

*One Baptism: Ecumenical Dimensions of the Doctrine of Baptism.*

Susan K. Wood. A Michael Glazier Book. Collegeville: Liturgical Press 2009. Pages, xiv+218. Paper, \$29.95. ISBN 978-0-8146-5306-7.

"So much has been written already on baptism, you probably wouldn't be able to contribute anything new." That was the dour advice I received as a doctoral student from a faculty member helping me eliminate potential topics for my dissertation. Obviously, he didn't know Susan K. Wood.

You can find books on the history of baptism, on the confessional meanings of baptism, and on the liturgical celebration of baptism. You can find documents exposing the fruit of ecumenical dialogues on baptism. But it is hard to find a book that surveys all this material, organizes it intelligently, faces the challenges squarely, and extends hope to Christians seeking stronger unity.

In *One Baptism: Ecumenical Dimensions of the Doctrine of Baptism*, Wood offers the reader a deeply insightful and dispassionately critical analysis of baptismal theologies, their sources and implications. "This study attempts to forge [the bonds of sacramental theology and liturgical theology] by integrating sacramental, liturgical, historical, and systematic theology in an examination of baptism" (xi). It is a remarkable achievement.

Wood poses three questions: "What does baptism do? How does it do it? What does it mean?" (22). The parallels among the baptismal liturgies of various denominations can be noted by even the most casual observers. The differences among Christian bodies are often felt more than scrutinized. Wood takes her reader beyond the liturgical evidence into the confessional stances of Christians to analyze what they aim to do when they baptize, and what they mean when they insist with Saint Paul that there is one baptism. At times, it sure doesn't appear to be so.

Not every Christian recognizes the baptism of every other Christian. Reasons pertain to Trinitarian doctrine, the personal faith of the recipient, or ecclesiological principles (21). But there are important points of convergence: a theology of the efficacious word of God; participation in covenant with God; the call to conversion; and the particulars of performing the rite with the dominical formula, the use of water, and the expression of a creed (88-89).

These convergences reassure the reader as Wood proceeds to explore the relationships among baptism, faith and justification in a provocative chapter. Theological divergences kept Catholics out of communion with other Christians, but the practice of baptism was never thought to be church-dividing

(146). Wood stresses that baptism is an act of faith, and this anchors a mutual understanding and recognition of the ceremony.

Confirmation is a "thorny problem that cannot be addressed in detail in the present study" (134), but Wood goes on to give a concise and accurate description of the issues. By contrast, her summary of the history of the sequence of the initiation rites suffers from oversimplification (38-40), but her conclusion is still correct: the disintegration of the three initiation rites "no doubt contributed to divisions among Christians at the time of the Reformation" (43).

The author has listened carefully to various points of view about baptism, and has presented these in a way that permits not just comparison but the emergence of new insights. She has gone far in answering her own question, "What does baptism do?" Baptism offers a foretaste of eschatological glory. Wood shows that Christians can walk the sometimes tortuous path to that goal with mutual respect and tangible hope.

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