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Book Reviews

***On the Resurrection of the Dead and On the Last Judgment*. By Johann Gerhard. Translated by Richard J. Dinda. Edited by Joshua J. Hayes, Heath R. Curtis, and Aaron Jensen. Vols. 30–31 of *Theological Commonplaces*, edited by Benjamin T. G. Mayes. St Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2020. 592 pages. Hardcover. $64.99.**

Since 2002, the editors and staff at Concordia Publishing House and the editors of the Gerhard dogmatics have been undergoing what we might today call an ultra-marathon in the publishing of the celebrated *Loci Theologici* by Johann Gerhard (1582–1637), originally in twenty-three large quarto volumes. On my shelves, the series takes up twenty-six linear inches so far, in seventeen volumes, and I understand more is to come. It might be useful for the reader to consult the book reviews of volumes in this series so far.[1]

Why should a pastor or educated layman purchase and read these volumes, whose content is four hundred years old? They should do so because any theology whose source and norm are only the canonical Scriptures is perennial. Gerhard's dogmatics are perennial. There is no new data that will make the old "theological science" obsolete, as we often find in the natural and historical sciences. The errors that the Christian church dealt with in its first 1,600 years are still with us today. The only thing that is new is the inventiveness of heresy, philosophy, and other academic disciplines that always find new ways to warp the gospel to fit modern ways of thinking and living.

What is particularly useful about Gerhard compared to other Lutheran dogmatics that are available in English? First is Gerhard's mastery of the early church fathers regarding their doctrine. We Lutherans need to remember the method set out for us in the Augsburg Confession: "There is nothing here that departs from the Scriptures or the catholic church or the church of Rome, in so far as the ancient

[1] Jack Kilcrease, review of *On Christ*, *LOGIA* 20, no. 3 (Trinity 2011): 48–49; Martin R. Noland, review of *On the Ecclesiastical Ministry, Part 1*, *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 75, no. 1–2 (January/April 2012): 185–186; Jack Kilcrease, review of *On the Church*, *LOGIA* 22, no. 4 (Reformation 2013): 44–45; Gifford A. Grobien, review of *On Creation and Predestination*, *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 80, no. 1–2 (January/April 2016): 167–171; Gifford A. Grobien, review of *On the Law*, *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 81, no. 3–4 (July/October 2017): 358–359; Tim R. Schmeling, review of *On Justification through Faith*, *LOGIA* 29, no. 2 (Easter 2020): 54–56. Mention should also be made of Roland F. Ziegler, "Chemnitz, Gerhard, Walther, and Concordia Publishing House," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 83, no. 1–2 (January/April 2019): 43–50.

church is known to us from its writers" (AC XXI-B 1 Latin).[2] Gerhard listens to the early church fathers and councils and sifts out the gold from the dross. In this he follows the examples of Luther, Melanchthon, and Chemnitz but is superior to all his Lutheran predecessors in both quantity and use of the early church material.

Second is Gerhard's superb argumentation against all the errors of the Roman Catholic theologians, the Calvinists, the Anabaptists, and the Socinians, which latter group he calls the "Photinians." All his arguments and sources are still useful today when dealing with these groups. Third is Gerhard's consistent use of Aristotle's four causes throughout his dogmatics as subtopics, which might be confusing for the modern reader. In modern usage, only the "efficient cause" is considered a cause per se. The other three—material, formal, and final causes—are really explanatory features in modern usage. Since Gerhard follows this fourfold pattern consistently, it makes it easier for researchers to find whatever subtopic they are looking for. The extensive table of contents from the editors contributes to the ease of finding subtopics and their many chapters and sections.

The topics in the present volume are from two of the original quarto volumes: *On the Resurrection of the Dead* and *On the Last Judgment*. Regarding the resurrection, Gerhard commends the doctrine to his readers because (1) it is a mystery unknown by nature, (2) it is the foundation of every life-giving consolation in all adversity and in death itself, (3) it is the greatest incentive to piety, and (4) it is the proper treasure of the church (9–10). He concludes his introduction to this doctrine by stating that "briefly, the article on the resurrection of the dead is 1) the heart of the Christian religion, 2) the aim of our life, and 3) our shield against every adversity" (10). Here we see, already in a few initial pages, the practical use of the doctrine, which Gerhard concludes with in chapter 12 (238). Gerhard always keeps in mind this practical use. Just like the medical doctor must learn the practical use of an organic chemical, so the parish pastor and theologian must always learn the practical use of the doctrines of the church.

Particular questions that Gerhard addresses that might be of interest to modern readers include (1) whether infants who die in their mothers' wombs will be raised (211), (2) whether miscarried fetuses will be raised (211–212), (3) whether animals will be raised (214–217), (4) the resuscitation of certain people by Christ and the holy men of God (220), (5) the translation of Enoch (220–221), and (6) an extensive discussion about the interpretation of 1 Corinthians 15:51–53 and 1 Thessalonians 4:15–17 (221–236).

[2] In *The Book of Concord: The Confessions of the Evangelical Lutheran Church*, ed. Theodore G. Tappert, Jaroslav Pelikan, Robert H. Fischer, and Arthur C. Piepkorn (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1959), 47.

Regarding the last judgment, Gerhard commends the doctrine to his readers because (1) it is also a mystery unknown to nature but revealed only in the word, (2) it is the foundation for every life-giving comfort in all the perilous adversities of this life, (3) it is a very effective incentive to piety, and (4) it is a proper treasure of the church (244–245).

Particular questions that Gerhard addresses under this locus that might interest the modern reader include (1) whether Christ's return for judgment will be local (318); (2) what will be the nature of the cloud in which Christ will arrive (318); (3) the judgment of the Antichrist (334–335); (4) why only works of mercy are listed in the description of the judicial process in Matthew 25 (345–349); (5) a lengthy discourse, sections 76–81, on the time when the judgment will begin, in which Gerhard exposes and refutes all the speculative answers to that question from the early church to his time (383–401); and (6) another lengthy discourse, sections 85–111, on the signs that will precede Jesus' return on the last day (405–457). These last two discourses are alone worth the purchase of this book and its study! My hat is off to the author, translator, and editors!

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***Suffering, Not Power: Atonement in the Middle Ages.* By Benjamin Wheaton. Bellingham, WA: Lexham Academic, 2022. 264 pages. Paperback. $26.99.**

The most recent contribution to the debate over the essential meaning of the atonement is Benjamin Wheaton's *Suffering, Not Power: Atonement in the Middle Ages*. The contribution is an important one, being a long-overdue corrective to the false notion that Christ's atonement as vicarious satisfaction may be dismissed as a late-blooming theory first conceived in the Middle Ages and characterized especially by Anselm of Canterbury in the late eleventh century. The false notion was popularized by Swedish Lutheran scholar Gustaf Aulén's *Christus Victor*, first published in English in 1931.[1] Aulén divides the Christian views on the atonement according to their imagery in interpretation of it. His layout of the spectrum of atonement "theories" has gained considerable renown, enough to suggest that his work may be considered a twentieth-century classic. At one end of the spectrum is what Aulén calls the Latin, or "legal satisfaction," view, characterized especially by Anselm, who

[1] Gustaf Aulén, Christus Victor: *An Historical Study of the Three Main Types of the Idea of Atonement*, trans. A. G. Hebert (London: SPCK, 1931).

in his view was introducing medieval conceptions of feudal honor, and, at the other end, which for Aulén is the more legitimate end, is the so-called classical view, expressed in terms of Christ's triumph over the devil, whose grip over mankind his atonement loosed.

The dispute over the vicarious satisfaction, which is the linchpin of Anselm's portrayal of the work of Christ, had begun in earnest in the nineteenth century, when Johann Christian Konrad von Hofmann (1810–1877) opposed the "orthodox doctrine of vicarious satisfaction" as biblicism in the name of a *heilsgeschichtliche* theology. Hofmann declared that "the saving truth which the Scripture proclaims authoritatively to the Church does not consist in a series of doctrinal propositions," by which he meant doctrinal formulations having to do with the vicarious satisfaction, "but rather in the fact that Jesus has mediated a connection between God and mankind."[2] For Hofmann, the Bible is not "a text book teaching conceptual truths but rather a document of an historical process"—that is, *Heilsgeschichte*.[3] Hofmann was attacked by a number of his "orthodox" colleagues, among them Theodosius Harnack, who in 1886 brought Luther into the debate, attempting to show the latter's adherence to the vicarious satisfaction. Hofmann responded by working to demonstrate that Luther cannot be associated unambiguously with the doctrine of vicarious satisfaction, quoting Luther at great length, in an attempt to embarrass the orthodox.[4] What Aulén's work did, then, was to participate in reigniting the debate in 1931.

What Wheaton does is to bring important historical evidence to the debate that demonstrates rather decisively that Aulén had been incorrect in contending that the vicarious satisfaction was a medieval novelty coming from Anselm. Rather, it is the notion that the atonement is a matter of God's removal of the devil's power, exclusive of the notion of vicarious satisfaction, that is historically novel, and a misreading of the broad medieval consensus (hence Wheaton's title: *Suffering, Not Power: Atonement in the Middle Ages*).

Wheaton's contribution may be seen as unique, although he admits to having come to it by a careful reading of French theologian Jean Rivière, a lesser-known yet "far more insightful and learned" contemporary of Aulén (8). Rivière "meticulously and acidly dismantled" the arguments of the modernist Joseph Turmel's six-volume *Histoire de dogmes*, whose presentation of the history of the doctrine of the atonement was very similar to (and thus as deficient as) Aulén's. In so doing Rivière concludes decisively that "through all periods of Christian history, the atonement was

[2] J. C. K. von Hofmann, *Interpreting the Bible*, trans. Christian Preus (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1959), 76.

[3] Hofmann, *Interpreting the Bible*, 204.

[4] Hofmann, *Interpreting the Bible*, 57–58, 63.

at its root seen as a sacrifice of expiation and propitiation made by God to God" (12).

Using Rivière's method, Wheaton's treatment brings the matter up to date, having the advantage of many more available texts and research since Rivière's death in 1943. In addition, and perhaps more importantly, Rivière's own influence was limited, due to the deficiency of translations of his idiomatic French into English and the unfortunately cursory engagement of his arguments even by Aulén, who "breezily dismisses Rivière with two brief mentions of [his] early work, neither of which show any sign of engagement with the French historian" (245). Wheaton's meticulous work serves in part as a correction of that historical oversight.

Wheaton chooses three representative writers from the periods surrounding Anselm's years to demonstrate that Anselm's thought was hardly unique. He then provides "vignettes" from each of these writers to show clear assumptions on their parts, easily seen as assumptions on the part of also their hearers or readers, that the atonement was widely seen as "a sacrifice of expiation and propitiation made by God to God" (12). The first writer he examines is the well-known late medieval poet Dante Alighieri, who died in the early fourteenth century; the second is Caesarius of Arles, also well known, from the late fifth and early sixth centuries; and the third is Haimo of Auxerre, a ninth-century monk of the Benedictine Abbey of Saint-Germain d'Auxerre. Though Haimo is not well known today, Wheaton demonstrates that in authoring many widely read biblical commentaries and theological texts, he can be seen as "the great teacher of Europe in the Middle Ages" (217), which is important for Wheaton's purposes. In short, "all three were thoroughly mainstream teachers in their time and place; this is important to emphasize" (243).

Reading Wheaton is easy, notwithstanding the obvious scholarship he brings to his task. As such, he is accessible to a large readership. One does not need to be a theologian to appreciate this work. In addition, his thorough treatment of these three medieval authors provides a window into what must have been common medieval thought and assumptions regarding the meaning of the atonement. As such, it leaves no doubt in the reader's mind that the atonement was widely understood as a vicarious satisfaction, a sacrifice from God to God to propitiate and expiate sin.

In his treatment of Haimo in particular, Wheaton draws the reader into the Scriptures themselves, because his vignettes are of Haimo's commentaries on Romans and Hebrews, the very same Scriptures Haimo's readers read, and "the clear centrality of the sacrificial aspects of Christ's crucifixion" found there demonstrates that they are also biblical (238). Hence, a careful reader of Wheaton must conclude that Anselm's similar treatment of the atonement was hardly new.

The artfulness of Wheaton's approach is that instead of dealing directly with Aulén, he deals with the debate between Rivière and Turmel, a brilliant move to

demonstrate that in fact Aulén's central argument against Anselm had already been refuted before he even began. A reintroduction of Rivière required a thoroughgoing familiarity with his idiomatic French that had left him mostly inaccessible to non-French audiences, including, so it would seem, even Aulén. But Wheaton accomplishes this task for us, and so succeeds in thoroughly dismantling Aulén, via Rivière's demolition of Turmel.

Yet the reader is left wondering why Wheaton did not in the end turn directly to Aulén, a task that presumably would have been easy after the thoroughness of Wheaton's approach had him hemmed in. After all, Turmel is a historically irrelevant figure, a Roman Catholic who was excommunicated largely due to the Catholic Rivière's work. But the widely known Aulén was a Protestant like Wheaton himself, and it is his work that is clearly the object of his research.

Yet there is a possible benefit to us even here, for in taking on Aulén's view only indirectly, Wheaton's work also indirectly serves the purpose of indirectly taking on figures of more immediate interest to us.

For one, the proponents of liberation theology also have no use for the vicarious satisfaction, seeing rather a mere correspondence between Christ's death and the need for liberation from "social injustice." For them the meaning of the cross is reduced to being the unjust death of a just person under the oppression of religious leaders to which the politically or socially oppressed can somehow relate. Wheaton's work shows that this would certainly have to be characterized as a historical novelty.

Another benefit of Wheaton's indirect approach, which is perhaps of even more value to us, is its application to Aulén's theological heirs. Two examples would be Gerhard Forde (d. 2005), who like Aulén, claimed that the vicarious satisfaction is an Anselmian innovation. For him, atonement does not occur until God succeeds, at the cost of the death of the Son, in "getting through to us who live under wrath."[5] Likewise, Forde's student Steven Paulson, who in 1998 became his successor at Luther Seminary, follows him in disparaging "legal scheme" interpretations of the atonement.[6]

The debates on the meaning of the atonement continue apace, and since they do, at the very least Wheaton's book deserves to be taken seriously as a welcome participant.

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[5] Gerhard R. Forde, "The Work of Christ," in *Christian Dogmatics*, ed. Carl E. Braaten and Robert W. Jenson, vol. 2 (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 59.

[6] Steven D. Paulson, *Lutheran Theology* (London: T&T Clark, 2011), 2.