel), the place of mimesis in Johannine ethics (central and based on the dynamics of “family ethics”), and “mimetic empowerment” (“relational empowerment,” “mnemonic empowerment,” and “the Spirit”).

There is much to learn from Bennema’s linguistic analysis, and, no doubt, the idea of mimesis is not an easy one to conceptualize, let alone that of what motivates one toward imitation. However, there are very serious weaknesses in Bennema’s presentation. I will mention two that are *methodological* and one that is *theological*.

First, it is true that the *idea* of mimesis is not a uniquely Christian idea. Yet, it is quite questionable whether a general idea of mimesis suffices to interpret John’s discourse of the Son imitating the Father and the believer imitating Jesus. Thus, Bennema treats Johannine mimesis as though it is merely another instance of common human psychological and volitional action. Thus, in discussing the claim that mimesis is an event arising of memory as empowerment, Bennema adduces modern theory of human memory. Conclusion: “Many of the events recorded in John’s Gospel are emotionally and sensory-charged incidents that would have forged personal event memories in the minds of the disciples” (182). One need not deny that apostolic memory was human in every way, but would the evangelist admit that such memory was open to psychological analysis? One may well doubt it.

Another example: In his discussion of the place of mimesis in Johannine ethics, Bennema adduces Aristotle’s ethics as “an heuristic framework for understanding Johannine ethics” (144–147).<sup>1</sup> He notes that for Aristotle “happiness” (εὐδαιμονία) is the goal of human life and is acquired through virtue and discipline. When, then, Bennema claims that “in the Johannine literature, ζωή is the closest equivalent to εὐδαιμονία so that, for John, the ultimate end (τέλος) people should pursue for nothing but its own sake is ζωή” (144), one can only wonder where Jesus has gone, who claims that he is the way, the truth, and the life. To be sure, Bennema affirms that “there is ζωή in Jesus” and that he “makes it available to people,” but the very language distinguishes between “life” and the person of Jesus.<sup>2</sup> That is a serious christological problem. The conclusion: “In sum, when we look at the Johannine

<sup>1</sup> To be sure, Bennema does not claim that John intentionally draws on Greco-Roman morality (144).

<sup>2</sup> Bennema can speak of ζωή as “the highest moral good which people can attain when they enter into a relationship with the Father and Son” (146). That “life” is a christological *name* in John’s Gospel is wholly unnoticed. The underlying problem here is that Bennema thinks of “life” as a quality that the Father and Son *share*: “ζωή denotes the divine, everlasting life that the Father and Son share and that defines them” (145; also 72).



writings through the lens of Graeco-Roman virtue ethics, we see that ζωή is the Johannine equivalent of εὐδαιμονία” (147). Johannine Christology has disappeared.

Second, the latter point leads to another observation. It is remarkable that a study on mimesis (which I agree is central to John’s Gospel) never appeals to Old Testament narrative, most especially the *Torah* and its repeated exhortation to obey God’s commandments *as* the virtual definition of Israel as God’s people. Some mention of Psalm 119 (LXX Psalm 118), a long hymn concerning the law, might have been of interest in such a study as this.

Third, the major weakness of Bennema’s presentation lies in its implicit trinitarian and christological ideas. These are not affirmed explicitly, but they arise from the definition and understanding Bennema adopts for mimesis. Frankly, the problems in this are pervasive. I will refer to only one instance, but one repeated often. Generally put, Bennema’s notion of mimesis relates the Father and the Son/Jesus as *external* to each other, and the same *external* relation also of the believer and Jesus. Even when Bennema discusses “existential mimesis,” there is a constant slide from the “existential” to the “relational.” For example: “The expression ‘person A being ‘in’ person B’ indicates closeness of relationship rather than that person A exists or resides physically in person B” (129; this is a discussion of John 17:21).<sup>3</sup>

The problem of externality becomes especially acute in Bennema’s discussion of John 5:19. The question is, how does mimesis between the Son and the Father occur? Here Bennema speaks of a “dualistic worldview” or “two spatial locations.” The Father resides in heaven, and so “this must be the place where he operates and shows everything to the Son.” But the Son is on the earth, so “how is Jesus on earth able to observe the Father’s actions and hear the Father’s words in heaven? The answer lies in the uniqueness of the incarnation.” Bennema mentions one possibility only to discard it as inferior: The one who came to earth and took on humanity is “in the unique position” to tell what he has seen and heard. “This could suggest that prior to his incarnation, the Father showed the blueprint of work to the Son, who subsequently carried it out on earth” (73). How such an understanding can possibly do justice to the trinitarian confession of the Nicene Creed, one cannot imagine. But the accepted solution is not good either: “Jesus on earth has a continuous access to heaven, so is in constant communication with his heavenly Father, and that this dynamic is realized by means of the Spirit” (75, also 76–77). Here Jesus is depicted as a visionary. What he is not, nor can be, is the eternal Word of God in *person*. As we noted above, Bennema’s definition of mimesis includes that which is cognitive

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<sup>3</sup> One sees in this quotation the ontological division Bennema is making between the physical and the spiritual. That division has been the christological “bugbear” for all “low” christologies and pervades Bennema’s whole argumentation.

and volitional. When such notions, understood in human terms, are applied to God, this is the result: “The Spirit would be expected to provide Jesus specifically with revelatory wisdom and knowledge to carry out his messianic ministry. This would include being informed about the Father’s work, which Jesus will then carry out on earth” (76). We have here an adoptionistic Christology in modern form that, in turn, renders trinitarian thinking into a mere heavenly classroom.

To his credit, Bennema seems aware that his talk of “participation” and “relation” is very imperfectly related. For further research, he mentions “the relationship between mimesis and theosis,” that is, how it is that believers “do not only imitate Jesus’ example but also his very being” (204). I hope that he undertakes the project. But if he does, he might wish to consider whether patristic reflection on the hypostatic oneness of the man Jesus with the divine Son, and, in turn, the essential and natural unity of the Son and the Father are not worthy of his study rather than Aristotle and modern psychologists. Might I suggest he start by reading the *Commentary on the Gospel of John* by Cyril of Alexandria.

William C. Weinrich

**Honeycutt, Frank G. *Sunday Comes Every Week: Daily Habits for the Busy Preacher*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 2019. 160 pages. Softcover. \$19.99.**

This book was written primarily for recent seminary graduates who need to help their congregations understand the primary role of the pastor as the preacher of the word. Frank Honeycutt, a retired ELCA pastor with more than thirty years’ experience in different parish settings, wants the novice pastor, who tends to be extra-busy those first few years, to develop daily habits of sermon study and writing throughout the week in order to build a healthy pastoral identity and to educate the congregation concerning the pastor’s *raison d’être* (84). Because preaching can be difficult and exhausting work, which is never easy, Honeycutt helps the novice pastor to understand that there are no homiletical shortcuts in the preaching task. He states: “The truth is that a faithful preaching process shapes the entirety of one’s ministry for the long haul. The spiritual habits we develop throughout the week . . . ground us in the very disciplines that have nourished pastors in their callings for centuries” (85).

Not wanting his weekly homiletical task to seem too regimented or legalistic, Honeycutt believes that his process of writing a sermon, although it may not work for all pastors, will provide the necessary “habits” for those starting out. He considers the lectionary (for him the three-year cycle) a “tremendous gift” so that the novice preacher stays with large chunks of the Bible and learns to preach on the whole council of God and not on his own whims or desires. Even if the pastor has Monday

(dubbed the “Listening” day) off, he advises the novice pastor to choose the text he will preach on the following Sunday and to come up with a single sentence to describe the sermon’s aim. Too bad he didn’t suggest the Collect of the Day as the starting point. By starting this way, says Honeycutt, the text begins its “percolation and marination” through the week.

Tuesday is the “Hearing” day. The pastor needs to get out of the church building for regular prayer as he focuses on his chosen text. Getting away from the church building the author deems crucial as a “fresh perspective” and “creative realities” are sought. With no distractions and mind and spirit focused, with a few note cards, the pastor can begin to raise questions about the text. Here on Day 2, the pastor begins to discern the truth, tenor, and tone of the text. Honeycutt sees the real importance of involving his own parishioners in the writing task. From young to old, homebound and hospitalized, he feels his people should be included in the sermonizing process, making them feel included as he raises these questions.

Wednesday is “Exegeting” day. Honeycutt doesn’t want the preacher to rely upon commentaries too early in the week, but now they can be utilized, but sparingly. He likes to construct sermons more from the people he meets than the books he reads. He feels it very important that he preaches from an understanding from different viewpoints. In so doing, he regularly befriends skeptics, atheists, and agnostics and sees them as “helpful preaching allies.” Sadly, throughout the book, he makes no mention of consulting the original languages in the homiletical task.

Thursday is “Naming” day, where the pastor now distills all his notes and observations so that a tightly worded (twelve words or less) theme statement is developed. Friday is “Writing” day. Honeycutt strongly believes that the pastor should carve out an uninterrupted four-hour period for writing. He did this faithfully on Fridays for thirty-one years. A manuscript is still important as each word and phrase is tested and tried. By speaking to many throughout the week, he constructs his sermon with “artful and measured language,” always keeping the “outsider” in mind. He typically reads the draft aloud three times (with changes made during each oral reading) before setting it aside the next morning. Some time is spent on Saturday to rehearse and revise. Sunday is the “Offering” day where much advice is given on the delivery.

There is much jam-packed into this small book. I would recommend this book to seminarians and novice pastors. There are no shortcuts in sermon preparation and faithful listening. By faithfully preparing and delivering sermons, pastors are modeling faithful discipleship for the congregation, and, over time, helping them to “fall in love with God’s life-changing Word” (126).

Gary W. Zieroth

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Senkbeil, Harold L. *The Care of Souls: Cultivating a Pastor's Heart*. Bellingham, Washington: Lexham Press, 2019. 312 pages. Hardcover. \$21.99. (Joel G. Koepp).

Crisp, Oliver D. and Sanders, Fred. *The Christian Doctrine of Humanity*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018. 250 pages. Softcover. \$34.99. (Jonathan G. Lange).

Abernethy, Andrew T., ed. *Interpreting the Old Testament Theologically: Essays in Honor of Willem A. VanGemeren*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2018. 352 pages. Hardcover. \$49.99. (Ryan M. Tietz).