

## Book Reviews

***The Blessings of Weekly Communion.* By Kenneth W. Wieting. St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006. 304 pages. Paperback. \$24.99.**

Concordia Theological Seminary has a well-deserved reputation for a Doctor of Ministry program that combines theological rigor with focused pastoral application. This book shows why. Kenneth Wieting received the D.Min. from CTS in 2003; his project dissertation was published three years later.

Early in his ministry, Pastor Wieting was conducting pastoral visits in the homes of his parishioners when one of the young husbands in his congregation surprised him with this question: “Pastor, if the Lord’s Supper is everything that Scripture and the catechism say it is, why don’t we have the opportunity to receive it when we come for worship each week?” (9) Convinced it wouldn’t take him long to research the reason for the congregation’s practice (then twice a month), Pastor Wieting’s journey of discovery was both lengthy and revolutionary; it led to the recovery of weekly communion in that congregation and in the one he presently serves. In this book, he invites other pastors and congregations on the same journey of discovery.

Beginning with a comprehensive foundational chapter on the Scriptural and confessional parameters of the Lord’s Supper, Wieting devotes over one hundred pages of his book to an enlightening excursion through the broad sweep of the church’s views on the Sacrament of the Altar and its practice from the early church through the modern period. In our time—which is decidedly a-historical—it is especially important to come to grips with the larger setting of church practices throughout the centuries and their influence on our own practice. Wieting provides an excellent overview. Yet those who habitually look to the past for direction would do well to note his summary observation: “The Lord’s Supper has never enjoyed a golden age wherein its presence and practice were without opposition and perfectly understood and received” (52).

Obviously, our own age is no exception; each succeeding generation in the church must assume its own responsibility for fidelity in both doctrine and practice. In chapter six of his book, Pastor Wieting turns the spotlight on The Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod. Presenting indisputable evidence from his doctoral research, he provides an interesting snapshot of current practice among LCMS congregations. 2,494 pastors serving in parish settings responded to his 1999 survey, a remarkable return rate of 48 percent and a statistically valid portrait of sacramental practice among us (156). Pastors who responded reported that 36 percent of Missouri Synod congregations offer Holy Communion at least once a Sunday (19.8% in each Sunday service and 16.2% in rotating services every week). On the face of it, the plain evidence is that LCMS congregations are gravitating toward more frequent communion.

Yet Wieting's argument is that there must be more to sacramental practice than the mere ebb and flow of historical trends. Taking up the major concerns that pastors report are impeding communion frequency, he addresses them each in sequence: increased frequency will trivialize the Sacrament, it will take too much time within the service, it is viewed as an anomaly in Lutheran practice, etc. Furthermore, he addresses forthrightly the impact of anti-Roman Catholic and pro-Protestant sentiments on Lutheran identity and practice in America (167-180).

Chapter seven, which Wieting titles "The Treasures Abound," takes up the unspeakable gifts which Christ offers worthy communicants in His Supper. Chapter eight, "These Things Matter," explores various genuinely pastoral concerns regarding the faithful administration of the Holy Supper. Patiently and lovingly, yet straightforwardly, Pastor Wieting addresses matters which have unfortunately become contentious among us: the theology and practice of the liturgy, the nature, content, and style of preaching, faithful preparation for communion, closed communion (which Wieting reminds us is a *loving* practice [249]), and the proper distribution and disposal of the elements. Thoughtful pastors and laity will find rich fare here for both contemplation and implementation.

Finally, in a chapter entitled "Into the Future," Wieting invites the reader to face some of the forthright challenges to the church's identity and mission in our time. Our culture—with its morbid obsession with death, sexual promiscuity, denigration of marriage, open embrace of tolerance, inclusiveness, and pragmatism—has a corrosive effect on the church as she seeks to maintain her identity as God's own creation: very much in the world, and yet conscientiously not of it. In his patient style, Wieting urges pastors and laity alike to see the central role of the Sacrament of the Altar in maintaining the church's life and mission of our time in the face of such destructive influences. "The heart and center of this book," he writes, "is the loving encouragement that God's people not be denied the opportunity to receive the main service when they come for regular weekly worship . . . their need for the heavenly food of (Christ's) body and blood is no less than the need of their brothers and sisters after Pentecost and in the early church and in the church of the Reformation" (269).

This pastoral focus is underscored by the very helpful discussion questions Wieting has included at the close of each chapter. Thus the reader is invited to ponder and review the line of argumentation as he or she is exposed to concepts that, while native to Lutheran theology, may unfortunately seem foreign at first reading. The book could well serve as a lengthy study on the Sacrament and its use for a church council or board of elders.

In his preface to the Small Catechism, Dr. Martin Luther warns pastors against compelling people to more frequent communion: "Our preaching should instead be such that of their own accord and without our command,

people feel constrained themselves and press us pastors to serve the Sacrament." (*Luther's Small Catechism*, CPH, 1986, 250) The honest question of one of his parishioners led Kenneth Wieting to do just that; in this very helpful book he in turn invites other faithful pastors to consider the same. And we are all the richer for it.

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***Image and Word in the Theology of John Calvin.* By Randall C. Zachman. Notre Dame, Ind.: University of Notre Dame Press, 2007. 548 pages. Hardcover, \$55.00. Paperback, \$40.00.**

The traditional Reformed or Presbyterian view of worship, governed by what is sometimes called the "regulative principle," says that God requires "that we in nowise make any image of God, nor worship him in any other way than he has commanded in his Word" (Heidelberg Catechism, q. 96; cf. Westminster Confession of Faith 21.1; Schaff, *Creeds of Christendom* 3:343, 646). Classic Calvinist worship is an auditory experience, not a visual one.

However, Randall Zachman, associate professor of Reformation studies at the University of Notre Dame, contends that this way of approaching worship (and religion in general) is not faithful to the theology of John Calvin. After an important introductory chapter, in which Zachman interacts with Calvin scholarship, the other chapters consist of diachronic presentations of Calvin's thought on the following issues: the universe as a living image of God, the image of God in humankind, providence, God's self-revelation in Scripture to Israel and the Church, the sacraments, ceremonies, interpersonal communication, and signs of one's predestination to salvation.

Zachman's four objectives are, first, to show that for Calvin, God reveals Himself not only through the Word but also through creation, not just through proclamation, but also through manifestation. (This move, being explicitly against Barth and Bultmann, is motivated by ecological concerns.) Second, he aims to foster theological aesthetics and liturgical renewal among Reformed and Presbyterian congregations. Third, he aims to encourage gestures as vehicles of liturgical communication. Fourth, and most important, he aims to portray Calvin's theology as ecumenically open toward the Roman Catholic and Greek Orthodox traditions.

The diachronic arrangement of the chapters resolves many of the cognitive dissonances in Calvin's statements as they change over time. However, other contradictions in Calvin's thought remain, most especially, according to Zachman, on the issue of God's invisibility and visibility (through "living images"), and on the issue of the sacraments. Zachman explains these as an intentional dialectic on Calvin's part.

Lutheran readers may find this book to be a helpful introduction to various themes in Calvin's thought with a few unexpected turns along the way – such as that Calvin taught the imposition of hands in ordination to be a sacrament and to bestow the Holy Spirit (315–18). Zachman's work will undoubtedly be important for evangelicals and Calvinists who seek to remain faithful to Calvin's theology and yet also move in ecumenical and liturgical directions.

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*Infant Baptism in Reformation Geneva: The Shaping of a Community: 1536-1574.* By Karen E. Spierling. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009. 253 pages. Paperback. \$39.95.

This valuable book reveals the Reformed tradition's understanding of community, church, and baptism. Spierling's sources are the minutes of the consistory of Geneva. In the ideal Reformed world the consistory functions as the civil authority that reviews and serves to enforce the ministers' decisions. Discipline as a mark of the church became explicit in Scottish Presbyterianism, but it was a fact of community life in Geneva – and there was no better way to enforce it than baptism.

The prime actor in this narrative is John Calvin, who is shown to have presented one case after another to the consistory to determine the rightness of his accusations. A favorable ruling resulted in a jail sentence, a fine, or both. The book is a narrative of case law and the reader is kept wondering what infraction the true believers might have committed and, if found guilty, what sentence will be imposed.

Calvin believed in original sin, but birth into the covenant through family eliminated any need for baptizing infants. In any event, baptism did not grant the forgiveness of sins. Eliminating two reasons offered by Catholics and Lutherans for baptizing, Calvin maintained infant baptism as a means of placing them into the community and giving the parents an opportunity to pledge to provide the child with a religious education. God had commanded baptism to keep the community intact. Emergency baptism by a midwife of a child in danger of death was strictly outlawed. Infant baptism in Geneva had to be administered in the regular worship service after the sermon to keep the word and sacrament order unbroken. Church authorities resisted the requests of some parents to have their children baptized at the beginning of service – parents who, especially in the winter, feared that the infants would die before the conclusion of the sermon. (Remember that baptism had no immediate salutary effect on the child.)

Because infant baptism involved the parents pledging to bring up the child as a Christian, a problem arose when the fathers of illegitimate children

refused to identify themselves in fear of reprisal by the consistory. Then there were those parents who had not purged themselves of Catholic ideas and went in search of a priest for a proper baptism. The poor people could not rid themselves of the medieval idea that baptism actually did something for the child right then and there. Calvin often served as a baptismal sponsor, though he saw no biblical warrant for the practice. In one instance he prevented a widow, for whose child he served as a sponsor, from leaving Geneva. His reasoning: he would not be able to bring the child up in the Reformed faith. Finally the matter was resolved by letting the mother move to a territory controlled by the Reformed.

Spierling's study of Geneva should dispel any ideas that the Reformed and Lutherans are two different branches from the same trunk. Calvin's reformation as a regulation of society through baptism reflects his own peculiar understanding of the third use of the law. Just for the record the Reformed—and that includes Presbyterians—do not believe or practice emergency baptism on infants in danger of death. The practice of parents and sponsors pledging themselves to care spiritually for the baptized child has its origins in Calvin's theology, not Luther's. For Luther, baptism is a unilateral act of God on the one being baptized. For the Reformed, baptism is the ritual of entrance into the community.

The uninteresting title of the book is in direct contradiction to its fascinating contents. This book is a great read and provides another good reason to stay Lutheran.

David P. Scaer

***This is My Body: The Presence of Christ in Reformation Thought.* By Thomas J. Davis. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2008. 203 pages. \$25.00.**

This book on the subject of the presence of Christ in the thought of Luther and Calvin is a collection of scholarly essays, in part previously published. The first two essays are, respectively, a study on the sacrament in early Luther and an argument for the identification of Luther's emphasis in the 1520s on the power of the word to be effective rather than on the ubiquity of Christ's body. In this second essay, Davis proposes a "hierarchy of meaning" in Luther's theology, whereby it is not the nature of the presence that is at stake, but the acceptance or denial of God's word.

There follow several articles on subjects related to Calvin's understanding of the presence of Christ in the church. Davis argues in chapter three that the Eucharist assures the Christian with the knowledge of his communion with the body of Christ. In chapter four he continues this idea, which is rooted in the Calvinist presupposition that God must "accommodate" himself to men. There, he delineates the string of instruments by which God's presence is conveyed to men: the human nature of Christ, which, being in heaven, is in

turn conveyed through the instruments at the church's disposal. These instruments are the Eucharist and preaching, the latter being the subject of the next two essays. The first contends that Calvin advocated a "bodily" preaching, since the task was to convey Christ's presence; the second presents preaching explicitly as God's accommodation to human understanding. Chapter seven neatly clarifies the reason for the Calvinist necessity of the soul ascending to heaven to feed on the body of Christ: the location of the body is essential, not accidental, so that if Christ's body were in heaven and also on earth, it would no longer be fully human, which it must be as the instrument of salvation. In chapter eight, Davis points to Augustine as the source of the increased emphasis on efficacy in later editions of Calvin's *Institutes*.

Chapter nine places Zwingli, Calvin, and Luther, in that order, on a spectrum with regards to Christ's presence. Chapter ten argues on the basis of increasingly literal understandings of language that Calvin and his followers (Theodore Beza in particular) have been dealt with too harshly. These concluding essays seem to betray the book's intent. To this reviewer, Davis appears to be trying to cast Calvin in a softer light. He does this first, by drawing him closer to Luther, though at the expense of a centered understanding of Luther's primary emphasis on the forgiveness of sins; second, by offering a clear, and indeed helpful, exploration of Calvin's understanding of divine accommodation for man's salvation; and finally, by explicitly identifying where Calvin has been misrepresented. With that in mind, Davis's book is certainly not the final word on the real presence in reformation thought, but has value in its clear presentation of Calvin and a Calvinist's interpretation of Luther on the subject.

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***Commentary on the New Testament Use of the Old Testament.* Edited by G. K. Beale and D. A. Carson. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2007. Hard Cover. Xxviii + 1239 pages. \$54.99.**

Every Sunday in preaching and in Bible class pastors face New Testament texts that are literally cluttered with Old Testament quotations. Most of us have neither the time nor the inclination to go back to the older revelation to see what was on the mind of the New Testament writer in using this or that Old Testament reference. This has now been done for us in twenty-four essays by eighteen contributors under the editorial guidance of G. K. Beale (Wheaton College) and D. A. Carson (formerly of Trinity Evangelical Divinity School).

Expositions of the four gospels contain sections on the New Testament and New Testament context, use of the Old Testament passages in Jewish sources, and finally textual background, the hermeneutic employed and

theological use. Craig L. Blomberg, author of the Matthew chapter, provides an introductory section to the genealogy and then comments on each of Jesus' progenitors. Similarly, the section on Matthew 1:18-25 begins with a brief introductory commentary followed by exposition on how the evangelist made use of Isaiah 7. The well respected and widely known I. Howard Marshall provides a section by section—and sometimes verse by verse—commentary in his eighty-three page essay on Acts. He begins with a lengthy introduction which includes such topics as Luke's perspective, sources and methods, his canon, and Jewish models of sermons and exegetical methods, among other topics.

Just as the title indicates, this is a biblical commentary limiting itself to how the writers of New Testament books used the Old Testament, but it goes far beyond identifying citations. The contributors probe the minds of the New Testament authors to determine why they chose certain Old Testament passages, what they saw in them, and how they were used. Old Testament citations in the New Testament are cross referenced in extra-biblical sources. A bibliography is provided at the end of each essay along with a comprehensive one at the end of the book with a seventy-page five columned biblical indices (1163-1239). Pages with the essays are divided into two columns. At first this commentary might find a place alongside of traditionally organized ones. It might soon take first place.

David P. Scaer

***The Certainty of the Faith: Apologetics in an Uncertain World.* By Richard B. Ramsay. Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2007. 280 pages. Paperback. \$13.99.**

Recently there have been a number of books published in the field of Christian apologetics, each with its own approach to and understanding of this oft-ignored theological discipline. *The Certainty of the Faith* is no exception. Its author, Richard B. Ramsay, a veteran missionary from the Reformed tradition, sees apologetics as an essential component of evangelism. His book was thus written to aid in engendering "an apologetic mind-set" among Christians engaged in evangelistic outreach.

Ramsay pursues this task in three distinct phases. First, he briefly introduces his readers to various schools of philosophy to show how—when pushed to their logical conclusion—they all lead to theological skepticism and moral relativism. The chief task of apologetics, then, is to demonstrate the logical incoherence and practical inconsistencies of non-Christian worldviews. This is integral to apologetics, argues Ramsay, for it removes obstacles that fetter the hearing and reception of the gospel. But the next step is not the building of a positive case for the Christian faith, as one might expect to be advanced in an apologetics text. Instead, Ramsay argues, it should be a cogent

explanation of the gospel coherently articulated against the background of the Christian worldview.

This methodology is known, at least to apologetic enthusiasts, as presuppositionalism. Ramsay clearly favors such a method, for in the second part of the book, where he briefly treats historical and contemporary apologists, he gives considerable attention to its chief advocates (e.g. Cornelius Van Til and John Frame). He does acknowledge the occasional utility of inductive *a posteriori* approaches proffered by evidentialists. Like most presuppositionalists, however, he is quick to criticize their willingness even to admit that epistemic common ground exists between Christians and nonbelievers.

The last part of the book is the most practical and useful. It considers various challenges a non-Christian may pose in the context of evangelism and briefly treats them using the memorable acronym DEFEND: Demonstrate interest in the person advancing the challenge; Explain your faith; Furnish answers to the objection; Expose the presuppositions from which the non-Christian's objections are derived; Navigate the inconsistencies of the non-Christian's worldview; and Direct the non-Christian to Christ.

Not bad advice. Overall, the book lacks sufficient depth, and seems to take non-Christian positions too lightly. Moreover, while it criticizes other approaches to apologetics, Ramsay fails to adequately address some of the major criticisms of presuppositionalism, such as the inherently circular nature of its logic. (On this, see especially John Warwick Montgomery, "Once upon an A Priori" in *Faith Founded on Fact*, 107-128.)

All things considered, though, *The Certainty of the Faith* could be a useful introduction to the field for those with no experience in apologetics. With the discussion questions at the end of each chapter, it could prove especially beneficial for small group study. However, one will definitely want to supplement it with some of the more rigorous factual-historical defenses of the faith.

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