

chapter, which demonstrate how social theories can be applied to Pauline studies. In some cases, it is possible to see the value of such comparative studies between the Diaspora Jews and Pauline communities. In others, Barclay raises more questions than he provides answers, leaving the reader wondering whether social comparisons are actually valuable in cases where so much data is lacking. After all, Paul's epistles are mainly concerned with addressing theological issues, and not with providing us with a description of the ins-and-outs of early Christian communities. Another pitfall of such associations is the danger of over-generalization, as Barclay himself admits (120). Perhaps it would be important to remind the reader that comparative studies should not replace the task of sound exegesis. If the apostle is not, first and foremost, studied and interpreted on his own terms, whatever analogies are subsequently drawn will invariably be skewed.

All in all, *Pauline Churches and Diaspora Jews* will stimulate both seasoned scholars and young students of Paul to look at his epistles with fresh eyes, while at the same time providing them with innovative tools with which to explore the world of early Christianity. As the author repeatedly emphasizes, there is still much to uncover, if one is willing to ask the right questions.

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Brewer, Brian C. *Martin Luther and the Seven Sacraments: A Contemporary Protestant Reappraisal*. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2017. xviii + 253 pp. Softcover. USD 26.99.

In *Martin Luther and the Seven Sacraments*, Brian C. Brewer—associate professor of Christian theology at George W. Truett Theological Seminary, Baylor University—“intends to outline each of Lombard's seven sacraments, which became traditional to Roman Catholicism, to examine how Luther understood each practice, evaluate why it was or was not a sacrament, and explore how the rite might be properly understood and positively used in the Protestant tradition still today” (35).

At the heart of Brewer's argument lie the following key thoughts: First, while Luther and the other reformers reduced the number of the sacraments, they did not abandon the practices related to them. In other words, Luther spoke against the sacramentalization of certain practices, but not against the practices themselves. Secondly, many Christians from Protestant traditions today—in contrast with Luther and other Reformers—have either ignored or do not fully engage in important church disciplines that are considered sacraments by the Roman Catholic Church because of their misunderstanding of Luther's intentions.

To be clear, the book is not an appeal for Protestantism to return to seven sacraments, but to re-assess the two Protestant sacraments (Lord's Supper and Baptism) as well as the other ecclesial practices that can strengthen the Christian's life and the life of the church (xii), in light of Luther's theology and practice. In other words, the fact that the nomenclature “sacrament” was deemed inappropriate by Luther and other Reformers in reference to five

important practices of the church does not mean that those practices should be minimized, neglected, or altogether forgotten—as is often the case in many Protestant churches. On the contrary, careful consideration and special attention should be given to each one. Moreover, Brewer suggests that the writings of Luther can provide answers for today's church in its quest to introduce "important rites for its ongoing practice and renewal" (36).

This work is a valuable contribution to the modern church, particularly its main thrust: to call Protestantism's attention to the careful re-evaluation of the seven sacraments. While not considering them sacraments, as such, the call remains to assess the (perhaps lost) significance and usefulness of each practice for today's church. The relevance of, and response to, Brewer's specific proposals under each of the sacraments, however, will most likely vary depending on the tradition of the reader.

The book is composed of an introduction and seven chapters. The generous introduction clearly states the main thesis of the book, and then provides an encompassing historical review of the development of sacramental theologies and understandings spanning from the early church through the Reformation. These are divided into four historical subsections: The first subsection deals with the first few centuries of Christianity, emphasizing that theology rose out of practice in this period, not the other way around. The second subsection presents the debates over the sacraments by medieval theologians (9). The third subsection paints a picture of Luther's views on the sacraments, pointing out that while Luther criticized the sacramental system, he still utilized "the logic of his medieval theological ancestors" (19). The fourth and last subsection provides a succinct, yet clear, depiction of the broader context of the Reformation and its bearing on the issue of the sacraments.

Each of the seven chapters is dedicated to one of the seven sacraments, in the following order: penance, confirmation, marriage, ordination, extreme unction, baptism, and the Lord's Supper. Each chapter follows the same pattern, consisting of four distinct parts: First, a concise, yet solid, historical account of the development of the sacrament until Luther's time; second, Luther's position on the sacrament; third, other Reformers' positions in contrast with Luther's; and finally, a reflection and possible applications for the Protestant tradition today.

Brewer's gentle yet direct challenge to the church, to re-consider the sacraments "as usages" in light of Luther's understanding, is a positive move. His general observation that many Protestant churches today have misunderstood Luther's views and therefore neglected or completely ignored these important practices is valid. At the same time, it seems important to be cautious not to get overly carried away with this train of thought, falling into irresponsible or inaccurate generalizations. While Brewer is correct in the general direction of his argument, the idea that Protestants only practice two, doing absolutely nothing with the other five practices that Romans Catholics consider sacramental, is erroneous to say the least.

Brewer has done an excellent job in his historic appraisal of the development of the sacraments—both in the robust introduction and in

each of the seven chapters. While not an exhaustive historical account, these sections are comprehensive and instructive, clearly setting the broad historical and theological backdrop to which Luther reacted, along with the fertile soil out of which the Reformer built his sacramental views. In this sense, the section in each chapter that exposes what other reformers taught on these issues provides even greater clarity and shows Brewer's predominantly objective approach to his study.

When it comes to each specific sacrament, Brewer's observations and propositions may be considered either extremely valuable or totally irrelevant, depending on the tradition of the recipient. For example, churches that have strong small group programs with well-established accountability partners, may find Brewer's ideas on penance and confession redundant and obvious; while other churches may see those same ideas as needed and beneficial in their particular context.

Regarding *penance*, or confession, Brewer rightfully signals the privatization of faith and the loss of genuine community as potential outcomes of the church's removal of this practice (64). I find Brewer's appeal relevant for the church today, though each tradition's application in this area might vary, and despite the fact that a full return to medieval practices of confession is less than desirable. It appears that the offices of counselors and psychologists have become the confessionals of the twenty-first century for much of the population. Not that Christianity should oppose the service of these valuable professions; however, perhaps a healthier practice of the biblical mandate to confess our sins to one another might reduce the need for such consultations. Simply put, the discontinued practice of the biblical principle of healthy confession has resulted in a great loss for the Christian church today.

In relation to *confirmation* and *baptism*, evaluated here together because of their obvious connection, churches that practice believers' baptism should take heed of Brewer's advice to practice the dedication of babies as a rite that both initiates infants into, and acknowledges them as part of, the covenant community in Christ. Another welcome observation is the well-established preparation for baptism, one that is more evidently celebrated in the life of the congregation. Regarding baptism, Brewer rather unsatisfactorily resolves Luther's paradox of emphasizing faith as that which makes baptism efficacious, on the one hand, while still maintaining infant baptism, on the other.

On *marriage*, Brewer proposes no new elements for the contemporary church. He suggests that, "by removing the 'sacramental' label from the estate, Luther intended to promote marriage beyond Christians to all people as the divine intention for living in God's created world" (111). However, this point is not completely convincing, and even if it was, it does not provide anything innovative for the church today. In other words, most (if not all) Protestant churches do practice marriage and consider it a crucial and sacred divine institution.

Pertaining to *ordination* and the issue of authority in the church, much remains to be resolved within Protestant denominations. It is clear that the

central catalyst of the Reformation—church authority—is still a challenging issue for the church today. There is a difficult balance between the cherished egalitarian Protestant principle of “the priesthood of all believers,” and the practice of order and authority in the day-to-day life of the church. Brewer clearly describes this challenge, but the solutions are obviously beyond his reach.

Regarding *extreme unction*, for many traditions, including Adventism, Brewer’s proposed ideas are mainly a description of standard practice. For all intents and purposes, this places the author’s suggested ideas in full agreement with Adventism. It still seems important, however, to support Brewer’s appeal for the church to maintain a healthy practice of the biblical mandate to pray for the sick, as well as those on their deathbeds, and to offer anointing to those that request it.

Regarding the *Lord’s Supper*, it is hard to see the extent to which Luther’s views are useful today; though Brewer’s suggestion to consider Luther’s views as a way to balance Zwingli’s “mere symbolism” seemed understandable and logical. Perhaps the most helpful part is Luther’s rejection of philosophy as the basis for explaining spiritual/theological matters and his proposal that biblical mysteries be accepted by faith, without the attempt to explain that which has not been clearly revealed in God’s word.

Brewer’s message tends to lose some strength when he moves from the general to the specifics of his discussion. While the historical sketches are rich and provide a solid backdrop for each of the discussions on the sacraments, the possible applications for the church today are not as strong. Still, this book is an excellent read for college students, as well as for practitioners, and can be used as a primer on the historical development of the sacraments, from the early church to the time of the Reformation, written from a Protestant perspective. Perhaps a section with questions to ponder at the end of each chapter would strengthen the application sections.

Brewer’s appeal to contemporary Protestantism to take a fresh look at the seven sacraments, and consider them as relevant practices for the church, using Luther as a filter, should be taken seriously. Overall, this is a book worth reading for everyone interested in observing and evaluating the Protestant Church of the past, in order to enhance the Protestant Church of the present.

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Cartwright, John, Gabriel Etzel, Christopher Jackson, and Timothy Paul Jones. *Teaching the World: Foundations for Online Theological Education*. Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 2017. xviii + 188 pp. Softcover. USD 24.99.

This book by Cartwright, Etzel, Jackson, and Jones is a collaborative effort to examine the question of whether online education can be as good as traditional learning on a physical campus. Some schools reject online training categorically (Beeson Divinity School), while a few *only* use online venues for education (Rockbridge Seminary). In 2012, the Association of Theological