

Ronald P. Byars. *The Sacraments in Biblical Perspective*. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox, 2011. 350 pages. \$40.

Preaching not only provides information as to what the biblical text says and means, but it also challenges current individuals, communities, and societies through sermons that call for transformation. With *The Sacraments in Biblical Perspective*, one volume in the commentary series of *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, Ronald Byars offers a very valuable resource and reference for those who want to explore deeply and broadly multiple meanings, implications, metaphors, symbols, themes, dimensions, reflections, and interpretations of the sacraments, rooted in biblical texts. He addresses those seeking to engage in faithful sacramental preaching on baptism (23-182) and the Eucharist (183-308) for purposes of transformation.

In this text, Byars' interest in the intersection between the sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist and the abundant biblical interpretations/implications in ecumenical contexts is very visible. His understanding of preaching as the living bridge between biblical texts and the congregation's sacramental life is fully engaged with his sustained intellectual, spiritual, and historical exploration. Therefore, one can easily recognize the author's intention to present the readers with examples of scripture and sacraments in life-forming, transformative relationships.

*The Sacraments in Biblical Perspective* is distinctive in five ways. First, this series provides rich commentary and lectionary resources on the Revised Common Lectionary. It enables users to draw out various sacramental perspectives and themes on baptism and the Eucharist from the beginning to end. It thoroughly focuses on how the lectionary readings can help preachers interpret and reflect on passages, on baptism and the Eucharist, both biblically and theologically, for both the lectionary as well as the non-lectionary preacher throughout the entire year.

Second, Byars designs textual comments to help preachers and congregations develop a deep and broad sacramental vision out of which to interpret genuine Christian sacramental identity beyond the barriers of one's own denominational, theological, and biblical understandings of the sacraments. This text is primarily helpful to anyone interested in an overview of Reformed sacramental theology and biblical interpretations, acknowledging human decision-making as a result of divine action. However, the sacramental comments on the biblical texts inclusively and ecumenically introduce baptism and the Eucharist beyond the boundaries of the theology and interpretation particular denomination of particular denominations.

Third, this study provides the readers with various biblical implications, imaginations, associations, and connections on baptism and Eucharist from both Testaments, even though they "may not immediately appear to have anything to do with the sacraments" (18). It encourages the preacher to pay attention to other biblical texts that may have informed or influenced the passage, or to be sensitive to other passages that may simply come to mind amid the process of preaching preparation.

Fourth, the author criticizes modern/postmodern church worship and preaching in the twenty-first century world (1-19), observing the general ignorance and indifference toward the sacraments in contemporary services of baptism and the Eucharist, as well as the current lack of sacramental faith, which is the foundation of Christian experience in relation to the mystery of

God's presence and grace. At the same time, he prophetically emphasizes its recovery and restoration in terms of its mystery, relationship, and symbol.

Fifth, Byars intends this commentary resource to be much more than simple notes on imaginative exegetical interpretations of the biblical readings and implications, especially as it relates to baptism and the Eucharist. It is also designed to help preachers and congregations, as well as Christian leaders, understand the history, theology, appropriate baptismal /Eucharistic hymns and liturgies, Creed, and arguments, as related to the sacraments, such as the validity of infant baptism, qualifications of catechumens (169-177), and the celebration of the Eucharist at a funeral (305-307).

Numerous scholarly volumes deal with diverse theological perspectives and practices, grounded and centered in various denominations and Christian traditions. Such resources related to exhaustive historical exploration and Ecumenical studies of baptism and Eucharist can be easily found. But, Byars' text provides the reader with a well-investigated resource that one can easily navigate on how biblical texts relate to baptism and the Eucharist and what they mean, scrutinizing various links that illumine the meanings/implications of baptism and the Eucharist. Thus, this book is a significant resource for sacramental preaching, well worth engaging.

Finally, though Byars has compiled for the reader abundant information, associations, and images on baptism and Eucharist, it is the responsibility of the reader to challenge and experience sacramental transformations through the means of human communication. Byars' commentary reflects Karl Barth's notion that to understand preaching we must understand sacrament.

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