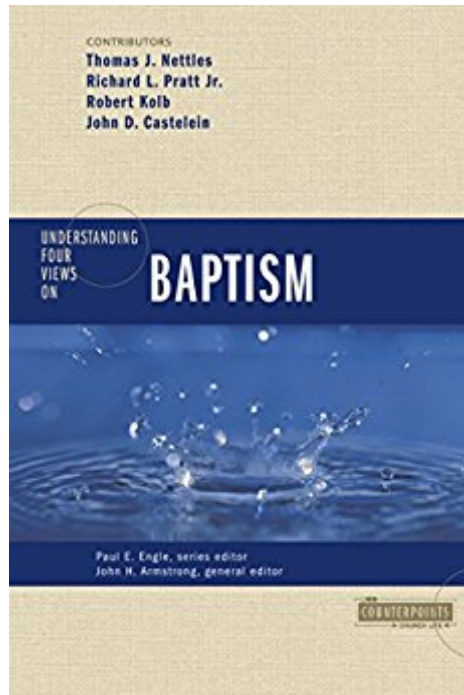


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Understanding Four Views On Baptism (Counterpoints: Church Life)



Synopsis

What is the significance of water baptism? Who should be baptized? Is infant baptism scriptural? Which is the proper baptismal mode: sprinkling, pouring, or immersion? Should people be rebaptized if they join a church that teaches a different form of baptism? Should baptism be required for church membership? These and other questions are explored in this thought-provoking book. Four historic views on baptism are considered in depth: • Baptism of the professing regenerate by immersion (Baptist) • Believers' baptism on the occasion of regeneration by immersion (Christian Churches/Churches of Christ) • Infant baptism by sprinkling as a regenerative act (Lutheran) • Infant baptism of children of the covenant (Reformed) Each view is presented by its proponent, then critiqued and defended in dialogue with the book's other contributors. Here is an ideal setting in which you can consider the strengths and weaknesses of each stance and arrive at your own informed conclusion.

Book Information

File Size: 800 KB

Print Length: 224 pages

Simultaneous Device Usage: Up to 5 simultaneous devices, per publisher limits

Publisher: Zondervan (August 30, 2009)

Publication Date: August 30, 2009

Sold by: HarperCollins Publishing

Language: English

ASIN: B000SEFC1U

Text-to-Speech: Enabled

X-Ray: Not Enabled

Word Wise: Enabled

Lending: Not Enabled

Enhanced Typesetting: Not Enabled

Best Sellers Rank: #126,968 Paid in Kindle Store (See Top 100 Paid in Kindle Store) #35

in Kindle Store > Kindle eBooks > Religion & Spirituality > Christian Books & Bibles > Theology >

Soteriology #36 in Books > Christian Books & Bibles > Worship & Devotion > Sacraments #60

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Comparative Religion

Customer Reviews

This is a fantastic summary of four Protestant understandings of baptism: from the Baptist, Reformed, Lutheran, and Church of Christ perspectives. Each of the authors does a marvelous job of stating his case briefly and succinctly (all chapters are under 20 pages) and yet thoroughly -- I felt as though I grasped the core teachings of each perspective after I finished. The editor (John Armstrong) also offers a helpful introduction and conclusion, which point out some of the universally-held points of agreement among all the contributors, as well as the key issues on which they differ. I fall within the Reformed perspective, and I was impressed by how the Reformed writer not only included several classic terms from Reformed theology (e.g., "covenant", "sign and seal", "means of grace") but also defined these terms and showed how they emerge from the Bible and not just from the Reformed Confessions. Other reviewers will have to assess whether they think the other 3 perspectives were as well-represented, but I thought all the chapters were very well-written. (Perhaps a few additional comments could have helped in a few areas. For example, neither of the two proponents of Infant Baptism addressed very strongly how the biblical data is somewhat inconclusive: just as there is no explicit command to baptize infants, neither is there an explicit command forbidding it; and just as there is no clear-cut example of an infant being baptized in Scripture, neither is there any example of an infant being presented for baptism by his or her parents, and being denied. But this is a small point.

This is a great addition to the Counterpoints series. The format of previous volumes is retained. Each theologian has an essay about his view of baptism, and the others give brief replies. The first one up at the plate is Thomas Nettles, who represents the Baptist view. He points out that the pattern for baptism is that it is something which follows belief. Therefore, Nettles would not baptize an infant. Nettles struggles somewhat as he tries to explain how difficult texts such as 1 Peter 3:21 and Acts 22:16 fit into his system. The Reformed view is presented by Richard Pratt, Jr. He contends that infant baptism has a similar function to circumcision in the Old Testament in that it incorporates the child into the visible community (even though it does not confer saving grace on the child). Nettles and Castelein countered Pratt by noting that Pratt placed an equal amount of emphasis on the Westminster Confession as he did the Bible, and that non-Reformed Christians would object to this. They note that our doctrine should come straight from Scripture. Robert Kolb presents the Lutheran view, and it is very similar to the Reformed perspective. The main difference is that Lutherans believe that babies ARE born again when they are baptized. Nettles counters this by noting that there are no known instances of salvation in the New Testament apart from hearing and responding to the gospel, an argument which struck me as quite cogent. John Castelein

presents the Church of Christ view. His presentation is very similar to the Baptist view. The one difference is that Castelein contends that baptism is the occasion for justification, a teaching that Pratt and Nettles effectively challenge.

This is a fine introduction to the competing views of baptism inside Protestantism, though there are indeed further nuanced positions of baptism within the Protestant camp besides the four represented here . See for instance, Kenneth Stephenson's "The Mystery of Baptism in the Anglican Tradition" that describes seven nuanced approaches to baptism inside the Anglican tradition alone. The rebuttals and counterarguments made by the other three theologians were more interesting than the actual presentations themselves unless you are completely new to the baptism debate. However the relatively simple introductions to the respective approaches to baptism might clue you in on how the other side actually thinks. It is highly unlikely that anyone will come away with a changed mind given the nature of the presentations. The Reformed and Lutheran positions, for instance, approach the subject of baptism by relying heavily on the Reformed confessions and the theology of Luther respectively. Those who do not share such presuppositions are unlikely to come away convinced. Nettles's presentation of baptism is fine and does not begin with a confessional basis or a great theologian such as Luther, but the Bible, arguing that baptism is a symbol of Christ's saving work whereby a person who has already come to faith now visibly enters the Christian community. Nettles then details the baptism of John and Jesus and then describes several key instances of conversion and baptism in the Book of Acts arguing that faith in Christ/conversion always precedes baptism. One of the strengths of the Baptist approach is the lack of biblical evidence for children being baptized in the New Testament.

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