

wealth of ideas for homiletic illustrations, too. It's time to take up one of those books, now, and read well.

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McKnight, Scot. *It Takes a Church to Baptize: What the Bible Says About Infant Baptism*. Grand Rapids, MI: Brazos Press, 2018. 128 pages. \$16.99 paperback.

Addressing the perennial topic of infant baptism (in the last decade or so, several books have addressed the subject), Scot McKnight, professor of New Testament at Northern Baptist Seminary in Lombard, Illinois, brings a unique perspective on the issue. Raised in the Anabaptist tradition, he “converted” to Anglicanism and was ordained as a priest in the Anglican Communion in 2014. He is a popular speaker, blogger, and writer, employing a very comfortable writing style on this important theological issue.

Noting his own “conversion,” Bishop Todd D. Hunter’s *Foreword* sets the tone for this short, very readable book. Hunter was also evangelically trained and questioned (even disavowed) baptism as regenerative (baptized as a Methodist, he was rebaptized as a leader of the Vineyard Movement). His conclusion, after studying the subject more carefully, is that infant baptism is theologically, biblically, historically, and personally the most credible position a committed Christian can take (xi). The endorses McKnight’s book, which McKnight admits is designed “for those who are considering infant baptism in the Anglican Communion” (15).

Giving a brief introductory *Preface*, McKnight launches into his presentation with his chapter: “Our Baptism: First Six Words.” The key words are family, Bible, gospel, conversion, debate, and heritage. Here Lutheran readers will already pause, since we would most likely look at Jesus’ invitation (John 3 and Matthew 28) as well as His promises. Regarding family, he states: “infant baptism is the deepest, wisest, and most historic Christian way of forming our children into the faith” (3) Admitting that “there is no text in the New Testament that explicitly reveals the *practice* of infant baptism in the apostolic church” (4), he does affirm that implicitly “a *theology* for infant baptism is to be found” (5) there (citing Acts 2:38 [although he misses v. 39]; Galatians 3:27; and 1 Peter 3:21).

Leaning heavily on these six words, McKnight delves into the Anglican context of baptism. Following the Anglican baptismal liturgy from the *Book of Common Prayer*, McKnight shows its biblical connections. He emphasizes the family context for baptism and its covenantal significance. Although this approach is not completely convincing, he does make some interesting points about our contemporary American individualism as well as a helpful analogy to citizenship: “one’s citizenship was established at birth by an act of

Congress. So with infant baptism: it is granted by God's grace..." (28). McKnight has a process-perspective of baptism and conversion as he speaks of "a journey into spiritual maturity [which] begins at baptism" (28). Relying on a cleverly titled book by Kara Powell and Chap Clark, *Sticky Faith*, McKnight underscores the creedal aspects of the baptismal liturgy, noting that "totally absent is anything about what we can do or have done" (42). He concludes that chapter by saying, "The work of Christ in which the infant is baptized is what brings redemption" (46).

In two key chapters, McKnight opens the biblical perspective on infant baptism. This is undeniably the strongest and most helpful chapters in the book. He begins chapter 4 by saying, "As a Bible professor, I believe our theology and our practice ought to be established by the Bible" (47), an approach I wish he had used to structure this book. He sets out three major themes: union with Christ, Spirit and church reception, and redemption. Curiously, he begins with Romans 10:9-10, but then goes to Matthew 28 and Acts 2:38; 8:16; 10:48; and 19:5, followed by Romans 6:1-14 and Colossians 2:6-15, concluding that "Baptism is an act in which God brings us into union with Christ and all the blessings Christ has accomplished" (53). He returns to several more biblical texts (again Acts 2:38; 22:16; Galatians 3:27; 1 Corinthians 6:11; Romans 6:4-8; Titus 3:5; Hebrews 10:22; 1 Peter 3:21), but for some reason omits John 3. He ends this chapter with "five major terms...defining what happens at baptism for our redemption: sign, seal, symbol, sacrament, and seed" (58), but misses many of the promises Lutherans associate with baptism. In chapter 5, McKnight explores in more detail his biblical understanding of the importance of infant baptism through a study of "household" (65-71) in Acts and early Christian authors. He continues with an emphasis on covenant theology as related to circumcision and baptism.

Concluding his presentation with a return to the Anglican liturgy, McKnight describes "The Act of Baptism" (chapter 6) and his own personal testimony (chapter 7). These shorter chapters cover the actual act of baptizing, which McKnight sees as symbolically important: "The Bible's emphasis is a whole-body spirituality and a whole-creation redemption and a building-based, utensil-shaped, and ritual-ordered worship in the temple" (87). Referring to Peter's connection of baptism to Noah, McKnight is apparently unaware of Martin Luther's "Flood Prayer," only referencing the *Book of Common Prayer's* prayer. Affirming that *baptizein* does not require immersion (90), McKnight does appreciate the practice of the use of oil for chrismation (92). His concluding "personal testimony" includes an unfortunate quote from two Anglican theologians (Stott and Motyer) regarding baptism that "the reception of the sign, although it entitles them to the gift, does not confer the gift to them" (103). This seems to be a denial of baptisms regenerative power (in Titus 3). The book ends with an *Afterword* by Gerald McDermott, who was a Baptist, but also came to Anglicanism. McDermott draws on John 3:5 and Titus 3:5 as support for his "conversion" to belief in infant baptism.

Anglicanism is a self-proclaimed middle-of-the-road denomination (xi). The biblical material in this book is fairly good, but the major concern I have with McKnight's understanding of baptism is that he sees conversion as a process. Already in chapter one, he says "Infant baptism is the first public step in nurturing our children in the faith" (1). Shortly thereafter he patently states, "Conversion is a process, and it begins when the infant is baptized" (12). This theme is woven throughout the book, which weakens the fact that baptism creates the faith it requires (Titus 3:5-6). His emphasis on the liturgy also limits this book's usefulness for non-Anglicans.

Noting these concerns, I still found this book helpful, although not totally satisfying due to the liturgical context (the family of faith) receiving more press than the biblical truths and the numerous promises associated with baptism. My preference for helpful and apologetic works on infant baptism are Uuras Saarnivaara's *Scriptural Baptism: A Dialogue Between John Bapstead and Martin Childfont* (Wipf and Stock, 2003), Joachim Jeremias's two careful studies, Andrew Das's *Baptized into God's Family* (Northwestern, 1997) and Gaylin Schmeling (Northwestern, 1999). While McKnight has done a fine job for Anglicans, a Lutheran approach emphasizes the action and promises of God above all else.

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