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BOOK REVIEW

Gordon L. Heath and James D. Dvorak, eds. *Baptism: Historical, Theological, and Pastoral Perspectives*. McMaster Theological Studies Series. Eugene, OR: Pickwick, 2011. xvii + 271 pp. Pbk. US\$32.00. ISBN 978-1-60899-486-1.

Baptism is one of the few things that unites most Christian traditions. Unfortunately, many Christians do not understand their own denominational theology of baptism, much less that of other traditions. This book seeks to fill that gap.

The great strength of this book is the wide range of Christian traditions represented. Irenaeus Steenberg presents baptism from the Orthodox perspective, with all of the challenges of balancing the belief in one true baptism and welcoming people from other denominations. The Roman Catholic perspective is offered by Gerard Kelly, who gives an interesting overview of the development of baptismal theology, both before and after the Second Vatican Council. Robert Kolb gives the Lutheran point of view, both through the thought of Martin Luther and the adjustments made by later theologians. John Vissers reflects on the relationship between infant baptism and belief in the elect, from a Reformed tradition. The Anglican position, with all of its theological and geographic diversity, is given by Alan Hayes. Although Baptists seem defined by their theology of baptism, Anthony Cross explains how even the Baptist tradition is influenced by changing culture and growing ecumenism. Unlike most traditions, Quakers do not practice water baptism. However, Howard Macy provides an interesting case for the Quaker practice of baptism as a spiritual reality. Curt Niccum presents the view of baptism from the Restoration Movement, one that has some similarities to the Baptist position, but with the additional belief in the necessity of baptism for salvation. Steve Studebaker, with the humility required for summarizing the beliefs of one of the most diverse traditions, gives a good overview of the different ways baptism has been understood in both classical Pentecostalism and the charismatic movement. The

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book concludes with the authors having the opportunity to comment briefly on each other's essay.

There is very little to criticize in this book. It should be noted that the essays, while all informative, vary in their scholarly level. Footnotes are minimal, and if readers are looking for in-depth research into baptism they will have to look elsewhere. While a good range of traditions is presented, there are two traditions that would have made the study more complete: Mennonites and Methodists. The Further Reading sections are somewhat disappointing, but there is a greater offering found in the bibliography.

In this day of growing ecumenism, this is a timely book. This is so for two reasons: 1) churches from different traditions are working together more and 2) congregations today are rarely mono-denominational, but rather are made up of people from various traditions. This book is extremely useful as a means of conversation between the traditions and for helping people to understand their own traditions. Each author nicely balances the historical, theological, and pastoral perspectives, and they interact with each other respectfully. Even if you are not interested specifically in baptism, you will find this book informative, as baptism is a microcosm of each tradition's theological (especially soteriological and ecclesiological) makeup. This book is very helpful for Christians to understand the denominational landscape of today's world and for helping one to have a deeper appreciation for his or her own theology of baptism. It will also be useful to pastors who are called upon to welcome people of various denominational backgrounds into their churches.

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