

attempt at theological engagement with near-contemporary mainstream popular musical culture, drawing on a range of sources most of which I believe are well-chosen, and will certainly provide food for thought and many valuable ideas for both teaching and further research.

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**The Sign of the Gospel: Toward an Evangelical Doctrine of Infant Baptism after Karl Barth**, W. Travis McMaken, Fortress, 2013 (ISBN 978-0-8006-9999-4), xii + 324 pp., pb \$69

W. Travis McMaken (Assistant Professor of Religion at Lindenwood University) shows in this volume that Karl Barth's rejection of infant baptism is a logical outworking of his mature theology rather than a deviation from it. However, he suggests, this rejection is not the only possible course. Rather, one might be able to adhere to Barth's theology and still affirm the possibility of infant baptism. The result is a proposed third view of infant baptism, one neither 'sacramental' nor 'covenantal' but rather 'post-Barthian' and 'evangelical'. This book, a revision of McMaken's doctoral dissertation (2011) at Princeton Theological Seminary, provides an important contribution not only to Barth scholarship but more broadly to ecumenical dialogue on baptism.

The first chapter delivers a brief history of the reception and rejection of infant baptism from the New Testament era to Barth and his interpreters. Regarding the latter, McMaken charges that scholars have failed to give adequate attention to Barth's exegetical arguments concerning baptism. McMaken's survey of the literature on this point is extensive and his critique is compelling, though his suggestion that 'it is likely that many of these authors were predisposed to distrust Barth's exegesis' (p. 43, fn. 109), casually disregarding it due to 'their own theological presuppositions' (p. 100), seems to be unproven and unnecessary speculation. Taking Barth's exegesis seriously, McMaken examines select New Testament passages throughout the rest of the book, predominately in excursions at the ends of chapters two and three. In these brief but helpful sketches McMaken does not seek to provide conclusive arguments for Barth's exegesis, but rather to show that it deserves consideration.

The second and third chapters deal with Barth's differences with the 'sacramental' and 'covenantal' views of baptism respectively. The

purpose of this comparison is to show what is significant about Barth's development of the doctrine and to cast light on the central issues at hand. Primary figures used for these comparisons include Augustine, Aquinas, Calvin, and Turretin, among others. McMaken acknowledges that these chapters do not represent every existing argument for infant baptism, but adds that they do represent the historically 'preeminent' arguments (p. 7, fn. 1).

The soteriologies underlying both the sacramental and covenantal views understand objectively accomplished salvation to require individual subjective application. In the sacramental view, such application would include baptism's removal of original sin and its guilt, while in the covenantal view such application would come through faith's reception of that which baptism signifies. By contrast, in Barth's objectivist soteriology Christ accomplishes salvation once and for all, and this salvation is not *applied to* but rather *actualized in* the responsive life of the believer. This actualization is that event 'whereby one encounters the truth of one's identity and correspondingly shifts from unfaithfulness to faithfulness' (p. 153). Salvation does not *become* true for the individual, rather, it already *is* true and is encountered in the proclamation of the Gospel. McMaken gives careful attention to this soteriological principle by examining Barth's views on election, reprobation, and reconciliation throughout the second and third chapters. It is clear that McMaken desires to understand Barth rightly on his own terms, and the resulting analysis is illuminating and helpful.

This analysis culminates in an extended and focused discussion of Barth's doctrine of baptism in chapter four. Here, McMaken treats Barth's notion of 'free human response', as well as the distinction and relationship between Spirit baptism (conversion) and water baptism. That is, water baptism is understood ethically as 'the faithful human response one renders to God' (p. 207) as a result of Spirit baptism, which is the subjective actualization spoken of above. Infant baptism simply does not fit into this understanding of responsible and responsive water baptism.

The final chapter is devoted to the construction of a new account of infant baptism which remains consonant with Barth's theology. In this construal, baptism is a 'mode of gospel proclamation' (p. 221). This does not mean that baptism is merely a 'visible word', rather, it addresses the baptizand as an individual 'in all her historical particularity' (p. 225), embedding the gospel proclamation within this individual's life and history in such a way that she cannot escape the confrontation. It is also an act of prayer or *epiclesis* by the community for the individual, expressing hope that the baptism of the Spirit will also take place in her life (pp. 258–60). One can see how this view is easily compatible with the practice of infant baptism. McMaken roots these concepts of Gospel

proclamation and community activity in Barth's theology, showing persuasively that this is another consistent route that Barth could have taken.

This new account is given substantial ecumenical purchase, as McMaken suggests that infant baptism does not have to be a required practice but might only be deployed in certain cultural contexts in which it would be properly fitting (pp. 264–6). Credobaptists and pedobaptists could thus come together in agreement about the meaning and purpose of baptism, as infant baptism would neither be absolutely necessary nor prohibited. McMaken argues that the New Testament's silence on the topic of infant baptism allows the church this freedom on the matter.

Is McMaken's constructive proposal persuasive? That depends in part on how much the reader accepts the Barthian soteriological principles that undergird the proposal. However, the primary purpose of the comparisons in chapters two and three is not exactly to persuade the reader that Barth is right. McMaken's focus here is on baptism, not on providing a lengthy defense of Barth's understanding of salvation. He seeks 'to demonstrate the close relation between Barth's doctrine of baptism in general and his rejection of infant baptism in particular', and 'to raise awareness of the significant questions that Barth puts to these traditions' (p. 276). On both these counts McMaken's work here is a success. He compellingly argues that renewed attention should be given to Barth's doctrine of baptism, and also provides his own unique voice to the wider conversation. In doing so he provides a fruitful contribution to the ongoing dialogue on baptism.

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**The One Christ: St Augustine's Theology of Deification**, David Vincent Meconi, Catholic University of America Press, 2013 (ISBN 978-0-8132-2127-4), xx + 280 pp., hb \$64.95

David Meconi of Saint Louis University has written what he claims is the 'first book-length study of Augustine's theology of deification' (p. xvi). Since the publication of Gerald Bonner's seminal article on this theme ('Augustine's Concept of Deification', *Journal of Theological Studies* 37 [1986], pp. 369–86) deification has been a topic of discussion within Augustine studies. It is often assumed to distinguish 'Eastern' from 'Western' theology (the East has it, the West lacks it),