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BOOK REVIEWS

Baptist Distinctives and New Testament Church Order, by Kevin Bauder. Schaumburg, IL: Regular Baptist Books, 2012. 263 pp. $19.99 (paperback). $24.99 (hardcover).

Finally, a relevant, articulate, and readable treatment of Baptist principles and polity by one who understands and embraces Baptist belief! Author Kevin Bauder has taught Baptist polity for a number of years at Central Baptist Theological Seminary (Plymouth, MN) where he currently serves as Research Professor of Systematic Theology. This book is preceded by several others wherein he treats his specialties—evangelicalism and fundamentalism. His purpose in writing this work is twofold: to logically explain and practically apply Baptist distinctives. Hence the two divisions: The Baptist Distinctives and New Testament Order.

Since Bauder's plan is to consider the Baptist distinctives integratively and scripturally, he explains that their uniqueness lies not in individuality (other groups have held to certain of these distinctives) but in their combined witness, that is, "no other group holds the whole bundle" (12). And their genius lies in the fact that they are scripturally derived. But that does not mean that all Baptists have come to the same scriptural agreement. Therefore, Bauder provides an explanation of his own hermeneutical principles for interpreting relevant texts. These principles, he writes, appear to be the assumptions "implicit in mainstream Baptist thought" (13). They are three in number: (1) didactic passages should interpret historical ones; (2) clear passages should interpret obscure ones; and (3) deliberate or explicit passages should interpret incidental ones. These all fit under the rubric of Scripture interpreting Scripture. Bauder's faithful adherence to this hermeneutical approach is the mainstay that provides both coherence and defense of Baptist doctrines.

Bauder begins his discussion of Baptist distinctives in order of priority with what has been the most important one for most Baptists—authority. He goes to great lengths to insist that it is not enough to merely accept biblical authority; to be a consistent Baptist, one must explicitly affirm the absolute authority of the New Testament in matters of faith and order. "Baptists insist that only the New Testament may be used to establish the doctrine and structure of the church" (24). Practically, Bauder is right, but historically Baptists did not always make such a fine distinction, at least in their earliest confessions. For example, the First London Confession (1644) states that the "Rule of...Knowledge, Faith and Obedience, concerning the worship and service of God, and all other Christian duties, is not man's inventions...but only the word of

God contained in the Canonical Scriptures" (article 7). Likewise, the General Baptist Standard Confession (1660) concludes "that the holy Scriptures is the rule whereby Saints both in matters of Faith, and conversation are to be regulated, they being able to make men wise unto salvation" (article 23). However, this qualification does not in the least detract from what I believe is Bauder's most important contribution to Baptist distinctives: they derive from Scripture, which is necessarily and practically sufficient, as expressed in Baptist symbolics, namely, creeds and confessions.

In his explanation of the subsequent Baptist distinctives—believer baptism, pure church membership, individual Christian responsibility (priesthood of the believer and soul liberty), congregational government, and separation of church and state—Bauder is excellent in his organization of content, delineation of detail, and explanation of controversial points. Limited space permits only a few examples. In treating believer baptism, Bauder correctly insists on what Baptists have always believed about this defining doctrine: it should include proper subjects (believers), proper meaning (identification with Christ), and proper mode (immersion). To these some Baptists have added proper administration. Each of these topics receives precise explanation of how Baptists have scripturally established their beliefs. Under proper subjects, Bauder lists five reasons why babies should not be baptized on the basis of Scripture's sufficiency, concluding that there is simply no evidence in the New Testament for infant baptism. He approaches proper meaning in the same way, saying what it does not mean (circumcision, washing of sins) in contrast with baptism's biblical meaning—a symbol of identification with the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. He does the same thing with the proper mode of immersion, which verifies meaning. When treating the issue of proper administration, a debatable point among Baptists, he carefully distinguishes between *irregular* baptism (non-church related, e.g., camps) and *invalid* baptism (where the symbolism is destroyed by heresy, e.g., apostate churches). "Baptists are unanimous," writes Bauder, "that baptism is invalid when it has the wrong subject, meaning, or mode. They have not come to the same unanimity regarding baptisms that lack proper authority" (53). Otherwise, if baptism has been observed properly, it is sin to repeat it.

Thankfully, Bauder discusses the necessity of Baptist confessionalism. Historically, the order has been confession, then covenant. Bauder reverses the order, highlighting covenant as the most important means of unifying the church by promising to believe and behave biblically. I would like to have seen a recommendation of catechism, which would complete the confessional responsibility of the local church: confession (statement of belief), covenant (promise of belief), and catechism (confirmation of belief). The last, I am afraid, is all but lost to our Baptist churches.

Bauder's aversion to pastoral monarchialism in the local church is evident throughout, particularly in his chapter on congregational government. This type of polity is the best means of assuring accountability

of both members and leaders. He cites several New Testament passages to support this, including a Baptist favorite, Acts 15, describing the Jerusalem Council (which Bauder considers simply a local church business meeting). Whether a church employs only one elder or a plurality of elders, the congregation is the final decision-making authority. Pastors lead by teaching and example; they do not dictate nor pontificate. Nor should they hire and fire. These decisions are reserved for the local church body. Deacons are not governing boards but specially appointed servants to administer the physical aspects of the church. Churches in which congregations govern, pastors lead, and deacons serve facilitate spiritual unity.

The book contains a few minor historical slips. For example, Bauder refers to Constantine's "merger of church and state," a popular but inaccurate view. As *pontifex maximus*, Constantine reserved for himself the supervision of all religions in the empire, including pagan. In this context, Christianity received most favored status, but was not actually made the official state religion until Theodosius I in A.D. 380. Another slip-up is referencing Anabaptists as Baptist "cousins," perhaps an unwitting concession to the Anabaptist kinship theory, but a designation with which early confessional Baptists would have been uncomfortable. Otherwise, Bauder does a masterful job in delineating the responsibilities of both church and state. His biblical illustrations for the proper use of civil disobedience are pertinent and useful in helping Baptists understand their responsibilities under renegade as well as lawful governments. Rarely found in other treatments of Baptist polity is a section on Christian involvement in governmental affairs. Baptists have the right, even the responsibility, to provide moral leadership in key areas. Bauder is to be commended for tackling the "knotty" issues that continue to confront Baptists, such as excessive and unfair government regulation, insurrection, and how to behave in an increasingly antagonistic culture.

The second and much shorter section of the book enumerates and discusses the various types of Baptist organization with the advantages and disadvantages of each, followed by most helpful critiques of Landmarkism and baptismal regeneration. Bauder boldly counters the arguments of these views with careful scriptural exegesis. It is in these two sections where his three hermeneutical principles are brilliantly displayed. By insisting on proper linguistic and contextual interpretation and allowing clear Scripture references to explain obscure ones, he completely repudiates false theories. Baptists who have been looking for answers on how to counter pseudo-Baptist claims of extreme successionism and salvific baptism may find them here.

Bauder's last chapter ends the book abruptly but practically. And if anything, Bauder wants to be eminently practical while being thoroughly exegetical. He describes how to organize a Baptist church. The subject makes perfect sense: take the principles outlined in the previous chapters and put them to work. Do something! Start what Baptists have always been about—a local New Testament church.

The one area that could be an improvement of the book relates to referential framework. In treating denominational distinctives one must have solid scriptural arguments (in this Bauder shines)—this is the preferential approach. But the support of historical source material via footnotes or at least recommendations of appropriate references would have supported what otherwise appears to be Bauder's assumptions or preferences. His normal frame of reference is what he is most familiar with—the GARBC and related groups. But a larger historical framework would have added perspective and even greater credibility to his assertions. This is done occasionally and, where it is done, with great effect. But footnotes are generally sparse. For example, when Bauder introduces his study with hermeneutical assumptions that he finds implicit in mainstream Baptist thought, I would like to have seen some evidence for this, even in the form of suggested studies. Certainly, such an addition would increase the book's length, perhaps considerably, but would also enhance its value. Yet, all in all, this is a superbly written manual on how to have orderly churches. And heaven knows we need them in these desperate times of uncertainty and unbelief. I highly recommend this book and encourage every Baptist pastor and church member to read and heed its contents.

Gerald L. Priest

Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help (and How to Reverse It), by Robert D. Lupton. New York: Harper One, 2011. 191 pp. $22.99.

You drive up to a man in tattered clothes standing by the road holding a sign stating he is hungry and asking for help. A poorly dressed woman approaches you asking for money to buy food for her children. You watch a video about the destitute orphans overseas and hear the plea to help with just a small payment each month. As a Christian, your heart is moved with compassion for these individuals, so you give of your own limited resources to provide aid. But does your act of kindness benefit the individual, or does it harm him? In *Toxic Charity: How Churches and Charities Hurt Those They Help (and How to Reverse It)*, Robert D. Lupton argues that much charitable work is destructive for those receiving the gift. Lupton is the founder and president of Focused Community Strategies (FCS) Urban Ministries, based in Atlanta, GA. He has lived and served in inner-city Atlanta for nearly forty years, focusing on neighborhood and community development. Lupton has a Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Georgia and is also the author of four other books on Christians and urban ministries: *Theirs Is the Kingdom*; *Return Flight*; *Renewing the City*; and *Compassion, Justice and the Christian Life*.