

## BOOK REVIEWS & SHORT NOTICES

### Baptism

*Baptism in the New Testament* by G. R. Beasley-Murray. W. T. Whitley Lectureship, 1962. American Paperback Edition, Macmillan & Company, 1973. Reprint edition, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994. Pp. x + 422. \$14.39.

G. R. Beasley-Murray's book *Baptism in the New Testament*, written almost forty years ago, remains the definitive statement and defense of the believers' baptism position. This study has stood the test of time and is probably the most widely quoted book in contemporary discussions on baptism in the English language. No matter where one stands on the theological divide pertaining to the baptism of infants, this volume is must-reading, for it provides sane scholarship that all readers can benefit from and sets forth an exegetical and theological agenda for further discussion and debate.

For readers who are not familiar with Beasley-Murray's study, the author, professor emeritus of New Testament Interpretation at Southern Baptist Theological Seminary, Louisville, Kentucky, and former principal of Spurgeon's College, London, first discusses the antecedents of Christian baptism. This consists of lustrations in the Old Testament, Jewish baptizers and the Qumran community, Jewish proselyte baptism, and the baptism practiced by John the Baptist. From here Beasley-Murray moves on to discuss the foundation of Christian baptism, which is ultimately commissioned by Jesus himself. He then discusses how baptism came to be practiced in the emerging church (the book of Acts) and developed in the apostolic writings. Beasley-Murray

examines in detail baptism in the Pauline epistles, the Johannine literature, as well as baptism in Hebrews and 1 Peter.

Out of this analysis, which comprises almost two-thirds of the book, the author then moves toward synthetic construction in a chapter entitled “The Doctrine of Christian Baptism in the New Testament.” Most startling here is that Beasley-Murray, a Baptist, believes the New Testament witness does not permit us to reduce baptism to mere symbolism (a teaching common to his tradition) and opts in favor of baptism as a sacrament—rightly understood, of course. Thus he rejects *ex opere operato* and any magical notions of “sacrament.” But he refuses to constrict the New Testament teaching about baptism to mere “testimony.” Beasley-Murray is not, however, ready to yield the believers’ baptism position. In one sense, his entire book is a vigorous argument for the believers’ baptism position. Consequently, he sees baptism as attached directly to conversion, and conversion is inseparably attached to faith.

For Beasley-Murray, the New Testament does not allow us to divide Christ and his gifts of grace from the Spirit whom he has bestowed upon the church. Again, breaking slightly with his Baptist heritage, the author argues that the New Testament does not permit us to conceive of baptism as functioning solely as witness to a faith already embraced and an experience of the Spirit already known. Reception of the Spirit may not be divorced from the confession of Christ in baptism. In other words, baptism is a baptism *in the Spirit*. While avoiding mistaken notions of baptismal regeneration, Beasley-Murray maintains that baptism is indeed the arena and occasion of regeneration, associated with and inseparable from, as it must be, grace and faith. Moreover, baptism into Christ is baptism into the church, and this has weighty and far-reaching moral dimensions. Those in Christ are called to a new life in the Holy Spirit oriented to the all holy God. Baptism is death to sin and life in God and for God. Again, Beasley-Murray will not allow the idea of baptism to be reduced to a mere public testimony on the part of believers. It is that, but so much more. Baptism is an eschatological rite, entrance into the eschatological order of the new creation. To be baptized is to

be taken up into “the things to come.” Baptism points to the day of resurrection and gives assurance of our resurrection and immortality. Baptism means hope!

While Beasley-Murray in no way wishes to minimize the importance of baptism, he contests the notion that baptism is “necessary” for salvation. Yet, as a sacrament, why would anyone want to minimize its importance and blessing upon the church?

The final chapter of Beasley-Murray’s book takes up the issue of infant baptism. Approximately ninety pages are devoted to this topic. The doctrine of infant baptism is subjected to critique from almost every conceivable angle. I will therefore limit myself to just a few comments. Beasley-Murray believes that Reformed advocates for the baptism of infants misuse the doctrine of the covenant, making a major mistake in their one-sided emphasis on the unity and continuity of covenant between the old and new dispensations. Ultimately, the discontinuity between the Testaments is of a “cataclysmic” order. The Reformed approach, argues Beasley-Murray, belongs to “an unrealistic mode of exegesis.” Circumcision is wrongly exalted in its significance and simultaneously the New Testament rite of baptism is demoted, for its uniqueness and power, rooted as it is in the cross and resurrection of Christ, is thereby diminished.

Another common error committed by proponents of infant baptism is seen in the way the role and importance of faith is compromised. While Beasley-Murray acknowledges that faith is a *gift* of God, it is also a response of man. Since faith plays such a prominent role in the doctrine of justification, a doctrine of baptism that does not likewise accent the role of faith is suspect, and proves to be contrary to the New Testament witness, says this author. “Indeed the whole lamentable situation in which the Church finds itself today with respect to baptism is sufficient proof that the objective power of baptism, unaffected by the presence or absence of faith is a tragic mistake.”

Beasley-Murray maintains that infant baptism is a doctrine that emerged in response to pressures from within and without the church. The Augustinian doctrine of original sin certainly played a role, argues Beasley-Murray. For his part, Beasley-

Murray is altogether ambiguous regarding the state of infants. Adopting the universalistic language of Romans 5, the author insists that all persons are taken up into Christ's redemptive work, but only those who believe are saved. He emphatically rejects the notion that infants need forgiveness (a typical Baptist position), and asserts that it is "unreal to ask whether children are children of God or children of wrath." They are neither by birth. However, what is clear, according to Beasley-Murray, is that no one becomes a child of God except in baptism by faith. Yet, "no unbaptized infant is a 'child of wrath.'" The children of believers are under the care and disciplining labors of the church. But they are not members of the church.

Infant baptism must be rejected, says our author, for either it must turn the sacrament into magic or it must reduce the sacrament from being a *gift* for today to an *offer* about tomorrow. As a mere offer, infant baptism cannot be a source of assurance. In fact, the offer of grace bestowed in the baptism of infant children of believers is exactly the same grace available to all children of all people, "to every child in a world under the redemption of Christ." Beasley-Murray even points out the lack on unanimity among the Reformed on the doctrine of infant baptism and the covenant, and how these disagreements have led to schism and ecclesiastical ruptures.

But, again, what is essential for Beasley-Murray is the element of demand or obligation that is inseparably connected to the divine promise, and that is the demand of faith. The link between grace and faith cannot be maintained in the baptism of infants, since (as is obvious enough) little children are incapable of faith. No doctrine of baptism may be made to conform itself to anything except this New Testament given.

Readers of this volume will discover a wealth of biblical and historical material with which to wrestle. This book deserves a Reformed response that matches it in scope, erudition, and exegetical detail.

—J. Mark Beach

*Children of the Promise: The Biblical Case for Infant Baptism* by Robert R. Booth. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 1995. Pp. 206. \$9.99.

Robert Booth's book on baptism is distinguished by its irenic spirit and clear biblical exposition. It serves as a model polemic, since its aim is to convince and persuade, not to "score points" against opponents. Booth, formerly an elder in a Baptist church, serves as pastor of Grace Covenant Church (an evangelical and Presbyterian church, according to the blurb on the book's back cover) and is a graduate student at the Southern California Center for Christian Studies, where he is simultaneously its program director. Booth came to his new conviction about the permissibility and necessity of infant baptism through a program of careful study. Since he exercised an important leadership role as an elder in a Baptist congregation, Booth felt obliged to explain to his brothers and sisters why and how he changed his mind on this issue. This book is the result.

Booth really asks one question in his book: Who should be baptized? He argues for baptizing infants who are part of households headed by believing parents. He sums up his argument under five headings: (1) Covenant Theology, (2) Continuity of the Covenant of Grace, (3) Continuity of the People of God, (4) Continuity of the Covenant Signs, and (5) Continuity of Households. What is foundational to the argument, then, is the unity of the covenant of grace, manifest in various administrations, reaching its final expression in the new covenant, which is not a *different covenant* than the covenant of grace but a new administration of the one covenant of grace.

It is beyond the scope of this review to present Booth's "case for infant baptism." The five headings noted above adequately lay out the trajectory of the book and the kinds of issues the author addresses. I do wish, however, to point out one problematic feature of Booth's argument which needs correction or at least clarification.

Booth it seems, for fear of presumptive regeneration, goes too far in the other direction, giving us a weak and attenuated

definition of the *promise* of the covenant and, consequently, of the *meaning* of the covenant signs: “The covenant sign was not an indication that those who received it were regenerated. Nor did it mean that they would necessarily be regenerated in the future. Rather, the covenant sign was God’s indication that its recipients were *set apart* for his special blessing and use. They therefore stood in need of cleansing, regeneration, and justification. The benefits of the covenant were to be appropriated by faith in the promised Redeemer. To be included in this gracious covenant meant to be an heir of the promise (i.e., one who should lay claim to the Redeemer). A child of the covenant had available all the benefits and privileges of this covenant, including salvation. Yet this same child of the covenant, failing to appropriate these benefits by faith, became a covenant breaker and received God’s covenant judgment instead of his covenant blessing” (p. 9).

Booth writes these words in the context of discussing the “gracious plan of God.” What is striking here is that Booth seems to give us a doctrine of the covenant in which the children of believers are brought into the arena of grace—that is, the sphere in which they *can be saved*—provided they respond appropriately to the divine promises. In other words, recipients of the sign and seal of the covenant of grace (circumcision in the Old Testament and baptism in the New Testament) do not receive what is signified and sealed in the sacramental rite, regeneration and the forgiveness of sins; rather, they receive a promise with a contingency: if they believe these things, the blessings and fruits of the covenant *will* become theirs. But this elicits the query: Isn’t the same true for those who are not in the covenant? For Booth, recipients of the sign and seal of the covenant, baptism, are *heirs* of the promise, provided they meet their covenant obligations. Again, they are not actual recipients of the blessings and privileges until those obligations are met. As he writes: “The children of believers who are *faithful* to God’s covenant *will know* the individual blessing of personal salvation” (p. 46, *italics added*). Where does this leave the infant-children of believers, incapable as they are of meeting these “obligations”? Booth gives us a thinned down doctrine of the divine promise, wherein our

contribution is decisive. Such an accent emasculates God's promise and leaves recipients of baptism without assurance, since we are cast back upon "our faithfulness" as the decisive factor.

No doubt, it is not Booth's intention to leave believers without assurance. In another context he expresses himself in a way that offers encouragement and certainty, maintaining that baptism not only signifies "the need for" but also signifies "God's gracious provision of" forgiveness and rebirth. "Baptism unites believers *and their children* with God's promised Redeemer, Jesus Christ, and secures their position as his people." Yet even in this context his language betrays a doctrine of conditionality that is troublesome, especially as this applies to the infant-children of believers, for he states that "baptism must be responded to by faith *before* covenant blessings may be appropriated" (p. 107, *italics* added here and above). Well, can infants "appropriate" such blessings?

Earlier in his book, Booth sets forth what he understands by the idea of conditionality in the covenant: "A covenant, when formed between a superior and an inferior, is a 'conditional promise.' A reward is promised, on the condition of obedience, and punishment is threatened for disobedience" (p. 23). He then offers this definition of covenant: "We should ... understand a covenant between God and man to be *a conditional promise, sealed by blood, sovereignly administered by God, with blessings for those who obey the conditions of the covenant and curses for those who disobey its conditions*" (p. 24). As is evident, Booth wishes to emphasize the "contingencies" of the covenant. The promise is given to you and your children *if...* Thus in discussing the Abrahamic covenant, Booth aims to oppose "mere externalism" and emphasizes the divine demand for "genuine faithfulness" (p. 39). The Mosaic covenant, which was "an addendum" to the Abrahamic covenant, likewise reveals an accent on conditionality: "This redemption, as in all of God's covenants, was conditioned on the covenant faithfulness of its members." Then to drive home the point Booth writes, "Personal salvation is not automatically given to those who are merely externally

circumcised (or baptized). God requires a ‘circumcised heart’ (Deut. 30:6)” (p. 41).

While I do not wish in any degree to minimize the necessity of an obedient response to covenant promises, I do wish to emphasize that surely those promises are really ours (present tense), otherwise the call to covenant obedience is a sham. How can we be obliged to respond to a promise that isn’t yet given but *shall be given*, provided I make my contribution? No, we can only respond to God’s promises in obedience because those promises are really extended to believers and their children, which baptism signifies and seals. And it is our Lord who “gives what the sacrament signifies—namely the invisible gifts and graces; washing, purifying, and cleansing our souls of all filth and unrighteousness; renewing our hearts and filling them with all comfort; giving us true assurance of his fatherly goodness; clothing us the ‘new man’ and stripping off the ‘old,’ with its works” (Belgic Confession, Art. 34). To be sure, we may not “identify” the sign with the thing signified. But neither may we commit the error of “separating” or “divorcing” the sign from the thing signified.

Booth’s book on baptism begs for precision at this point. Instead we are given a doctrine of baptism that is long on the call to obedience but short on the divine initiative that makes our response possible. Booth does not deny the divine initiative in salvation (see, for example, pp. 112-116), but what sort of initiative is it when the human contribution seems to ratify or activate the salvific blessings of the covenant? Booth’s doctrine of the promise of the covenant simply lacks clarity, and the book would be greatly strengthened if the divine promise were not defined in such a diluted and attenuated fashion.

—J. Mark Beach

*The Water That Divides: A Survey of the Doctrine of Baptism* by Donald Bridge and David Phipps. Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Mentor by Christian Focus Publications, 1998. Pp. 192. Price unknown.



The authors of *The Water the Divides* describe themselves as “insular Englishmen at the end of the twentieth century, one a Baptist, the other a Church of England minister.” This means that the authors do not agree with each other when it comes to whether or not infant children should be baptized. Yet their differences in persuasion have enabled them to write a book which presents the major approaches to baptism in a fair and evenhanded way.

This review will list the three main headings in *The Water That Divides* and offer some comments in response to each section.

*Baptism and Scripture.* Bridge and Phipers begin their survey with New Testament references to baptism. They distinguish the baptism which was promoted by John the Baptist and Christian baptism which the Apostles first administered on the day of Pentecost. John’s baptism was “for repentance” and was urged upon people as a way for them to acknowledge their need for God to cleanse both their hearts and hands. The baptism urged by the Apostles at Pentecost was like John’s in that it involved a call to repentance. Yet Christian baptism went beyond John’s in that penitent sinners were washed “in the name of Jesus Christ” for the forgiveness of their sins and to receive “the gift of the Holy Spirit” (Acts 2:38).

Say Bridge and Phipers, the “direct equation between baptism and reception of the Holy Spirit cannot be stressed too strongly.... Admittedly, water-baptism and Spirit-baptism are logically separate events and each is possible without the other.... But theologically the two belong together.... There is no need to separate water-baptism and Spirit-baptism, nor does the New Testament do this.” (pp. 20-21)

Another lesson the authors glean from the New Testament is that Christian baptism demonstrates the “all of God’s grace” nature of salvation. “It can never be said too strongly that God’s love for us has nothing at all to do with our being loveable or even likeable... Because baptism is a declaration of the gospel, it is an announcement of God’s grace: the emphasis, as in Paul’s words to Titus (3:4-5), is on God’s coming to us, not our doing

something for Him...” Yet “this gracious salvation is appropriated by faith, and baptism declares this too.” (p. 21)

In their survey of the New Testament, Bridge and Phipers also accent the “union with Christ” dimension of Christian baptism (see Rom. 6:1-14; Col. 2:12). “Coming to Christ involves dying and rising with Him, and there is no more vivid reminder of this than the act of baptism itself.” Entering the water the Christian shares in Christ’s death; leaving the water he shares in Christ’s resurrection.

But the believer in Christ does not live his new life in isolation from other Christians. The believer becomes part of the people of God. “Thus, baptism in the New Testament is portrayed as the means of entry into the Christian church. Paul writes, ‘by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body’ (1 Cor. 12:13). To be baptized without belonging to the church is a contradiction in New Testament terms.” (pp. 22-23)

Beyond these general theological observations on which most Christians agree, Bridge and Phipers use two chapters to present the paedobaptist and Baptist understandings of the historical and theological evidence. Though these two chapters do not directly rebut each other, they illustrate how very differently paedobaptists and Baptists see things.

Paedobaptists, for example, see in the New Testament several references to the baptism of “households” (Acts 16:15, 33; 1 Cor. 1:16). “It is inconceivable,” say paedobaptists, “that in all these households there were no children or infants. When parents and other responsible members of the household were baptized their children were obviously included as well. This was how first century Greek and Roman families operated... Decisions reached by the head of a family directly and almost unquestioningly affected all its members.” (pp. 26-27)

To Baptists, however, New Testament household baptisms do not illustrate family solidarity, but merely record that on several occasions whole families responded to the Gospel. “Either there were no infants in the families concerned, or infants were specifically excluded because they were infants.” (p. 42)

Yet there is more to the disagreement between paedobaptists and Baptists than the interpretation of household references to baptism. At issue is that much broader question as to whether or not there is one covenant of grace in the Bible (with two administrations, the older and the newer) or whether there are two covenants, one of law (the old) and one of grace (the new). Paedobaptist see one covenant of grace in both Old and New Testaments, since believing Abraham of old was justified by faith (Rom. 4:3-12). And since the children of believers were included in the “old” covenant of grace (by circumcision), they most certainly are included in the “new” covenant of grace (by baptism)!

Baptists, however, see many differences between the Old and New Testaments. They read of these differences especially in the book of Hebrews which teaches the superiority of Jesus over Old Testament priests, etc. Baptists reason that since law came through Moses and grace came through Jesus, the covenants they made at Sinai and Calvary are of a different quality. Thus the entrance of children into the New Covenant may be different from their entrance into the Old Covenant.

*Baptism and History.* This section of the book is the longest and, to this reviewer, it is the most interesting part of *The Water That Divides*. Here are a few things I learned from this portion of the book:

(1) Early in church history people identified Christian baptism with the washing away of original sin and “sins formerly committed” (Justin Martyr, d. 163 AD). “If baptism secured the forgiveness of sins, what of sins committed after baptism? Was there any forgiveness for these? Initially, the answer was, No, although later the appalling implications of this conclusion forced theologians to distinguish between sins for which there was forgiveness (still later called venial sins) and sins for which there was no forgiveness (mortal sins).” Tertullian followed this line of thinking, and cited such sins as idolatry, blasphemy, murder, adultery, fornication, false witness and fraud as being unforgivable if committed after baptism. Might it not be better, then, to delay being baptized, not just beyond infancy, but to the

time just before one's death? Said Tertullian, "Deferment of baptism is more profitable, in accordance with each person's character and attitude... All who understand what a burden baptism is will have more fear of obtaining it (too early) than of its postponement." (Cited on p. 60)

(2) For much of church history the issue of baptism was debated against the backdrop of "Christendom" in which Christianity (or a particular form of it) was the officially sanctioned and sponsored religion of empires and nations. In such settings, many infants were baptized as a matter of citizenship, not because they or their parents were true followers of Christ. When people rejected the ideas of the "state church" and the "church state", many of them also rejected the indiscriminate baptism of all the children therein. To distinguish themselves from the sacramental abuses of "state churches", many dissidents abandoned paedobaptism entirely and were re-baptized as adults.

(3) After the Reformation was underway, some Protestants persecuted one another over the issues of "paedobaptism" and "anabaptism" to the point of torturing and killing each other. Bridge and Phipers document the martyrdom of Felix Manz in 1527. Manz was arrested, tried, and convicted of teaching doctrines which were forbidden in Switzerland. In the court records a clerk explained, "They do not allow infant baptism. In this way they will put an end to secular authority." Said his accuser, Ulrich Zwingli, "Let him who talks about going under (the water) go under!" So it was that Felix Manz was executed by drowning. How was it possible that Protestants killed Protestants for the crime of obeying God's Word as they understood it? Because "the Reformation of the sixteenth century rediscovered the New Testament Gospel, but failed to recreate the New Testament church." (p. 75) In other words, many Protestants at that time still embraced the idea of the "state church" in which nonconformity to official church teachings was a civil crime punishable by death!

(4) John Calvin's contribution. In his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin addressed the sacrament of baptism from the

perspective of the priority of God's grace. God's grace precedes both the reality of salvation and its symbols (the sacraments). Therefore, said Calvin, paedobaptism does not put infants and their believing parents in the wrong place, but it puts God in the right position, as the sovereign giver of the grace which precedes repentance and faith. (p. 96) Say Bridge and Phipers, "Calvin's efforts to placate, silence, or win back the Radicals was in fact one of his least-known but most remarkable successes. In French Switzerland thousands of Anabaptists came into the field of Calvinism and had their children baptized." (p. 98) Obviously not all Baptists were persuaded by Calvin, but his appeal to Scripture and its covenant pattern was much needed. It changed the whole tone of baptismal controversy. "In the Middle Ages, paedobaptism stood for Catholicism and adult baptism for evangelical 'heresy'. During the Lutheran reformation, paedobaptism symbolized state Christianity, while adult baptism symbolized voluntary Christianity. Through Calvin's reforms, paedobaptism came to represent a predestinarian view of gospel, while adult baptism accompanied a strong emphasis on human freedom." (pp. 98-99)

(5) Proposed solutions to the baptism controversy. Some people have tried to bridge the gap which separates paedobaptists and Baptists by saying that baptism is not a sacrament which is essential to the Christian faith, but that it is an outward ordinance by which believers express their faith in Christ. Whether or not to baptize children, therefore, should not be debated with the same fervor as whether or not Christ is the true and living Son of God. We should allow Christians to express their faith in Christ by having or not having their children baptized according to their individual convictions. And we should allow children who were baptized in their infancy to decide whether or not they would like to be baptized again as adults. But while this approach may allow paedobaptists and Baptists to coexist in the same congregations, it tends to cut baptism loose from its deeper theological meaning.

*Baptism Today and Tomorrow.* In this, the final section of *The Water That Divides*, Bridge and Phipers have three chapters:

Problems for paedobaptists, Problems for Baptists, The Real Issues, and Baptism in a Postmodern World.

In some ways the first three chapters cover the same material that is in the first section, *Baptism and Scripture*. This reviewer will, therefore, focus on the final chapter and its view of the sacrament in a “postmodern world”.

By postmodern, Bridge and Phipers refer to developments in contemporary culture in which the idea of truth has become individual and relative. If something works for me, it’s true. But what works for me may not work for you, so it may not be true for you! The quest for “sound doctrine” in past generations has given way to a search for meaningful religious experiences. “People make religious decisions in a world that is essentially pluralistic, whose greatest virtue is that it offers choice.”

“For example, some postmodern ‘Christians’ see no contradiction between accepting the reality of God’s love, believing in the resurrection of Jesus, and looking forward to reincarnation on this planet when they die! Mixing traditional Christian and Hindu thought in this way simply does not bother them. Others will quite happily ‘commit their lives to Christ’, express their faith publicly in baptism/confirmation, then go and live with their partner without getting married. (Breaking the Seventh Commandment? But it feels right so it must be right).” (p. 172)

This means that many who reflect the postmodern mind won’t be interested in the church’s “we’re right” and “you’re wrong” debates concerning baptism. People are too interested in making their own individual life-stories to listen to Christians quote proof-texts. But the church can confront the postmodern world with the Gospel (the Big Story, as Bridge and Phipers call it) and with its testimony to what the Gospel does for us. This is why we must keep the preaching of the Word and the sacraments inseparably linked in the life of the church. The sacraments are not occasions for individual spiritual experiences as much as they are the means of grace by which the believing faith community appropriates and celebrates the Gospel.

As a former Baptist and present paedobaptist, I very much appreciated *The Water That Divides*. It's an honest, insightful and irenic book which will give readers of all theological persuasions much to consider!

—Roger W. Sparks

*Salvation's Sign and Seal: The Case for Infant Baptism* by Rodger M. Crooks. Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain: Mentor by Christian Focus Publications, 1997. Pp. 94. Price unknown.

In Reformed and Presbyterian circles we are seeing an increasing incidence of believers coming into our churches who are rightly attracted to the substance of the reformed faith, but who, along the way, have yet a few doctrinal issues to work through. For many, there is the need to learn to think covenantally—and to learn to think covenantally in regard to baptism. Such dear brethren need two things. They need time to sift through these issues of truth, and they need careful, clear, and concise studies to help them to do this. Rodger Crooks has provided just such help with this little volume.

The book consists of five brief and well-ordered chapters, followed by an annotated bibliography. At ninety-four pages, it is a step up from a booklet, and would not unnecessarily overwhelm the ordinary Christian who is conscientiously seeking to examine the doctrine of baptism. In the first chapter, the author addresses the basis of baptism, laying out simply but effectively the doctrine of the covenant of grace as the great unifying theme of the Scriptures. He then moves on in Chapter 2 to discuss the meaning of baptism. Here he shows how baptism is an indication of admission to the visible church, a sign of the covenant of grace, and a seal of the same. Chapter 3 deals with the subjects of baptism, providing five arguments for baptizing the children of believers: the argument from the covenant of grace, the argument from the nature of the church, baptism as a right of all who belong to the kingdom of God, the argument from examples of household baptism, and the argument from the silence of the New Testament.

Chapter 4 is the longest of the book, and here the author treats the mode of baptism. He effectively points out the weaknesses in the classic “immersion-only” arguments, and then goes on to make the case for pouring or sprinkling as the proper mode. He concludes with a plea that differences on this doctrine should not harm true fellowship with brothers in Christ. This plea is consistent with the pastoral and irenic tone maintained throughout the book. In the final chapter the author discusses some additional issues related to baptism, including the importance of baptism, the status of a baptized child, and the problems surrounding re-baptism.

At the very least this little book should serve to “get the wheels turning” for one who wishes to consider seriously the biblical doctrine of baptism. It is of special value, then, that the author includes the annotated bibliography which highlights other works on baptism. Commonly, a particular author’s approach or argument may prove to be of unique value, given the background of the reader. A final note: Should there be a revision in the future, the bibliography should include Douglas Wilson’s *To a Thousand Generations*.

—Bruce H. Hollister

*Classic Baptism: An Inquiry into the Meaning of Baptizo as Determined by the Usage of Classical Greek Writers* by James W. Dale. With a new introduction by Robert H. Countess. Reprint of 1867 edition. Wauconda, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1989. Pp. xxii + 354. \$19.99.

*Judaic Baptism: An Inquiry into the Meaning of Baptizo as Determined by the Usage of Jewish and Patristic Writers* by James W. Dale. With a new introduction by Robert H. Countess. Reprint of 1869 edition. Wauconda, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1991. Pp. 400. \$19.99.

*Johannic Baptism: An Inquiry into the Meaning of the Baptizo as Determined by the Usage of the Johannine Writings* by James W. Dale. Reprint of 1898 edition. Wauconda, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci



Publishers; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1993. Pp. 428. \$19.99.

*Christic and Patristic Baptism: An Inquiry into the Meaning of Βαπτίζω as Determined by the Usage of Christic and Patristic Writers* (two volumes in one) by James W. Dale. Reprint of 1874 edition. Wauconda, IL: Bolchazy-Carducci Publishers; Phillipsburg, NJ: Presbyterian and Reformed Publishing Co., 1995. Pp. 670. \$19.99.

In his Foreword to the first volume of this four volume set, Jay Adams expresses well the likely response of any student who takes the trouble to make use of them—"No other work on baptism begins to approximate James Wilkinson Dale's four-volume set.... Four comprehensive volumes on the use of the word βαπτίζω—think of it!" I use the language, "takes the trouble to make use of them," because in our day of instant communications and short attention spans, it is unlikely that many readers will have the inclination or courage to make their way through these volumes in their sequence of presentation.

Dale's studies, written in the nineteenth century, are the product of a life-time of philological and lexical study of the meaning and use of the most common Greek terms for "to baptize," especially the verb βαπτίζω. As the titles of these volumes indicate, Dale's research covers the usage of these terms in biblical and extra-biblical sources. Throughout the course of his research, Dale disavows any dogmatic or theological prejudice. His focus is upon the history of the actual usage of the terminology for baptism, arguing that lexicography may only describe the meaning of terms in their usage rather than prescribe what terms must mean in every instance of their use.

Based upon his studies of the usage of βαπτίζω, Dale reached the following conclusion: "Whatever is capable of thoroughly changing the character, state, or condition of any object, is capable of baptizing that object: and by such change of character, state, or condition, does, in fact, baptize it" (*Classic Baptism*, p. 354). Contrary to the typical immersionist claim that this verb denotes a particular mode of baptism, Dale argues that the meaning of this verb suggests an action whereby two entities are

“put together so as to remain together.” In terms of the biblical idea of baptism into Christ, this means that baptism joins the believer in an intimate and life-transforming bond of fellowship with Christ. So far as the particular debates regarding the mode of baptism is concerned—whether by immersion, affusion or sprinkling—these will have to be, according to Dale, settled on other grounds than an appeal to the meaning of βαπτίζω.

These studies of Dale remain a useful and significant contribution to an understanding of the doctrine of baptism. However, the reader needs to be cautioned against an exaggerated appeal to Dale’s arguments. As Dale himself acknowledged, the most important step in the determination of a term’s meaning is to study it in the particular context and text in which it is used. This means that no appeal to Dale’s findings can substitute for careful exegesis of the relevant biblical texts on the subject of baptism.

—Cornelis P. Venema

*Through the Waters: Baptism and the Christian Life* by David S. M. Hamilton. Edinburgh: T & T Clark Ltd., 1990. Pp. vi + 136. \$19.95.

Professor Hamilton teaches Practical Theology at the University of Glasgow and his book is based on lectures that he gave at New College (Scotland) in the Croall Lectureship. Hamilton is, sadly, in the thrall of higher criticism and also has a weak view of covenant theology (particularly he disputes the teaching that baptism is the New Covenant version of circumcision—with all the attendant fullness that adheres to the New Covenant). Thus, given his heterodoxy on a number of points, this book is not as useful as it might otherwise be if the clearly able Professor Hamilton were orthodox. Nonetheless, these lectures contain some helpful insights into the sacrament of Holy Baptism and merit careful consideration.

Hamilton, in his first chapter (entitled “Images”), notes that “for a great many people inside the church as well as outside, baptism is altogether mystifying.” That is to say, many

congregants view baptism “as a ceremony of naming, or blessing by the church, or as a dramatic gesture of self-dedication” and do not grasp its theological significance (p. 3). He argues that we, indeed, ought to seek to understand the truth embodied in this theology-from-below before cavalierly dismissing it; nevertheless, Hamilton contends that such popular notions of baptism “do not in fact provide Christians with the understanding of life for God in the world which baptism is intended to give,” insofar as “they proclaim no gospel” (p. 7).

Hamilton, then, is concerned to explicate baptism in terms that will be theologically rich as well as meaningful to the man in the pew. Understanding that the sacraments are “visible words” and provide us with graphic pictures of biblical truth—particularly redemptive truth—Hamilton reasons that we should seek to understand the sacraments in a primary sense in terms of their particular elements. In the case of baptism, “since by definition baptism involves water, water imagery has to be primary” (p. 14). Hamilton writes that “there are in fact three such primary images to be found in the Bible and the Christian tradition—cleansing or washing, deliverance from danger or death, and birth” (p. 15). Hamilton avers that these images do not exhaust the subject and do not say all that needs to be said about this sacrament that marks us as “in Christ,” but he affirms “that we need to return again and again to these three images beyond all others in our listening and talking with people about baptism” (p. 15).

Chapters 2 through 4 treat these three images of washing, deliverance, and birth, successively. Hamilton notes that “the significance of washing as a ritual was of course not new” to the Jews of the Apostles’ day, having a Levitical background (p. 18). Hamilton proceeds to discuss the connections between the washing of Jewish sects, Jewish proselyte baptism, John’s baptism, Jesus’ baptism, and Christian baptism. His discussion of the baptism of Jesus reveals a deficient Christology, though there are some helpful insights here. Hamilton argues that “stress upon baptismal cleansing . . . was the primary image in the primitive church . . . [and] remained [so] even when other images began to

enrich baptism theology” (p. 32). The increasing shift from believers’ to infants’ baptism, and the question of what to do with sin after baptism, led, according to Hamilton, to a division between the regeneration and removal of sin in baptism and the Spirit baptism that occurs in confirmation. To be sure, Origen, Cyprian, and Augustine contributed to the developing theology of infant baptism. But Hamilton seems to discount the New Testament evidence of infant baptism as well as the practice of the early church as revealed in archaeological and historical investigation. Most strikingly, though, Hamilton sees baptism as “a rite that is quite new, unencumbered by Jewish significance: indeed it is contrasted with circumcision” (p. 81), apparently failing to understand how that baptism speaks in a New Covenant way of the same thing of which circumcision spoke in shadowy form.

Hamilton is anything but orthodox. Yet there is a certain provocativeness that may serve the cause of orthodoxy. For instance, Hamilton offers some interesting arguments, albeit largely psychological ones, against re-baptism. He argues that those who want to be baptized as adults because they have now come to the consciousness of faith miss that “baptism, like birth, is only the beginning of growth” (p. 85). To be sure, there is a particular appropriateness to baptizing an infant who has just come into the world and is soon marked as a child of God, a member of Christ’s body, the church. Spiritual birth is indeed signified and sealed in baptism. That little member of the church is as helpless and dependent on his parents physically as we are dependent on God for saving grace. We can no more cause our new birth as we can our physical birth and this is surely set forth in our baptism. As Hamilton argues, baptism, like birth, is something in which we are passive. It is something done to us. It is not something that we do.

As noted above, “deliverance” is also one of the motifs of baptism. Certainly we see that in the Apostle Peter’s discussion of the Flood and Baptism (1 Peter 3:18-22). Because Noah and his family were in the Ark (as we are in Christ), the Flood did not drown them but did drown the enemies of God. Similarly, the

same waters that the Lord held back from harming the fleeing Israelites came cascading down upon and drowned the pursuing Egyptians. Hamilton explores other themes not directly related to the water imagery of baptism, notably “belonging” (Chapter 5) and “celebration” (Chapter 6). He uses belonging to argue for all manner of things: women’s ordination (we all “belong”), paedocommunion (don’t children “belong?”), and baptism of children whose parents may not profess faith (why shouldn’t they belong?). But just as one is despairing of this book having any real worth, Professor Hamilton will make an insightful observation. Regarding the mode of baptism, he writes: “. . . even a tankful of water is still only symbolic, for what is symbolised is so terrifyingly, so overwhelmingly destructive, that no symbolic action or element can do more than hint at it. Total immersion is no more than what a thousand people do every day in the local swimming pool for fun. On the other hand a damp-handed dab is so minimal, so completely off the scale at the other end, that it is not even symbolic. Water poured, washed over the head, is recognisable and matter of fact, in infant baptism visible to those close by, in adult baptism palpable to the candidate—water unmistakably there, and wet.”

One of the refrains of this book is Hamilton’s concern that adult baptism has come to shape infant baptism. To be sure, his solution is problematic—so emphasizing God’s action in baptism that the need for faith is downplayed or denied. Yet, he also makes some valid points in this regard, and ends the book with his own suggested liturgy to be used at the baptism of infants and adults. He places the promises made by parents and congregation after the baptism. This is actually quite powerful, insofar as baptism is not about the empowerment of parents to raise good Christians but about the grace of God in Christ that we and our children desperately need, and without which there is no hope of, eternal salvation. This grace of God in Christ is signified and sealed in our baptism.

—Alan D. Strange

*Baptism, the New Testament, and the Church: Historical and Contemporary Studies in Honour of R. E. O. White*, edited by Stanley E. Porter and Anthony R. Cross. Journal for the Study of the New Testament. Supplement Series 171. Sheffield, England: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999. Pp. 497. Price unknown.

Reginald Ernest Oscar White served in Scotland as a Baptist pastor, teacher, and theologian during the middle decades of the twentieth century. The opening pages of this festschrift provide a bibliography of White's writings, and a biographical sketch of White's life and labors. The bulk of the volume consists of two sections, the first featuring essays of an exegetical nature, the second providing pieces either historical, confessional, or pastoral in nature. The reader of this review may best be served with a brief account of each essay.

“In Such a Manner it is Fitting for Us to Fulfill All Righteousness”: Reflections on the Place of Baptism in the Gospel of Matthew,” by John Nolland. How does Matthew understand John's baptism? Nolland dismisses the suggestion that John's baptism was a rite symbolizing submission to judgment. Rather, the rite is an enacted image of provisional cleansing, a purification tied to repentance—a ceremony that fits well with many OT references to purification, repentance, and washing. What is the significance of Jesus' baptism by John? Jesus is placing himself alongside his fellow Israelites, starting down the path of humility leading ultimately to the cross. Is Jesus' baptism in the Jordan in any sense a model for Christian baptism? No, says Nolland, there is no specific link between these two baptisms. Regarding Christ's command to the Eleven that they baptize, recorded at the end of Matthew's Gospel, Nolland observes its connection with the genealogy at the beginning of the Gospel. Christian baptism expresses identification with the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

“Mark 1.4, Baptism and Translation,” by Stanley E. Porter. Why should Mark 1:4, particularly the phrase κηρῦσσων βάπτισμα μετανοίας εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν, occupy so much attention? Because this verse lies at the heart of the translation

theory pioneered by Eugene Nida, whose work in 1952 and 1969 has been ignored by subsequent commentators. Issues involved in this phrase include the relation between the nouns βάπτισμα and μετανοίας, their possible temporal-sequential relation, and whether the phrase εἰς ἄφεσιν ἁμαρτιῶν modifies one, both, or none of the preceding nouns. Although Porter's conclusion contributes little that is new, he does raise important questions about the methods used for translating and commenting on the Greek text of the NT.

“From ‘John’s Baptism’ to ‘Baptism in the Name of the Lord Jesus’: The Significance of Baptism in Luke–Acts,” by Joel B. Green. Green argues that current discussion of the meaning of baptism in Acts has reached an impasse because of a faulty interpretative methodology. He proposes a discourse-oriented approach, outlined more fully elsewhere and sketched in the opening pages of this essay. Such an analysis follows carefully and is guided by the development of themes within the narrative text composed within the limits usually governing a writer and an audience (plot, staging, and order). Given the coherence and unity of Luke–Acts, the meaning of Christian baptism (Acts) cannot be understood apart from the meaning of the baptism performed by John (Luke and Acts). In fact, one might expand Green's claim by saying that John's baptism and ministry provide the often overlooked key to proper assessment of Jesus' ministry and teaching.

“‘One Baptism’ (Ephesians 4.5): A Challenge to the Church,” by Anthony R. Cross. This essay discusses baptism more synthetically, aiming to redress at least two kinds of exegetical imbalance. The first is atomistic exegesis which isolates NT authors and texts. Drawing on the use of metonymy to show that biblical writers often spoke of aspects of baptism without forgetting the wider theological context of divine grace, Cross urges us to do the same. The second imbalance involves the claim that within the NT, Christian baptism began as an eschatological emphasis, but soon became backward-looking, fixing on Christ's cross and resurrection. In reply, Cross shows how the historical arguments can be interpreted to point to a

unified understanding of baptism within the NT, to a universally held baptismal theology. This plausible interpretation helps us understand the meaning, in Ephesians 4:5, of the phrase “one baptism.” The phrase itself is located within a context of seven “ones” (vv. 4-6), within a section and an entire letter whose central theme is the church’s unity. In examining the meaning of “one” and of “baptism,” Cross detects the use of metonymy. The entire set of events characterizing the beginning of the Christian life—conversion, repentance, faith, and Spirit-baptism—are covered by the phrase “one baptism.” Aspects of this claim have not gone unchallenged by exegetes (J.D.G. Dunn and G.D. Fee, for example).

With its reference to “one baptism,” Ephesians 4:5 pointedly challenges the existence, in the universal church of Christ, of two baptisms—paedobaptism and credobaptism. (The distinction between water-baptism and Spirit-baptism is thought to have dissolved through metonymy.) Cross explains various British attempts to bring together parties committed to each baptismal practice, concluding with the reminder to those rejecting the complete return to credobaptism of the church’s need for continuing reform.

“Baptism, Conscience and the Resurrection: A Reappraisal of 1 Peter 3.21,” by John E. Colwell. Here is a solid piece of exegetical work that opens up the relation between baptism and ethics. “Baptism is ethical in its focus inasmuch as it is significant of the impartation of a consciousness of God that issues in a character that is integrated with the gospel” (219). Baptism is not the efficient cause of this consciousness, but it is the event through which this consciousness and its accompanying dynamic are promised by both God and the one baptized. Colwell challenges the opinion of Barth and many Baptists that baptism is no more than an outward testimony to an inner and personal reality. “To affirm God’s promise and action within baptism is not to undermine baptism as a truly human action, it is rather to enable and establish it as a truly human action. Because baptism is a prayer [ἐπερώτημα, 1 Pet. 3:21] in the light of God’s promise, it can truly be a human promise” (226). This sentiment seems to



be supported by Calvin himself, when in the *Institutes* he offers this brief definition of a sacrament: “a testimony of divine grace toward us, confirmed by an outward sign, with mutual attestation of our piety toward him” (4.14.1).

“On Board the Eschatological Ark of God: Noah–Deucalion and the ‘Phrygian Connection’ in 1 Peter 3.19-22,” by Larry J. Kreitzer. The entire Noah-allusion in this passage is scrutinized, first in connection with Roman mythology (Deucalion as the counterpart to Noah), then in light of the location of Phrygia in the Roman province of Asia, and finally in terms of the metaphor of the ark as salvation. The author explores the suggestion of James Moffatt in his 1928 commentary on 1 Peter that Peter’s allusion to Noah’s ark in discussing Christian baptism may well have found a point of contact in the tradition, known to Peter’s audience, connecting both Enoch and the ark with Phrygia. Throughout his essay, Kreitzer uses parallels from apocryphal and other extra-biblical literature, including patristic sources, to shed light on various biblical references and allusions to the flood and its consequences.

“Dying with Christ: The Origin of a Metaphor?,” by Alastair Campbell. The author confesses to having difficulty with the pastoral implementation and usefulness of the representative or corporate-personality view of baptism-as-dying-and-rising-with-Christ. Rather than argue that Christian experience is the fruit of dying and rising with Christ, Campbell posits the reverse: Paul’s Christian experience of suffering in the cause of the gospel is the origin of his speaking about dying and rising with Christ.

His defense of this view begins with an exegesis of Galatians 2:19-20. How these verses fit within Paul’s line of argument is not easily determined. But the phrase “I have been crucified with Christ” refers quite possibly to Paul’s vivid experience of coming to faith in Jesus Christ, marked by the rite of baptism. To be baptized means, in part, to be crucified before the watching world on account of public identification with Christ. The cost is loss of honor, friends, and social identity. Since Paul had formerly been a Jew whose life was dominated by the law, to be crucified with Christ was to die to the law. Paul died “through the

law” as Christ died through the law: in his life Christ had challenged the accepted understanding of the law and in his death he paid the penalty exacted by the guardians of that law. This is how the law lost its power over Christ—and Paul.

The second stage of defense is an exegesis of Romans 6:1-11. In this context, Paul provides three extended pictures of the believer’s break with the old way of life. The first is a dying and rising (vv. 1-11), the second is the change from one master to another (vv. 15-23), and the third is the metaphor of marrying again (7:1-6). Each portrays a radical break with an old life, a break that makes returning to former patterns unthinkable. But what gives dying-and-rising its force is not union with Christ, but similarity to Christ in experiencing the world’s hatred—a reality occasioned by baptism. Baptism occasions and gives expression to a foretaste of dying and rising again, as old allegiances are cut off and the sanctifying work of the Spirit takes root. Campbell rightly rejects the view of J.D.G. Dunn, that though we are wholly identified with Christ’s death, we are not yet identified to the same extent with his resurrection. Walking in newness of life (v. 4) is the same thing as sharing Christ’s resurrection. Clear ground for the author’s view appears to lie in verse 5: “If we have been united with him in a death like his, we shall also be united with him in a resurrection like his” (RSV). The ὁμοίωμα points to the similarity between Christ’s death and the believer’s conversion (expressed in baptism). The point of similarity is not immersion in water, but the experience of social rejection occasioned by public identification with the rejected Messiah. “Such a social death [to the law, to sin, to the world] is the best guarantee of a (moral) resurrection, first, because Christ’s death was followed by his resurrection, and the same pattern can be expected to be reproduced in the experience of those who are ‘in him’, and, secondly because through that resurrection the Spirit of Christ has become available to believers to enable them to put to death the misdeed of the body. . .” (287). Death with Christ is not something believers must be taught had happened to them—they know it only too well by experience.

The final stage is the exegesis of Colossians 2:11-12. Campbell sees this passage as a commentary on Romans 6:1-11, admitting that our interpretation of the Colossians passage will be influenced by our understanding of the Romans verses. Colossians 2:11-12 refer, in Campbell's view, to Christian baptism as a rite of public, costly transfer from one community to another, not to the death of Christ.

How, then, must we explain the shift in the church's explanation of baptism in terms of dying and rising with Christ? Answer: as the threat of martyrdom receded, when the cost of confessing Christ decreased, the church reached for this Pauline language to describe the believer's radical break with the world. Converts needed the reminder that following Christ was serious business, and Paul's metaphor of dying with Christ became a vehicle for such instruction. In an age when baptism has little social cost (at least in the West), this language can serve to express our solidarity with Christian martyrs in every age and place today.

"Baptized' as Metaphor," by James D.G. Dunn. This essay continues Dunn's earlier (1970) presentation of his thesis that NT phrases like "baptized into Christ" (Rom. 6:3; Gal. 3:27) were intended and are best interpreted as metaphors rather than as descriptions of the baptismal act itself. Some later writers have seemed unable to work with Dunn's thesis, and have thus tended to ignore it. The particular value of this present contribution is its clear-headed discussion of the function of metaphors in literature and in theology, and Dunn's application thereof to Romans 6:3-4 and 1 Corinthians 12:13.

"Two Opposing Views on Baptism with/by the Holy Spirit and of 1 Corinthians 12:13: Can Grammatical Investigation Bring Clarity?," by Matthew Brook O'Donnell. Both John R.W. Stott and D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones have enjoyed a reputation as evangelical Bible expositors, yet they came to opposite conclusions regarding the baptism with/by the Holy Spirit. Stott saw the baptism of the Spirit as identical to the gift of the Spirit, a universal blessing for all members of the covenant. Lloyd-Jones, by contrast, viewed the baptism of the Spirit as something

distinct from and subsequent to regeneration. Each appeals to the Bible, to 1 Corinthians 12:13 in particular. O'Donnell carefully and clearly sets forth each man's interpretation of the phrase βαπτίζω ἐν πνεύματι, and in that connection of each man's hermeneutical method. They differ with regard to using narrative accounts (the Gospels and Acts) to help understand epistolary material (Romans and 1 Corinthians). This section is followed by a grammatical investigation of βαπτίζω and related prepositions in the NT, specifically ἐν with βαπτίζω in the passive voice. The author concludes that "ἐν πνεύματι may be used to indicate agency with a passive verb," yielding the possible translation of 1 Corinthians 12:13, "For also *by* one spirit we all into one body were baptized." This offers grammatical support, then, for Lloyd-Jones's interpretation.

"Initiation and Eschatology," by Neville Clark. Readers will find in Clark's essay an application, to questions surrounding the meaning of baptism, of a widespread contemporary view of eschatology known as inaugurated eschatology. In fact, if we may describe the two views of baptism (paedobaptism and credobaptism) as impaired, then church unity could well be advanced, in Clark's view, through the contemporary reform of both views under "the imperative of inaugurated eschatology." This overarching perspective can help provide fresh insight into the relation between the divine and human elements in baptism, and the relation between the "then" and the "now" to which baptism points.

"Infant Dedication in the Early Church," by David F. Wright, and "Baptismal Preparation under the Ministry of St John Chrysostom in Fourth-Century Antioch," by Raymond F.G. Burnish. These two essays begin the second part of the anthology, dealing with baptism in church history, in the church's confessions, and in the church's practice. Throughout history the church has not followed a uniform pattern of baptism followed by instruction leading to confirmation and access to the Lord's Table. For some time in the fourth century infants were not presented for baptism, and catechetical preparation preceded a person's baptism. With obvious competence, these pieces outline

the contours of this reality and offer compelling explanations for its development, the latter with a focus on the theology of baptism found in the writing of John Chrysostom.

“Baptism in the Reformed Confessions and Catechisms,” by Geoffrey W. Bromiley. Basic and essential questions surrounding the sacraments in general and baptism in particular are answered in the numerous creeds that have come to us from the Reformation. In survey fashion, Bromiley collates these answers in a way that is sensitive to the historical context of these creeds, and in a way that honors their consensus on the matters in view. Within a context of opposing both Rome and the radicals, the Reformed confessions capture the centrality and inseparability of divine sovereignty and human participation, of grace and faith, and of trinitarian justification and sanctification.

“An Eighteenth-Century Baptismal Controversy in Scotland,” by Derek B. Murray, and “Open and Closed Membership among Scottish Baptists,” by Kenneth Roxburgh. The focus of these essays is baptism in Scottish church history. In the first piece, Murray explores the historical rise of Baptist principles in mid-eighteenth century Scotland, appending a helpful list of “The Churches in Scotland in the Mid-Eighteenth Century: A Guide for the Unwary.” Roxburgh’s essay discusses the question of “open membership” and its problems, tracing solutions attempted in various places and congregations, even to this day. Many churches committed to Baptist principles do not allow into membership those not so committed, resulting in a growing number of non-Baptist “adherents” who cannot become members of local congregations. Depending on a congregation’s practice of supervising the Lord’s Supper, both sacraments could be involved in this membership regulation. The author pleads for the kind of flexibility embodied in an open membership policy, because it recognizes the validity of the experience of other believers.

“Baptism and Inclusivity in the Church,” by Timothy Bradshaw. If baptism must be reserved for those confessing faith in Christ *and* living lives of holiness according to God’s Word, may practicing homosexuals be baptized? Churches throughout

North America are facing this question in relation to ordination, church membership, and baptism. Why should baptism come under more scrutiny than the other two? Because the baptismal font stands at the doorway of the church, beyond which stand the table and the pulpit. Baptism is seen as “the mark of human inclusivity that prevents distinguishing ‘gays’ from ‘straight’ people for the purposes of ordination and indeed sharing in the Lord’s Supper.” Bradshaw elucidates the argument developed and used in the Episcopal Church of the United States of America. In 1997 the ECUSA came within a single vote of endorsing the ordination of those who practice homosexuality. If baptism is the sacrament of inclusivity, then doctrinal and moral expectations may not differ for clergy and laity, and the “other sacrament” of ordination may not be withheld from one who practices homosexuality (all other things being equal). What Paul did for the Gentiles and for women must now be done for those who practice homosexuality today. Against these arguments Bradshaw appeals to the biblical connection between repentance, dying with Christ to sin and self, and baptism. Baptism entails moral transformation and discontinuity. Baptism embodies a deep challenge to existing lifestyles prior to baptism. But the question remains, I fear, whether advocates in the ECUSA will grant the Bradshaw’s premise that homosexual practice expresses fallen, broken, and confused sexuality.

“Baptism for the Initiated,” by Paul Beasley-Murray. This essay treats the pastoral issue of baptizing a mature Christian (such as one who had been baptized as an infant and later confirmed in the faith, but subsequently came to a personal acknowledgement of Christ). Reflections by working pastors (one may suppose the phrase is not redundant) and Baptist writers are supplemented by the author’s personal reflections on baptism as an act of obedience, following Christ’s example and surrendering to him, receiving the Spirit, and confessing one’s faith.

We may conclude by expressing our appreciation for this fine collection. Although most of these essays communicate a British flavor (or flavour), and although most are written with the clear preference for credobaptism, their collective field of vision is

wide and deep enough to attract the interest of most who read this journal. Sadly, no essay included in this volume offers a thorough exegesis of Acts 2:38-39, without which any biblical and theological discussion about baptism will be impoverished, threatened by the tendency to ignore the Old Testament history of redemption as the necessary bedding and context for the meaning and significance of baptism.

—Nelson D. Kloosterman

*Baptism and the Unity of the Church*, edited by Michael Root and Risto Saarinen. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998. Pp. vi + 209. \$20.00.

This book is stage-three of a project that explores the relationship of baptism and the central paradox or dilemma that drives the ecumenical movement—namely, the fact that the Church is “one, yet not one.” Stage-one of this project was a study paper produced by the Institute for Ecumenical Research, Strasbourg, at the request of the Lutheran World Federation (LWF). This study paper sought both to formulate a particular understanding of baptism and of the church as communion, and to outline and analyze the various ecumenical issues raised by the interconnection of the concepts “baptism” and “communion.” This first-stage study paper served as a point of reference for the second-stage of the project, which was an ecumenical discussion sponsored by the Strasbourg Institute in Hvittorp, Finland, designed to analyze the topic from various angles. The current book is then the result of these two previous stages. It is the publication of the study paper and the contributions presented during consultation at Hvittorp.

Apart from the study paper, there are five articles dealing with foundational or theoretical matters and five dealing with concrete problems of mutual recognition and baptismal practice. Susan K. Wood and Peder Nørgaard-Højen both look at “Baptism and the Foundations of Communion” from a Roman Catholic and Lutheran perspective respectively. The last three foundational essays examine baptism and church unity from

biblical, ecumenical, and liturgical perspectives. In a more exegetically oriented paper the Protestant, James D. G. Dunn explores “Baptism and the Unity of the Church in the New Testament,” while the Lutheran André Brimelé provides a comprehensive survey of “Baptism and the Unity of the Church in Ecumenical Dialogues.” Eugene L. Brand, a Lutheran, deals with the liturgical dimensions of baptism and its ecumenical implication in his essay “Rites of Initiation as Signs of Unity.”

There are also three articles dealing with the problem of mutual recognition: Merja Merras deals with the problem in the Orthodox Churches, S. Mark Heim in the Baptist Churches, and the Anglican John Pobee looks at the problem in the African Instituted Churches. The last two articles address the relationship between baptism and church membership in two particular countries. Baptism and church unity presuppose that baptism is the one means of entrance into full membership within the church. In some situations, however, this premise has been called into question. Ragnar Persenius examines “Baptism and Membership in the Church of Sweden” and shows how they resolved the unacceptable situation that developed in the Lutheran State church. Because all children born to church members in Sweden were themselves automatically enrolled as members of the church apart from baptism, a situation developed in which a significant number of “church members” had never been “baptized.” J. Jayakiran Sebastian discusses the converse problem of the “unbaptized Christian” in his article on “Baptism and the Unity of the Church in India Today.” He points out how both cultural (e.g., caste customs and financial concerns) and religious (e.g., charismatic criticism of the significance of baptism) realities have come together to engender the conviction that one can believe in Christ but reject baptism.

Although the main thrust of this book would be highly problematic for most confessionally Reformed Christians, it can still be read with great benefit. It provides insight into the complexities and difficulties that accompany the desire for complete ecumenicity. The sheer magnitude of the practical issues and concrete problems that exist in different countries and



between diverse ecclesiastical traditions, not to mention the sometimes deep theological disagreements that manifest themselves, demonstrates the near impossibility of achieving total unity among even ecumenically minded churches. This study gives the reader a sampling of those differences and the challenges that confront ecumenical theology. This book also furnishes us with insight into the practical consequences of diverse theologies of baptism. Academic and confessional expressions about baptism bear practical fruits that can sometimes be quite harmful to the wellbeing of the church.

I especially appreciated the articles of Pobee and Sebastian in their insightful depiction of the complexities that emerge where Christianity encounters pagan culture. The impact of this encounter on the theology and practice of baptism in particular helps us to reflect on baptism's importance and significance for the church.

—Jacques Roets

*The Mystery of Baptism in the Anglican Tradition* by Kenneth Stevenson. Harrisburg, PA: Morehouse Publishing, 1998. Pp. viii + 214. \$15.95.

Dr. Kenneth Stevenson is very qualified to be writing on the subject dealt with in this book. He is Bishop of Portsmouth and a member of the Doctrine Commission of the Church of England, as well as the author of several books that deal with the Christian sacraments.

In the first two chapters (“Conversations with History” and “Setting the Scene”) Stevenson tells us what his aim is in the book. He intends to listen to nine different Anglican theologians who lived and wrote during the century that takes us from the late sixteenth century (the reign of Elizabeth I) to the time of Charles II (p. 7). The context of these theologians is the Anglican Church when the Romanist tendencies in theology and liturgy were still evident even as the Puritan influences were being proposed and occasionally adopted. Very aptly does Stevenson describe the Anglican Church when he writes, “The Church of

England is Catholic, but it is not Roman Catholic. It is Reformed, but it is not like the Reformed Churches of the Continent.” To complicate matters further, Anglicanism has also found inspiration from many elements in Eastern Orthodoxy (p. 13).

Some of the emphases that are found in Anglicanism can be related to the three sacramental models suggested by Brian Gerrish, says Stevenson (p. 12). Those models are (1) symbolic memorialism (Zwingli’s view), (2) symbolic parallelism (Bullinger’s view), and (3) symbolic instrumentalism (Calvin’s view).

William Perkins was a spokesman for “a more moderate form of Puritanism than that of Thomas Cartwright” (p. 25). Stevenson analyzes three particular works of Perkins in order to present his views on baptism: *A Golden Chain or The Description of Theology*, his *Commentary on Galatians* (where Perkins focuses on baptism at Gal. 3:27), and *Problem of the Forged Catholicism*.

Stevenson is accurate in his evaluation of Perkins when he writes: “Perkins’ heart seems to be on the side of faithful reception of the sacrament rather than what the sacrament does in itself” (p. 32). Probably somewhat unhappy with the Prayer Book, Perkins wrestled to define what is inward and what is outward in baptism. He sets the covenant of grace above the sacrament of baptism, thus representing a break with Catholic tradition. Perkins is sure that the sacrament of baptism is necessary, but “he cannot quite bring himself to say that it actually does something objective” (p. 35). In line with this Perkins had no use for confirmation, the blessing of the water, and the sign of the cross at baptism. Once “faith migrates into the individual choice of the believer, the sacraments become visual aids and little more” (p. 36).

Richard Hooker, on the other hand, was something of the exact opposite of Perkins. He represents a “high Calvinism” theologically. But in his *The Laws of Ecclesiastical Polity* Hooker departs from Calvin in arguing vigorously for Catholic practices such as the legitimacy of private baptisms, baptism by midwives, the retention of godparents, the sign of the cross at baptism, and confirmation. For Hooker, baptism brought together the inward

and the outward, without denying the element of human response (p. 46). Baptism is moral, ecclesiastical, and mystical, all at once, and as such it brings the one baptized into a sharing of the life of God, something that grows and develops throughout life. Stevenson summarizes Hooker's view when he writes: "For Hooker, baptism is primarily the means of drawing us into participation in the life of God" (p. 52).

Stevenson's analysis of Lancelot Andrewes' approach to baptism begins with a description of the covering of the baptismal font of St. Wulfram church in Grantham. From there he moves into a discussion of the door motif and its relationship to baptism. Christ is the door, and in baptism we have the doors of heaven opened to us! Andrewes preached often in the court of King James I (who, reportedly, enjoyed hearing Andrewes). Many of his sermons were published. Andrewes emphasized Christ's own baptism as Christ taking upon himself the sinful human race, just as we put on Christ when we are baptized. Building on the events of Christ's baptism—the Father's voice is heard, and the Spirit descends as a dove—Andrewes does not fail to draw attention to the Trinitarian aspect of baptism as well.

George Herbert was a priest-poet who was "in love with the providence of God," says Stevenson (p. 84). He carried on his polemics by means of poetry, answering some of Andrew Melville's attacks on the Prayer Book (p. 81). Herbert strongly favored baptism conducted in the context of the whole Christian community as well as the use of the sign of the cross at baptisms. "Why do you insinuate such calumnies against the cross which harms no-one?" wrote Herbert in one of his poems. Herbert's work reminds us that theological debate can be (and was) carried on in another genre besides theological tract and treatise.

John Bramhall served as an Anglican bishop. Although many of his adult years were spent in exile, he was very much acquainted with the royal family. Stevenson describes him as "one of the most versatile and energetic theologians on the seventeenth-century scene" (p. 89). Bramhall stands in the Hooker-Andrewes tradition of high Anglicanism. He composed a short essay that seems to be a kind of extended comment on a

conversation with a family friend. The conversation dealt with the necessity of baptism. Bramhall denies the absolute necessity of baptism for salvation (thus breaking with Augustine), but he insists on its practice for those who have access to baptism. If the opportunity to receive baptism exists, one should not despise it. But the visible sign and the invisible grace can be distinguished (p. 92). As a good and loyal Anglican, Bramhall defended the Prayer Book and the practice of confirmation. According to Stevenson, Bramhall affirmed that “in baptism the Holy Spirit is given for regeneration, whereas in confirmation, the Spirit is given for corroboration of the faith of the believer” (p. 94).

In Chapter eight, Stevenson deals with the work of Jeremy Taylor. Taylor worked at a time when the Prayer Book was superseded by *The Westminster Directory*. Taylor responded in 1658 with his own *Collection of Offices*, a document virtually parallel to the Prayer Book. Taylor wrote two very important essays: *The Great Exemplar* (dealing with the life of Christ) and *The Rule and Exercises of Holy Living*. Taylor draws attention to the commission of Christ to baptize (Matt. 28:18-20) and Christ’s own baptism. Baptism is important because, among other things, it gives the benefit of sanctification to its recipients. Baptism is the beginning of the Christian life, even though Taylor recognized the effects of baptism are not necessarily tied to the time of administration. Taylor’s baptismal theology recognized that, although it was the Church that administered the sacrament, it was God who gave the *grace* of the sacrament. Says Stevenson, “Sacraments are vital for Taylor, because they are about equipping ordinary men and women to live better lives” (p. 104). Those “better lives” come about because of the Holy Spirit.

Richard Baxter represents a moderate Puritan strain within Anglicanism. Baxter had no use for the sign of the cross at baptism, godparents, and empty confirmation rites. Rather, Baxter stressed the life of discipleship in the Christian, based upon the covenant of grace. To that end, Baxter produced in 1682 a work with the title *The Catechizing of Families*, stressing Christian discipleship in practical affairs. Baxter says the following about baptism in Chapter 45 of this work: Baptism is

“a sacred action, or sacrament, instituted by Christ, for the solemnizing of the covenant of Christianity between God and man, and the solemn investing us in the state of Christianity, obliging us to Christ, and for his delivering to us our relation and right to him as our Head, and to the gifts of his covenant.” To this covenant children also belong, and therefore they ought to be baptized.

Simon Patrick was active in the Anglican communion in the latter half of the seventeenth century. His first published work, *Aqua Genitalis* (Water of Rebirth) in 1658 was important, coming as it does in the period of time between the Puritan party and the other elements in high Anglicanism. The stress in Patrick’s works is on the profession of one’s faith: baptism expresses something very important in terms of federal (covenant) theology. Something is said from our side and from God’s side in baptism. The font belonged at the entrance of the church building, and from there one proceeded up the slope of the church, to the pulpit where one is taught the faith and confirmed therein, and from there on to the altar where communion in the Lord’s body and blood occurred. “Baptism sanctifies, confirmation strengthens” in Patrick’s view, according to Stevenson (p. 137). Patrick was very impressed with the sacred traditions of Anglicanism, and so he favored the use of godparents, the sign of the cross at baptism, and confirmation by the bishop.

Stevenson describes Herbert Thorndike, the last Anglican theologian in his survey, as “a prophetic figure and a prolific writer” (p. 144). Thorndike’s interest was to move the church back to a more patristic look, especially in terms of its polity. Parliament did not agree. Thorndike also viewed the Christian life along the lines of covenant, not as a legal matter, but as a rich relationship in which there was constant development and movement. Baptism, as part of the entire covenant experience of the Christian, was therefore necessary, not simply for the symbolic value of the sacrament, but also because the “baptism of water and baptism of the Holy Spirit are...part of the same sacramental process” (Stevenson, p. 149). Furthermore,

catechesis is also an essential part of the Christian experience to enable us to respond to God's prior initiative.

Stevenson concludes this study in Chapters 12 and 13 by looking and then looking around. In "Retrospect" (Chap. 12) the author briefly summarizes the distinctive accents and contributions of each of the nine Anglican persons being surveyed. Many of them contributed to the theological and liturgical climate that led to the form of the 1662 Book of Common Prayer, an expression of Anglicanism that grew out of its 1552 service. For example, Stevenson (p. 162) says that the rite of confirmation was enriched, because it was seen that discipleship is the natural outgrowth of baptism.

In his concluding chapter ("Prospect") Stevenson lets the Anglican conversation as represented in these nine men to speak to us also today in three areas: first, the relationship between theology and liturgy (pp. 173ff.); second, theological imagery (pp. 175ff.); and third, specific issues (pp. 178ff.). For example, with regard to imagery, baptism focuses upon several biblical images: dying and rising with Christ, washing away of sins, rebirth in the Spirit. Each image is needed to enrich the others since each by itself can lead to a theological or pastoral imbalance. Stevenson (p. 182) concludes with a plea for going deeper into the theological and liturgical importance of baptism. The Eucharist is not the only dominical sacrament; baptism is the first one. "We need, above all, a deeper baptismal theology," our author argues.

This period of time is very important because it was the time of the several editions of *The Book of Common Prayer* and the effects this liturgical instrument had on the devotional and ecclesiastical life of the English people. Prayers and liturgical forms were introduced that utilized much of the very wording of Scripture itself as well as being expressed in the language of the common people.

One interesting item in Stevenson's writing style is frequently to begin a chapter in his book with a personal reflection or two from his own ministry, particularly in regards to the variety of baptismal circumstances that he has experienced. These several anecdotes and observations become the jumping-off point for

discussion of the particular Anglican theologian dealt with in that chapter. Stevenson's overall style is easy, engaging, and quite accessible to the interested reader.

One comes away from reading this book with the thought of Qoheleth again confirmed: "There is nothing new under the sun." The debates that surround baptism in the Anglican tradition are the very same debates found in most Christian traditions. Anglicanism has representative voices that cover much of the spectrum under contention, especially in the Reformed branch of Christianity. Basic questions in the debate include, "What does baptism mean?" and "What does baptism do, and how much does it do?"

Spelling errors are minimal: "two different view" at the bottom of page 19 should read "two different views." The word "they" in the prayer at the bottom of page 74 should read "thy."

The author uses endnotes for all his references. An extensive bibliography concludes this work.

—Mark D. Vander Hart

*A Sign of Faithfulness: Covenant and Baptism* by H. Westerink. Trans. J. Mark Beach. Neerlandia, Alberta, Canada; Pella, IA, USA: Inheritance Publications, 1997. Pp. 128. \$8.90.

This book is a translation of a 1987 short study of baptism, *Een Teken van Trouw: over onze doop*, written by a Christian school teacher in the Netherlands, H. Westerink. In the "Author's Preface" Mr. Westerink signals to us what his intention is in the book, and that is to provide the Christian an understanding of the assurance he may have in the Lord through the sign of baptism, including that baptism received in infancy.

In Chapter one ("Signs from God") Westerink discusses the need for divine signs. The Lord is as faithful as all that is implied in his name, I AM. But because of our sinful weakness God condescends to us to confirm our faith through the use of divine signs. He gave Noah the sign of the rainbow. Gideon, Hezekiah, and the shepherds at Jesus' birth all receive signs. Jesus' earthly ministry is filled with signs (cf. John 20:30-31a). All of these signs

have the intention of strengthening us in faith. Baptism, as a sacrament, is a divine sign and seal for us, especially in our weaknesses as we encounter such throughout our life. “Baptism is the sign and seal by which God takes pity on us” (p. 14).

Abraham is the father of all believers. Yet Abraham had to live in the tension between what God had promised (many descendants and land) and the reality of the situation (an aged, barren wife and no land). This continued for years. But God gave Abraham several signs to reassure him. The night sky is filled with stars—so shall Abraham’s children be. God also passes by himself between the cut-up parts of the animals (Gen. 15), thereby committing himself to keep his words under self-imposed covenant penalty.

Genesis 17 introduces circumcision as a sign from God that signified his promises. Although Abraham’s household contained servants not born to him who also received circumcision, Westerink does not discuss this important point.

What Westerink does do (pp. 20, 21) is graphically describe how circumcision was not a beautiful sign, on the order of thinking that baptism ceremonies are so beautiful or “nice.” Circumcision drew out blood, and the sacrifices of Israel’s old covenant practice drew out much blood. The author then draws out the clear and unmistakable connection between the Old Testament’s shedding of blood and the work of Jesus Christ. His death inaugurates the era of the new covenant. Writes Westerink (p. 23), “The bloody sign of circumcision foreshadowed the day of Christ (John 8:56—the day Abraham looked for from afar! That day requires a new sign, a bloodless sign—the sign of baptism, a baptism unto the forgiveness of sins (Acts 22:16).”

Chapter four (“The Language of the Sign”) poses the question of the meaning of circumcision. Abraham’s neighbors employed this rite to remove an impediment to fertility. But such was not the case with Abraham. Circumcision was a sign of covenant, and the impediment to covenant relationship was sin. Sin is enmity and death. Thus it is fitting that circumcision is administered in the foreskin and not on any other part of the body. It is the husband who receives it because, Westerink



observes (p. 27), “As people say, the beginning of a ‘new life’ lies within male virility—though properly speaking ‘life’ does not reside in us, for with God alone is the fountain of life; in His light alone we see light (Ps. 36:9),” a somewhat curious statement that the reader wishes he would have explicated more.

Circumcision is also a mark of reconciliation in that the blood that flowed “pointed forward to another blood which is better and more powerful than the blood of sacrificial animals and of little boys” (p. 27). It anticipated Christ’s day, in which he sheds his blood to accomplish atonement and reconciliation.

It was a mark of new life, since to live a rebellious and disobedient life was the equivalent of being uncircumcised (cf. Jer. 9:26). It was also a mark that distinguished God’s people: if one is uncircumcised, he shall be cut off (see Gen. 17:14). It functioned as a seal of what God promised, and so it confirmed or guaranteed what the Lord had said. The effect was to humble God’s people, on the one hand, but not leave them in despair. Nor was there any implicit permission to arrogance, on the other hand, since God’s people were obligated in the covenant to give him all of their heart, soul, mind, and strength. Thus every element of the gospel is contained in the sign and seal of circumcision. This is the language of the sign, says Westerink.

Chapter four (“God’s Own People”) sets the discussion about baptism in the context of God’s intention with the human race from the beginning of creation. Man and woman were created to be the basic building block for family and development of all things in creation. God desired to see nations come into being. The fall into sin did not cancel that goal in God’s plan (p. 35). The family remains an important element in God’s plan to destroy death and bring salvation through the Seed. God never has to “patch together” a new plan because of any unforeseen circumstances.

Westerink’s emphasis here is to set the reader up for a particular theological point. He writes, “We should not belittle this way of salvation which travels along the path of family bonds, or speak disparagingly...” (p. 37). The sign of circumcision marked God’s people both physically and spiritually.

“He doesn’t keep two different nations within His covenant simultaneously. He doesn’t have one nation outwardly and then another nation inwardly...” (p. 37) God in many places in Scripture refers to Israel with the phrase, “My people.” This is “much more than a matter of blood and nationality” (p. 40), for God was pleased to maintain his covenant with Israel as a nation, the large family that descended from the patriarchs.

Chapter five (“Children of God’s People”) is a very fine survey of how children of the covenant are “children under grace.” Sacrifices for them were prescribed in the Old Testament. Education of such children was enjoined upon fathers and the covenant community in general in Deuteronomy. Yet, lest anyone misunderstand what covenant privileges entail, Westerink makes clear that being a child under grace in the covenant does not mean that such a child was “mechanically or automatically” saved forever (p. 45). Rather, education at every turn was designed to lead to love of the Lord and obedience to His commandments.

Westerink in Chapter six (“Old Covenant – New Covenant”) argues that the Lord does not change his manner of dealing with his people when the new covenant is inaugurated. “You and your descendants” is still the typical arrangement for the Lord’s interaction with his people. The apostle Peter makes this clear in the sermon he preached on Pentecost (Acts 2). The gift of the Spirit comes in the context of the Abrahamic covenant, which is always predicated on the principle of “you and your children” (p. 52; cf. Acts 2:39).

Chapter six also takes note how Old Testament language of heirs and households is now used in Romans, Galatians, and Ephesians, to describe the inclusion of Gentile Christians. Believing households are now under the law of Christ (pp. 55, 56). Children are sanctified in Christ Jesus and are addressed as members of the church. Even Jesus demonstrates that he honored the solidarity of the covenant family unit. He welcomed into his arms the children of the old covenant. Should ancient believers have understood that it would be radically different in the new covenant?

With the coming of the new covenant, there comes a new rite of initiation, baptism. Yet it is not wholly new in the sense that there were ceremonial washings in Israel's cultic practices earlier. Washing externally was a demonstration of the need for internal renewal, argues Westerink correctly in the seventh chapter ("A New Sign").

On the other hand, in his enthusiasm to connect Israel's adoption to the Lord with a covenant sign, Westerink makes the following statement after having made mention of several passages from Ezekiel 16: "Thus we learn that Israel became the LORD's bride *through water*" (p. 67; emphasis original). More to the point of marriage is the covering with a garment mentioned in Ezekiel 16:8 because in the same verse is the reference to a solemn oath and entering into covenant. Washing with water may be a concomitant to the marriage, but it is hard to see water washing in this passage as the act that made Israel the Bride of the LORD.

Westerink explores the nature of sacramental language in Chapter eight ("The Language of the New Sign"). Here he takes note of the wording of several passages that refer to washing, since that is the obvious picture placed before us in baptism. Baptism thus can function as a mark of sin, a mark of reconciliation, a mark of new life, and a mark of God's people. The Scripture uses language such as the washing away of sins (Acts 22:16) and the washing of regeneration (Titus 3:5). On the one hand, we understand that the water of baptism does not itself wash the sins away or change one's heart. On the other hand, Christ instituted the sacrament of baptism, and Christ "makes no empty gestures" (p. 74). Only those who are spiritual (Spiritual) can discern this. But through the Spirit the baptized Christian can now live for God in a new way of life. The Christian puts off the old nature and puts on the new nature.

Baptism signs and seals this (cf. Rom. 6; Gal. 3:26, 27). The promises of God in Christ Jesus are guaranteed to us in baptism, "just as surely" as water washes dirt away from the body (pp. 79, 80). For Scriptural support Westerink (pp. 81, 82) appeals to the dominical commission in Matthew 28:18-20 to disciple the nations

and baptize them into the name of the Triune God. The central thrust of his argument at this point is that “the *command* of Christ is at the same time His *promise*,” a premise with which not all would agree (imperative is not indicative).

Westerink (pp. 82-86) also shows the reader why baptism must replace the Old Testament covenant sign of circumcision. The language of both ceremonies concerns the same thing, namely, the removal of the sinful nature. But the blood of the sinner as well as the blood of bulls and goats is not able to remove sin. Christ’s death does, and since baptism signifies union with Christ in his death and resurrection, anyone who receives Christian baptism has also received the “circumcision of Christ.” Thus the Old Testament sign of blood must pass away and yield its place to the New Testament of bloodless washing.

In Chapter nine (“One People of God”) Westerink shows how the New Testament writers repeatedly take language spoken either to or about the Old Testament people of God, and they then employ the language to describe the New Testament church, which is inclusive of both believing Gentiles and Jews. The apostles Peter and Paul are fond of doing such (cf. 1 Peter 2; Ephesians 2; Romans *passim*). Westerink’s purpose is to show that the God who does not change has one people throughout all history. The covenant relationship and redemptive purposes are basically the same in both testaments, so that the language of gracious relationship (e.g., covenant, shepherd, bride) can be used in both the Old and the New Testaments (cf. p. 94).

Two Old Testament historical antecedents of baptism are examined in Chapter ten (“The Flood and the Red Sea”). Says Westerink (p. 95), “The *Flood* was an awe-inspiring event. The journey through the *Red Sea* was also awe-inspiring. But greater than both of these events is the miracle of baptism instituted by Christ.” He relates how the water of death actually carried Noah and his family to safety. The godless were sinking down into eternal death, and that is what destroyed them (p. 97). Westerink relates the Flood to Peter’s use of it in 1 Peter 3, where Peter refers to the Flood as a redemptive prefiguration of the Christian sacrament of baptism. Westerink writes that God’s “redemptive

work speaks most strongly in baptism; it speaks most strongly in the water of baptism, which has actually transported us from death to life. Thus Christian baptism is greater than the Flood” (p. 97). Many will find this last statement either too enthusiastic in arguing his point or far too unguarded, since it smacks of the idea of baptismal regeneration, something that Westerink rejects elsewhere.

The *locus classicus* regarding the Red Sea experience’s connection to baptism is 1 Corinthians 10:1ff. The reason why the two can be related is because of what they have in common, namely, that both mark the transition from death to life (p. 98). In this baptism at the Red Sea, “Israel crossed the boundary—the boundary between life and death—just as the Corinthians, in their baptism, crossed from the kingdom of darkness into the kingdom of God’s beloved Son...” (p. 99).

Chapter eleven (“The Promise and the Sign”) takes up objections to the practice of infant baptism. The New Testament pattern seems to be “faith first, then baptism,” and that is evident with the Ethiopian eunuch, Cornelius, and the Philippian jailer. Westerink does not dispute this principle, but he shows how it was already evident in the old covenant, Abraham himself as well as the aliens being key examples. Abraham believed and then received the sign of circumcision. Aliens who desired to eat Passover first had to be circumcised, and then they were engrafted into the community of Israel.

However, in the administration of the covenant, God does not despise his own creation ordinances of family, generations, and nations (p. 103). Abraham the believer received circumcision, but the sign was required of every male in his household, biological sons and purchased servants. The Lord “revealed that He establishes His own ordinances to serve His work of salvation” (p. 103). Children “belong to a people” (p. 104). Therefore, we must not think too little of God nor restrict the working of his grace in the way of the covenant. Our faith does not make baptism valid for us. If we think so, we have not learned the way of humility (p. 105).

This chapter is well worth the price of the book because of the author's excellent discussion of the relationship between the sign and seal aspects of baptism and the requirement of faith. Baptism points to the rich and gracious promise of God, and every promise of God must be received in faith. But having God's promises gives no one the right to disparage God's signs. On the other hand, the sign does not make faith unnecessary. Thus, "baptizing the church's children does not make faith unnecessary; rather, the opposite, baptism makes faith more necessary" (p. 107). God has joined together his promise and his sign; we must not put them asunder. Westerink (pp. 113ff.) ends this chapter with a plea for wholesome instruction in these matters lest we err in either direction (presumption or human merit). God is faithful, and our salvation is completely the work of God alone. "Faith is the hand that accepts what God gives—an indispensable hand—but a hand that God Himself has created" (p. 114).

The subject of infant baptism and the place of children in the covenant is taken up in Chapter twelve ("Where Does It Say That?"). Here the author pulls together some points that have already been made in previous chapters. He shows that God does not abandon in the New Testament era the covenant solidarity that is part and parcel of the old covenant arrangement. Households were baptized according to the witness of several New Testament books. Acts 2:39 explicitly includes children in the promise (recalling God's promises to Abraham). Furthermore, if the children of one believing parent are holy (1 Cor. 7:14), how much more so this is the case if both parents are believers. In other words, the broad witness of the whole Scripture is that children are included in God's covenant of grace, and therefore, they are also recipients of God's gracious promises (p. 122). Therefore, they ought to be baptized.

Westerink's concluding, brief chapter is a statement of thanksgiving for the faithfulness of God who stands behind every word and confirming sign that he has given. Baptism is "a trustworthy sign, a sign for which to be thankful."

The book is popularly written, easily followed by lay people who are rather literate in the basics of Reformed theology, including the teachings of the sacraments. If one is looking for detailed interaction with a variety of Reformed and non-Reformed theologians, one looks in vain in this book. But that was not Westerink's purpose. He does, however, weave in references at appropriate points to the Belgic Confession, Heidelberg Catechism, and the Canons of Dort, and he also utilizes excerpts from traditional continental liturgical forms (e.g., pp. 124, 125).

The book is rich in references to Scripture of both Testaments, yet few of the verses receive anything more than cursory discussion, if that. A helpful Scripture index concludes the book.

Some might take issue with his identification with the Ephesians 2 reference to "the prophets" as representative of the "old covenant" (p. 91). Many see such prophets as New Testament prophets who worked in tandem with the apostles in the apostolic age when the Biblical canon was not yet in collected form. As for printing mistakes, "His" in the phrase "His wife" at the top of page 35 should not be capitalized. The word "rent" in the second line of page 121 should be "rend."

All in all, this is a helpful and very vigorous restatement of the Reformed position of baptism and its meaning as seen in a redemptive-historical context. Seen in that framework, baptism and its application to children of the covenant make eminent sense. The book is highly recommended for pastors, catechism teachers, church libraries, and any interested lay person.

—Mark D. Vander Hart

*To a Thousand Generations—Infant Baptism: Covenant Mercy for the People of God* by Douglas Wilson. Moscow, ID: Canon Press, 1996. Pp. 123. \$7.50.

In the preface to this brief study, Wilson notes that its subject, the baptism of children of believing parents, is a

controversial one, not only in the church generally, but also in the congregation he pastors. In his congregation, the controversy has been resolved in the form of “baptismal cooperation agreement, which has enabled believers on both sides of this issue to work together harmoniously. We receive both baptistic and paedobaptistic households into membership” (p. 5). Within the context of the ongoing debate in his particular congregation and the broader field of the evangelical churches, Wilson offers this book as a contribution to its further resolution and as an invitation to join the continued study of the elders of his church.

Wilson makes clear that his purpose in writing this volume is to offer a biblical case for the practice of infant baptism. However, in order for such a case to prove persuasive in the debate with advocates of believers’ baptism, he argues that it will have to confront the real problem of “nominalism” in many churches that practice infant baptism (and, for that matter, in churches which do not do so). The biblical doctrine of infant baptism must be clearly distinguished from the doctrine of “baptismal regeneration.” The assumption that a Reformed practice of infant baptism amounts to something like the Roman Catholic doctrine of the inherent efficacy of baptism (working *ex opere operato*, merely “by the work performed”) constitutes a substantial roadblock in the way of many evangelicals. Furthermore, for the case to persuade, it will have to consist of an argument that shows the “biblical” necessity of the practice of infant baptism, not merely the consistency of that practice with biblical premises. Baptists will not embrace a Reformed view unless they have been shown clearly from the Scriptures, on the basis of “shared or indisputable premises” (p. 11) that this practice is warranted.

In the first chapter, Wilson opens his case by arguing that the children of believers are genuine “members of the kingdom.” This is as true in the new covenant administration as it was in the old. For this reason, the great debate in the early church was not over “whether the Jewish Christians had to start excluding their children” (p. 15). Rather, the great debate had to do with the means whereby the children were included: was it by means of



circumcision, as had been the case under the older administration, or was it by means of baptism? Though Wilson acknowledges the force of the Baptist claim that there is no clear instance of the baptism of an infant in the New Testament (the argument from household baptism, notwithstanding), he responds by noting that his argument is in the form of moving from “status to the ordinance, from their [the children’s] standing to the sacrament” (p. 17). If the children of believing parents in the new covenant are as much members of the church as were the children of believing parents in the old, then this strongly suggests that they ought to receive the sacramental sign of their inclusion.

After this introductory chapter on the status of the children of believing parents in the new covenant, Wilson addresses the subject of Moses’ relation to Christ in the second chapter. Under the provocative title, “Moses was a Christian,” Wilson adduces biblical evidence for the thesis that the truth and power of the old covenant wholly depended upon the truth and power of Christ, the Mediator of the new covenant. After setting forth a series of contrasts between the old and new covenant administrations, Wilson shows from the Scriptures that all believers stand before God only on the basis of the gospel of Christ and by way of faith in him (p. 29). As was true of Abraham and all believers under the old covenant, Moses “was a Christian” who placed his trust in Christ. Furthermore, contrary to the “baptistic assumption” that the new covenant differs from the old in that it excludes the possibility of unbelief (covenant membership and election being identified), Wilson maintains that the New Testament everywhere acknowledges the possibility of unbelief among those with whom God truly covenants, though such unbelief represents a serious offense against God’s gracious promise.

After these chapters on the substantial continuity and similarity of the old and new covenants, Wilson turns more directly to the subjects of circumcision and baptism as sacramental signs of God’s promise and covenantal inclusion. These signs are always subordinate to what they signify, and they

both signify the grace of God in Christ. Circumcision, for example, was a sign of the circumcision of the heart that can only be effected by the Spirit of Christ in regeneration and renewal. When Abraham, the father of believers, was circumcised, this was not firstly a sign of Abraham's salvation, but of the righteousness that is by faith in Christ. Similarly, in baptism God testifies to believers and their children of the saving work of Christ, not of "the inward state of the individual who bears the sign and seal" (p. 49). Neither circumcision nor baptism is to be identified with the spiritual grace—the saving work of Christ by his Spirit and Word—which they signify. Though these sacraments were given as visible signs of God's grace, they do not coincide with nor are they guarantees of the salvation of those who receive them.

After what he calls the "groundwork" of these early chapters, Wilson turns in Chapters 6 ("Circumcision and the New Covenant") and 7 ("The Olive Tree and the Olive Shoots") to the heart of his argument for infant baptism. If the rite of covenant initiation in the Old Testament was circumcision, and if the rite of covenant initiation in the New Testament is now baptism, the key question is: have "the *subjects* of baptism drastically change [sic] as well?" (p. 60). In answering this question, Wilson argues, many advocates of paedobaptism weaken their case "with inadequate arguments from silence" (p. 61). These arguments conclude that, because the household baptisms of the New Testament "may" have included infants, we "ought" to baptize infants. But this is too weak an argument. A basic Christian duty (ought) cannot be derived from what *may* or *may not* be the case. The argument we need is one that clearly shows "examples of infant baptism."

Wilson believes that this latter kind of argument can be derived from the practice of the circumcision of the children of Jewish Christian parents in the first period of the Christian church. We have evidence, he claims, that the apostles sanctioned the practice of these (Jewish) Christian parents in administering the rite of circumcision as a "covenantal sign of their identification with Christ" (p. 61). Though the apostles opposed the Judaizing claim that Gentiles had to be circumcised to be

saved, they permitted the Jewish Christian community to continue the practice of circumcision as a rite with genuine “religious signification” (p. 67). In the period prior to the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 A.D., membership in the Jewish Christian synagogue, signified by the initiatory rites of circumcision and baptism, was synonymous with membership in the Christian church. We know, then, that “some first century Christian churches had infant members” (p. 71), namely, those Jewish Christian synagogues which continued to practice circumcision as a sign of initiation into the covenant community. This was true during the period between Pentecost and the destruction of Jerusalem “when a great transition from circumcision to baptism was being accomplished” (p. 73). Furthermore, because baptism and circumcision have the same spiritual meaning, the great question in the early church was not whether children ought to be baptized (as they had formerly been circumcised) but whether the children of Gentile parents had to be circumcised? (p. 79). The common assumption was that something had to be done in order to signify the covenant promise to children of believing parents.

The closing chapters of Wilson’s study address briefly several issues that are part of the debate regarding the baptism of children of believing parents. In Chapter 7, “The Olive Tree and Olive Roots,” he demonstrates the biblical teaching of the organic unity of the people of God, Jew and Gentile, believers and their seed. In Chapters 9 and 10, he addresses the common Baptist claim that the term, “to baptize,” always means “to immerse.” Based upon a brief survey of biblical usage, Wilson shows that various modes (affusion, sprinkling, immersion) legitimately communicate what baptism signifies and seals. Then, in a concluding chapter, he summarizes the main lines of his argument and adduces additional biblical considerations for the practice of infant baptism.

Wilson is to be commended for the fresh way in which he deals with the biblical teaching and basis for the practice of infant baptism. Readers of this study will recognize what Wilson acknowledges in his preface: that this is a kind of report on a

study in progress, and has been written with the Baptist reader in mind. Rather than appealing to traditional studies, or to confessional statements of the Reformed churches, to buttress his case, Wilson focuses upon the biblical arguments that, when taken in their cumulative force, comprise a strong case for the administering the sign of covenant promise and grace to the children of believing parents. Though Wilson's study is relatively brief, he leaves few stones unturned in the course of his argument and adduces what, on balance, is a fairly convincing case for this practice.

There are, however, some rather serious deficiencies to Wilson's study. These deficiencies are methodological and substantive.

Methodologically, Wilson's study exhibits little or no interest in the contributions of similar studies of his subject. His study proceeds as though it were a kind of inductive treatment of the biblical materials, wholly independent of the views and arguments of other writers, whether traditional or contemporary. Not once is any confessional statement of the Reformed and Presbyterian churches cited as a helpful or useful summary of the biblical doctrine of infant baptism. No doubt, Wilson, addressing a Baptist audience, wants his study to be unencumbered by what might appear to others to be the weight of "tradition" or authorities other than the Bible. However, his deliberate lack of appeal to or interaction with these conversational partners in the work of biblical and theological reflection, gives his study a rather individualistic and even biblicistic cast. As you read Wilson's study, you want to ask such questions as: did you discover this on your own? Are you indebted to other writers for this or that insight? Are there no authorities, ecclesiastical or theological, to which you might want to appeal? Wilson's approach, perhaps out of deference to his primarily evangelical audience, seems to encourage study of the Scriptures with little regard for the exegetical, confessional, and theological inheritance of the churches.

Another deficiency of this study is the way in which it is organized. There is a great deal of repetition within chapters and

often from chapter to chapter. Some chapters are of considerable length. Others are very brief. Furthermore, the flow of the argument throughout the course of the study is rather unclear. Though the argument in Chapter 6 seems to be the central one of the book, it does not necessarily follow from the material preceding and following it. The final chapter adduces a number of arguments for the baptism of infants that have been traditionally used by defenders of infant baptism, but these are set forth as a kind of miscellany of items bearing little or no relation to the material preceding. In a word: this study appears to be the product of the author's biblical studies on the subject, so far as they have advanced until this point, but it lacks the quality of a clearly organized and coherent presentation of an argument for a biblical doctrine of the sacrament of baptism, particularly the baptism of children of believing parents. The reader is left to wonder whether the chapters may not be the product of studies that were originally independent of one another, only to have been collected together in this volume.

More serious than these methodological and organizational problems, however, are two substantive weaknesses in Wilson's study. The first is his attenuated view of the significance of Christian baptism. The second is his doubtful attempt to prove infant baptism from the practice of Jewish Christian circumcision in the early church.

In his attempt to answer the Baptist concern with nominalism and the doctrine of baptismal regeneration, Wilson focuses throughout his study upon baptism as an "external" sign of membership in an inclusive covenant community, comprised of regenerate and unregenerate persons. Almost nothing is said about baptism as a "seal" of God's grace in Christ, or of the efficacy of baptism as a true means of grace. Though the Reformed tradition has distinguished the sign of the sacrament from the thing signified, and though it has always insisted that the grace of God in Christ is only ordinarily communicated to those who respond in faith by the working of the Holy Spirit, it has also insisted upon the most intimate connection between them. The Holy Spirit works faith *through the use of Word and*

*sacraments*. This kind of emphasis is notably lacking, however, in Wilson's study.

Moreover, Wilson's innovative attempt to show how Jewish Christian circumcision, in the period between Pentecost and the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 A.D., represents a kind of infant baptism, is a dubious line of argument. According to Wilson, previous attempts to argue from the practice of household baptism to the practice of infant baptism, have failed to demonstrate clearly that children, including infants, were baptized in the new covenant church. This failure can be remedied, if we recognize that the apostolic sanction of circumcision of infants by Christian Jewish parents amounted to an approval of circumcision as a covenantal initiatory rite that signified their membership in the synagogue, the Jewish Christian church of this period. In the period prior to the destruction of the temple in 70 A.D., which Wilson claims was the "formal judicial dissolution of the older Judaic worship" (p. 72), Jewish Christian children were initiated into the new covenant in Christ by means of two sacramental rites, circumcision and baptism. The circumcision of such Jewish Christian children was the sacramental equivalent of new covenant baptism. Therefore, we have clear and compelling proof of the sacramental incorporation of infants into the new covenant church.

For this kind of argument to work (leaving aside the rather obvious point that Wilson has not provided a clear example of the baptism of an infant in the new covenant administration), two points need to be demonstrated. First, that circumcision continued to function, at least in the Jewish Christian community, as a divinely sanctioned *new covenant sacrament* of incorporation into Christ and his church. And second, that, to use Wilson's terms, "the formal judicial dissolution" of the old covenant administration did not end for the Jews until the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem in 70 A.D. In my judgment, Wilson demonstrates neither of these points. Both of them depend upon his peculiar preterist and postmillennialist eschatology, which is not the subject of this book and which he nowhere attempts to establish in the course of his argument.

Contrary to this view, the New Testament teaches the dissolution of the old covenant administration at the time of Christ's death, resurrection, ascension, and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. The judgment upon disobedient Israel in 70 A.D. was a significant fulfillment of Christ's prophecy in Matthew 24 and parallel passages. But it does not have, in the testimony of the New Testament writers, the kind of significance Wilson ascribes to it. This judgment does not constitute the definitive redemptive-historical moment of transition from synagogue to church.

This particular innovation in Wilson's presentation in the argument for infant baptism is likely to weaken its cogency among Baptists, rather than strengthen it. The real strength of Wilson's argument, like that of the traditional arguments for infant baptism, lies in his demonstration of the substantial continuity between the old and new covenant administrations, and the similarity of signification between the sacramental rites of circumcision and baptism.

—Cornelis P. Venema

## Varia

*The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy*, Second edition, General editor, Robert Audi. Cambridge, United Kingdom: Cambridge University Press, 1999. Pp. xxxvi + 1001. \$23.96.

Many pastors have received minimal or no training in philosophy. Some, no doubt, have no interest in philosophy. Others perhaps even deem philosophy irredeemable—a mumbo-jumbo of concepts and questions, an intellectual “waste of time.” If so, this does not bode well for the church, for we live in an age in which pastors need to be philosophically astute. Good pastoring—both pulpit ministry and personal counsel and leadership—involves a sound analysis and understanding of the culture in which parishioners labor and live. Included in such cultural analysis is a comprehension of the intellectual foundations and presuppositions that shape the practice of

modern science, our cultural attitudes and beliefs about technology, our public modes and methods of discourse, and the creation of values and so-called value-neutrality. Moreover, doing good theology—that is, to understand and evaluate the intricacies of theologically complex subjects past and present—likewise requires philosophical tools. *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* is a useful implement in the pastor's theological toolbox. Edited by Robert Audi, who is Charles J. Mach Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, this one-volume dictionary, with over 4,000 entries, is a well conceived and executed book containing a plethora of information on things philosophical. Although the entries are not confined to the Western philosophical tradition, this volume's central focus is Western philosophy. Major philosophers and ideas are rightly given extended treatment. This publication is the work of some 381 contributors and has to rank, along with *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (edited by Ted Honderich), as one of the best short reference works on philosophy available in English.

In comparing the *Cambridge Dictionary* with the *Oxford Companion*, each volume evidences its own strengths. A nice feature of the *Oxford Companion* over against the *Cambridge Dictionary* is that the Oxford book offers relevant bibliography at the end of each article, clueing the inquiring reader where to go for further study and analysis. The Cambridge volume does not have this feature. Moreover, the *Oxford Companion* has a complete index and list of entries; the *Cambridge Dictionary* only offers an index of selected names. Both volumes, however, offer a fine selection of entries on a host of philosophical themes. Any conscientious student, including pastors, could make fine use of this dictionary, for it is fairly accessible for those not trained in philosophy. At least one of these two volumes ought to be on the pastor's shelf. *The Cambridge Dictionary of Philosophy* makes a good choice.

—J. Mark Beach



*Reformed Confessions Harmonized, With an Annotated Bibliography of Reformed Doctrinal Works*, ed. By Joel R. Beeke & Sinclair B. Ferguson. Grand Rapids: Baker, 1999. Pp. xiii + 271.

Beeke and Ferguson have done students of theology and members of the church a considerable service by compiling this harmony of the confessions. As its title and subtitle suggest, this volume aims to provide an important resource for students of theology whose interest in the church's confessions is more than antiquarian or historical. By harmonizing the confessions, Beeke and Ferguson provide the reader a kind of compendium of the Reformed church's historical testimony and summary of the Bible's teaching under the traditional headings of theology. Brief historical introductions to the confessions, and the addition of an annotated bibliography, make the volume especially useful.

The principle of selection used for this harmony is the official status and historical influence of these confessions, as the principal standards of the Reformed and Presbyterian churches throughout the world. Thus, the confessions harmonized include the "Three Forms of Unity"—the *Belgic Confession* (1561), the *Heidelberg Catechism* (1563), and the *Canons of Dort* (1618-1619)—, the *Second Helvetic Confession* (1566), the *Westminster Confession of Faith* (1646-47), and the *Shorter and Larger Catechisms* (1647). The confessions are laid out in parallel columns, starting with the earliest on the left and moving across two facing pages to the latest on the right. The brief historical introductions by Ferguson serve to orient the reader to the historical setting and peculiar features of the respective confessions. Beeke's annotated bibliography of doctrinal works directs the reader who wishes to pursue any doctrinal matters in depth with a listing of the classical sources.

I cannot express too vigorously my appreciation for the preparation and publication of this volume. Beeke and Ferguson have produced a book obviously intended for use by those who continue to cherish their inheritance in the faith, as it is so richly and authoritatively summarized in these classic confessions of the Reformed churches. This harmony is no "book of confessions,"

which simply gathers together an assortment of confessions for the sake of marking out a broad tradition. Rather, it is a harmony intended to be a source of instruction and insight for those who regard the confessions to be a church-sanctioned repository of biblical teaching, catholic in breadth and expressive of the unity of the faith among Reformed believers. It is certainly my hope that this harmony will contribute to a genuine ecumenicity among Reformed believers who share one, common faith, though expressed in a diversity of confessions.

—Cornelis P. Venema

*Saving and Secular Faith: An Invitation to Systematic Theology* by B. A. Gerrish. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1999. Pp. xii + 153. \$19.00.

In this deceptively short volume, Gerrish, formerly professor of theology at Union Theological Seminary and the Divinity School of the University of Chicago, sets forth his view of the foundation and task of systematic theology or dogmatics in our time. As the title of his study indicates, Gerrish is keenly aware of the need for theology to interact with the broader world of scholarship and religious faith, not only in the Christian context but in secular contexts as well. Written from the perspective of someone whose professional work required a defense of the legitimacy of theological reflection in relation to the concerns of the non-Christian world, Gerrish aims to situate theology, in its reflection upon saving faith, within the framework of what he terms “secular faith.”

In the opening chapter of his study, Gerrish develops his view of the distinctive nature and function of saving faith in the Christian context. By means of a compact survey of the New Testament usage of the language of faith, and of the respective views of Luther, Aquinas, and Calvin, Gerrish concludes that saving faith includes elements of belief and trust. Saving faith is not only the confidence or trust which the believer places in God, but also the recognition of God’s goodwill or fatherly favor toward us in Jesus Christ. To identify faith exclusively with belief

leads to intellectualism, to a doctrine of faith as mere assent to doctrinal truths. Conversely, to identify faith exclusively with trust leads to subjectivism, to a doctrine of faith absent any acknowledgement of God's disposition toward us. According to Gerrish's schematic handling of the diversity of emphases in the Christian theological tradition, Catholicism has tended toward the error of intellectualism, whereas Lutheranism has tended toward the error of subjectivism. The middle and better way, he argues, is that of Calvin who defines faith in terms of the believer's recognition of God's fatherly favor or benevolence toward us in Christ.

However, in order to avoid a kind of parochialism in which the Christian view is utterly distinguished from non-saving faith, Gerrish takes up in Chapter two the question of secular faith. Is there a generic kind of believing, common to a variety of religions and even non-religious communities, that comes to concrete and particular expression in different "faiths?" To answer this question, Gerrish again follows the procedure of considering several representative authors whose reflections on the subject of secular faith stimulate his own formulations. Upon the basis of this survey, he concludes that there is such a thing as a kind of "generic faith," which may not be strictly universal or necessarily constitutive of all religions or even human nature. However, Gerrish maintains that this generic faith is sufficiently established to constitute the "genus" of which Christian faith is one "species." Such faith, which comprises the foundation or matrix for saving faith, he defines as "the perception of meaning and purpose in one's life through commitment to an object of ultimate loyalty in which one finds security" (p. 33). Christian faith, then, in its peculiar commitments and beliefs is one expression of that "ultimate concern" (Tillich) or basic trust that characterizes secular faith generally. Faith in this generic sense represents the human quest for meaning and ultimacy in a world that would otherwise be meaningless and valueless.

After a chapter in which Gerrish pursues further the existential foundations in human experience for the reality of faith, he presents, in perhaps the two most important chapters of

the book, his view of the distinctive content of Christian faith and the peculiar task of Christian systematic theology. In Gerrish's understanding, the creeds and confessions of the Christian church represent a codification of the "church's world of meaning" at a particular time in her history (p. 65). In his evaluation of the authority and standing of these creeds, he attempts to steer a middle course between rigid orthodoxy on the one hand, and relativism on the other. Though he emphatically rejects the idea that the confessions ought to serve as the basis for maintaining a particular orthodox system of doctrine—such a use represents a failure to reckon with confessional "pluralism" and breeds intolerance—he maintains that the church's confession serves as a means of "socialization" within a tradition. The matrix for faith is always, according to Gerrish, the church's life and history out of which the confessions have arisen.

Systematic theology has the task, accordingly, of presenting "the whole faith of the church, or of a church, in its systematic coherence—the way it all holds together" (p. 69). In this approach, the dogmatic system is "an attempt to uncover descriptively or phenomenologically the layers of a complex mode of consciousness, moving in presentation from the most abstract content to the most concrete: that is, from elemental faith (in the introduction), through theistic creation faith (in part 1), to the Christian redemption faith (in part 2) in which the other two kinds of faith are contained" (74). Dogmatics is a kind of excavation project: it uncovers "the Christian consciousness," "the layers of faith in the mind of a believer in Christ" (p. 75). Furthermore, because it has this kind of descriptive nature, and because the faith described has its own links and interplay with the more general concerns of secular faith, such dogmatics has a legitimate place in the university context. Rather than presenting a "dogmatic theology ... of supernaturally communicated truths" (p. 76), this approach to dogmatics merely presents "the way one important part of the human family believes." And it does so without the pretension or absolutism of the older, no-longer permissible, dogmatics of the Christian tradition.

If it were not yet clear where all of this is heading, Gerrish gives his approach rather startling expression in a concluding chapter on “Faith and Jesus Christ.” In this chapter, he confronts head on the modern crisis in Christology. This crisis has two sources. First, the exclusivistic claim that Jesus is God-in-the flesh and the only way to the Father strikes modern people as intolerant and insensitive to the alternative views of other religions and faiths. And second, the modern quest for the historical Jesus has demonstrated that there is no direct link between the Christian faith and the uncertain findings of modern historical science. Gerrish makes it clear that he does not believe we can take the ancient confession of the church regarding Jesus’ deity as a point of departure in interfaith dialogue. Nor can we begin with any presumption that the Scriptural testimony to Jesus Christ corresponds to an actual historical state of affairs. This does not constitute, however, an insuperable obstacle to saving faith, since such faith does not find its norm or source in an authoritative Scripture or subordinate standard based upon Scripture. Faith finds its norm or source in the contemporary consciousness or experience of the church community.

I have deliberately summarized Gerrish’s position and argument in this review, not because it has so much merit (it doesn’t), but because it illustrates so dramatically the impasse and futility of so much modern theological reflection. Reading Gerrish brings to mind the thesis of J. Gresham Machen’s *Christianity and Liberalism*: liberalism is not so much a form of Christianity as another religion. Though Gerrish attempts early on to include the aspect of belief in his definition of faith, his interest in finding a position that will prove palatable to the modern, post-Christian mind leads him astray. Gerrish’s whole approach is patterned after his theological mentor, Schleiermacher, and represents the continuing crisis of modern Protestant theology. Because theology may not appeal to a revealed and authoritative standard, the Word of God inscripturated, and because the creeds and confessions of the church do not set forth what ought to be believed and held for truth by Christians—the only thing left is the present

consciousness of believers as source and norm for Christian theology. For Gerrish the real dangers confronting modern theology are the dangers of creedalism, absolutism, and exclusivism. For fear of these dangers, he readily embraces pluralism and a contentless, normless kind of believing. What perhaps most tellingly reveals the consequences of this kind of an approach is his concluding treatment of the crisis of Christology. Rather than maintaining the Christian claims regarding Christ's person and work, Gerrish offers something like his version of "what's true for me may not be true for you, and what's true for you may not be true for me." If we are to take him seriously in this, as I believe we must, then we can only conclude that what he terms "saving faith" actually amounts to a sophisticated form of unbelief.

Those who wish to see firsthand the dilemma of modern theology will find no better example than that provided by this volume. One consolation perhaps for the reader will be the realization that nothing like the kind of systematic theology Gerrish proposes is likely to be written soon. Moreover, were such a systematic theology written, it would interest only a very few professional theologians whose academic pursuits are so far removed from the actual life and ministry of the church in our day as to be of little more than passing interest.

—Cornelis P. Venema

*Great Christian Thinkers* by Hans Küng. Trans. John Bowden. New York, NY: Continuum, 1995. Pp. 235. \$16.95.

In this handy volume Hans Küng introduces readers to seven Christian thinkers who have had a profound, even monumental, impact upon the church's life and theology: Paul, Origen, Augustine, Aquinas, Luther, Schleiermacher, and Barth. Küng, who is professor of Ecumenical Theology and Director of the Institute for Ecumenical Research at the University of Tübingen, introduces each figure with a chronology chart at the start of each chapter. He effectively places each thinker within his own theological and historical setting.

Küng excels at getting to the nub of each writer's particular theological contribution. This is reflected in the subtitles he attaches to the name of each individual thinker. The apostle Paul's chief contribution, therefore, is in making Christianity a world religion—a religion for Gentiles and Jews. Origen achieved the great synthesis between antiquity and Christianity. Augustine is the father of the whole of western Latin theology. Thomas Aquinas gives us a theology that is rational, a university science, and that offers an apologetic for the centrality of the papacy. In Martin Luther we meet with a return to the gospel of Jesus Christ, bringing about a major paradigm shift in Christian theology. Friedrich Schleiermacher's theology seriously confronts the challenge of modernity, whereas the theology of Karl Barth comes at a time of transition to post-modernity.

In this reviewer's judgment, the chapter on Paul is the weakest, while the chapters on Schleiermacher and Barth are the most informative. Readers will find that the author's portrayal of each major thinker is sympathetically rendered—don't forget, Küng deems these seven men to be the greatest theologians of the last two millennia. He does, however, reserve space, usually near the end of each chapter, to set forth his criticisms of each theologian, which unfortunately are often painfully and dubiously anachronistic.

Küng writes in an engaging style and students of the history of doctrine will find his book easily accessible. Indeed, historical theology is seldom such a pleasure to read and such an education.

—J. Mark Beach

*Reformed Confessions: Theology from Zurich to Barmen* by Jan Rohls. Trans. John Hoffmeyer, with introduction by Jack L. Stotts. *Columbia Series in Reformed Theology*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998. Pp. xxiv +311. \$35.00.

One common prejudice regarding the reformational understanding of *sola Scriptura* (“by Scripture alone”) is that it encourages a kind of biblicism. Because the churches of the Reformation rejected the authority and infallibility of church Tradition, and posited the supreme and final authority of the inscripturated Word of God, they are suspected of abandoning any respect for the exegetical and theological tradition of the church. This prejudice, however, fails to recognize that the Reformed churches are deeply respectful of the way the promised Holy Spirit of Christ has led the church throughout her history in a deepening understanding of the Scriptures. Though it may be the case that many “evangelical” churches in North America have fallen prey to biblicism, abandoning any real appreciation for the historic confessions of the church, this is not a development in the line of the Reformation. It is a deflection from the Reformation. Reformed churches are nothing if not confessional churches.

I mention this by way of introduction to Jan Rohls’ study, *Reformed Confessions*, to underscore my enthusiasm at the publication of this volume. In his study, Rohls sets forth the teaching of the older Reformed confessions (16<sup>th</sup>-17<sup>th</sup> centuries) in a topical or logical manner. While sensitive to the historical occasion for the writing of these confessions, and acknowledging what he terms their “plurality of theological conceptions” (p. 3), Rohls provides a synthetic exposition of their teachings, following the traditional sequence of the theological *loci* (though, oddly, omitting a concluding section on eschatology or the doctrine of the last things).

The confessions which Rohls summarizes include not only the great standard confessions of the Reformed churches, but also a number of not-as-well-known confessions which were of considerable influence in the period of the original consolidation



of the Reformed tradition. Adding to the usefulness of this volume, Rohls begins with an informative chapter on “The Development of the Old Reformed Confessional Writings.” In this chapter he offers a sketch of what he regards as the “six phases” of development in Reformed confessional writing: the beginning with the confessions of the German-speaking Swiss; a second phase in which a Geneva tradition develops under Calvin; the spread of Calvinism throughout Western and Eastern Europe; the fusion of Calvinism and Philippism to author a “specifically German Reformed confessional tradition”; the doctrinal decrees of the Synod of Dort, representing the triumph of Calvinism over Arminianism; and a sixth phase marked by the emergence of Puritanism. Rohls concludes his survey of the older Reformed confessions with a chapter analyzing the factors that undermined Reformed confessionalism (chiefly, Pietism and Liberalism), and the emergence of neo-Reformed confessional writing in more recent history (the Barmen Confession being a case in point).

The nature of Rohls’ study does not lend itself to a summary of its contents. But for anyone who wishes to explore the riches of the classic confessions of the Reformed churches, this volume is a treasure. Rohls exhibits throughout a thorough acquaintance with earlier studies of the development of the Reformed confessional and theological tradition. But he rightly opposes the tendency of the older, nineteenth century, historians of doctrine to find one central dogma as the organizing and foundational principle of all Reformed confessionalism (predestination was usually ascribed this role). He also allows the differing emphases of and occasions for the confessions to receive their due, without losing hold of his intention to provide a synthetic account of their teaching. Undoubtedly, readers will find instances where they may differ with Rohls’ conclusions. Seldom, however, will they come away dissatisfied with the clarity or insightfulness with which he handles the confessions.

Highly recommended!

—Cornelis P. Venema

*Modern Theological German: A Reader and Dictionary* (two volumes in one) by Helmut W. Ziefle. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1997. Pp. 303 + 359. \$23.99.

Serious students of modern theology inevitably find themselves frustrated if they are unable to read theological articles and texts in the German language, especially since so much theological literature in German-speaking lands is never translated into English. This book—which is really two books in one—is designed to assist students of the German language to refine their skills and develop a vocabulary in modern theological German.

This volume is the work of Helmut W. Ziefle, professor of German at Wheaton College, Wheaton, IL, and consists of a German theological dictionary of some 350 pages (particularly handy for reading the German Bible) and an extended section of “readings” in theological German. These selections are taken from the German Bible (Old and New Testaments are equally represented) and from (mostly modern) German-speaking theologians: Martin Luther, Adolf Schlatter, Albert Schwietzer, Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, Helmut Thielicke, Hans Walter Wolff, and Gerhard Maier, among others. These selections, twenty-nine in all, make up about 300 pages of the book and offer a nice diversity of theological themes, subjects, and styles of writing. One very fine feature of these selections is that Ziefle has added “vocabulary helps” on the opposing pages of the German text of each selection. Thus English translations of less common German words and difficult constructions are provided on the appropriate line opposite the German text. This feature reduces time spent searching for words, which in turn enables the student to concentrate on reading the German text. This builds the student’s confidence and makes reading the text selections more enjoyable. The hard work of memorizing German vocabulary, however, remains for each student of theological German. Another happy feature of this book is that the author has appended “exercises” to the end of each reading. These exercises

help the student to monitor his or her progress, especially since there is an answer key at the end of this section of the book.

Users of this book should be made aware that it is *not* an introduction to German grammar. This volume cannot be used without some prior knowledge of the German language. Whereas the book by J. D. Manton, *Introduction to Theological German* (IVP 1971; reprint, Eerdmans, 1983) strives to be such a publication, Ziefle's reader presupposes a prior acquaintance with German grammar. (As a side note, students who wish to build a German theological vocabulary might wish to consult two works compiled and edited by H. J. Siliakus: *Word Families in German: A Workbook for Theologians* and *500 German Theological Terms and Their English Translations Together with 500 Useful Phrases*. Both of these volumes are produced by the University of Adelaide, Adelaide, South Australia, and available through Trinity Bookstore of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, Deerfield, IL.)

Zeifle has prepared a computer-assisted learning aid to accompany his text. This learning aid consists of three components: understanding English meanings of German words, translating German passages, and constructing German sentences. The information for ordering this software is attached to the book.

—J. Mark Beach

## Lord's Supper

*Remember Him* by J. W. Alexander. 1854; reprint, Edinburgh: The Banner of Truth Trust, 2000. Pp. viii + 56. \$--

*Evangelical Eucharistic Thought in the Church of England* by Christopher J. Cocksworth. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993. Pp. xiv + 283. \$60.00.

—Reviewer:???

*The Clearest Promises of God: The Development of Calvin's Eucharistic Teaching* by Thomas J. Davis. New York: AMS Press, Inc., 1995. Pp. 236. \$52.50.

As Davis indicates in his preface, this book is a reworking of his doctoral dissertation at the University of Chicago. Davis, under the tutelage of Brian Gerrish (John Nuveen Professor of Historical Theology Emeritus at the Divinity School, University of Chicago, and now Distinguished Professor of Theology at Union Theological Seminary and Presbyterian School of Christian Education, Richmond, Virginia), sets out to map out the origin and development of Calvin's doctrine of the Lord's Supper. Davis maintains that by tracing out the that such will better equip one to understand and therefore assess Calvin's contribution to euhcaristic theology.

—J. Mark Beach

*Grace and Gratitude: The Eucharistic Theology of John Calvin* by B. A. Gerrish. Edinburgh, T & T Clark, 1999 under license from Augburg Press, 1993. Pp. xii + 210. \$

—Alan D. Strange

*In the Stead of Christ: The Relation of the Celebration of the Lord's Supper to the Office of the Holy Ministry* by Kent A. Heimbigner. Decatur, Illinois: Repristination Press, 1997. Pp. 204. \$11.95.

—Reviewer ???

*Responses to 101 Questions on the Mass* by Kevin W. Irwin. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999. Pp. xiv + 180. \$12.95.

—J. Mark Beach

*The Eucharist Makes the Church: Henri de Lubac and John Zizioulas in dialogue* by Paul McPartlan. Edinburgh, T&T Clark, 1993. Pp. xxii + 342.

—Reviewer: ???

*Remember Jesus: A User's Guide to Understanding and Enjoying Holy Communion* by Steve Motyer. Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain, Christian Focus Publications, 1995. Pp. 175.

—William H. Kooienga

*Sacrament: The Language of God's Giving* by David N. Power. New York: The Crossway Publishing Company, 1999. Pp. x + 338. \$24.95.

—J. Mark Beach

*What Happens in Holy Communion?* By Michael Welker. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. Pp. 194. \$18.00.

—Cornelis P. Venema

## Miscellaneous Book Notices

*The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* by G. K. Beale. The New International Greek Testament Commentary. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle, U.K.: 1999. Pp. lxiv + 1245. \$75.00. (reviewer: Kloosterman)

Moo on James Pillar  
Somebody on Something

*Saving and Secular Faith: An Invitation to Systematic Theology* by B. A. Gerrish. Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1999. Pp. xii + 153. \$19.00. (reviewer: ???)

*Great Christian Thinkers* by Hans Küng. Trans. John Bowden. New York: Continuum, 1995. Pp. 235. \$16.95. (reviewer: J. M. Beach)

*Christianity: Essence, History, and Future* by Hans Küng. Trans. John Bowden. New York: Continuum, 1999. Pp. xxvi + 936. \$29.95. (reviewer: A. Strange ???)

*The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* by Roger E. Olson. Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 1999. Pp. 652. \$34.99. (reviewer: ???)

*Calvin and the Atonement* by Robert A. Peterson Sr. Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain, Mentor by Christian Focus Publications, 1999. Pp. 154 (reviewer: ???)

*Reformed Confessions: Theology from Zurich to Barmen* by Jan Rohls. Trans. John F. Hoffmeyer. Columbia Series in Reformed Theology. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998. Pp. xxiv + 311. \$35.00. (reviewer: J. Mark Beach or C. Venema)

Other possibilities

J. Van Bruggen's two volumes recently translated

Herman Ridderbos Commentary on the Gospel of John

*Christianity: Essence, History, and Future* by Hans Küng. Trans. John Bowden. New York: Continuum, 1999. Pp. xxvi + 936. \$29.95. (reviewer: A. Strange ???)

*The Story of Christian Theology: Twenty Centuries of Tradition and Reform* by Roger E. Olson. Downers Grove, InterVarsity Press, 1999. Pp. 652. \$34.99. (reviewer: ???)

*Calvin and the Atonement* by Robert A. Peterson Sr. Geanies House, Fearn, Ross-shire, Great Britain, Mentor by Christian Focus Publications, 1999. Pp. 154 (reviewer: ???)

## Sacraments

*A Guide to the Sacraments* by John Macquarrie. New York: Continuum, 1998. Pp. viii + 245. \$--.

*Sacrament: The Language of God's Giving* by David N. Power. New York: The Crossway Publishing Co., 1999. Pp. xi + 338. \$24.95.

David N. Power is Shakespeare Caldwell-Duval Professor of Theology at The Catholic University of America. He is also the past president of the North American Academy of Liturgy and a recipient of its Berakah Award, as well as a recipient of the John Courtney Murray Award from the Catholic Theological Society of America. He previously authored *The Eucharistic Mystery: Revitalizing the Tradition*. Thus among Roman Catholic scholars Power is well-qualified to embark upon a more fundamental study of

Power's concern is to determine how language constitutes the reality of sacramental experience. In Power's view, sacrament is a language event—as *gift*. “Through the sacraments God gives the Church the gift of Word and Spirit, and through this gift the Church worships the giver, keeping the memorial of the Cross and Pasch of Jesus Christ. Sacramental celebrations are God's words and deeds, spoken in a plurality of tongues and forms. They are divine events, occurring among many peoples, relating to different cultures and are enriched by these cultures.”

*“Where it was usual in Catholic theology to refer to sacraments as channels of grace, it is now more common to describe them as actions of the Church in which Christ and the Spirit are operative.”*

*The Book of Revelation: A Commentary on the Greek Text* by G. K. Beale. *The New International Greek Testament Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle, U.K.: 1999. Pp. lxiv + 1245. \$75.00. (reviewer: Kloosterman)

*The Letter of James* by Douglas J. Moo. *The Pillar New Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. Pp. + 288. \$28.00. (Reviewer: Kloosterman)

*The Letters of John* by Colin G. Kruse. *The Pillar New Commentary*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2000. Pp. xxii + 255. \$28.00. (Reviewer: Kloosterman)

*Firestorm: Preventing and Overcoming Church Conflicts* by Ron Susek. Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1999. Pp. 252. \$14.99.  
—J. Mark Beach