

Book Reviews

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Paul E. Koptak, *Circles in the Stream: Index, Identification, & Intertext: Reading and Preaching the Story of Judah in Genesis 37–50* (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2022), 148 pages, \$38.

Paul E. Koptak, professor emeritus of homiletics at North Park Theological Seminary, has written *Circles in the Stream* to help people read and teach the Bible, particularly its narratives and poetry, more effectively. The book transgresses the genre categories of typical academic publications. It includes intellectual memoir, introduction to the literary analysis of Kenneth Burke, introduction to hermeneutics and homiletics, exegetical study of Gen 37–50, and homilies on Gen 37–50. While these topics may at first seem disconnected, they all serve Koptak’s overriding concern that Christian ministers gain more insight into the biblical text and better connect the teachings of Scripture to congregants’ lives. The interdisciplinary nature of this book is not surprising given that it reflects Koptak’s own ministerial vocation as a professor of both the Old Testament and communication while at North Park Theological Seminary.

The title of the book, *Circles in the Stream*, is a metaphor summarizing Koptak's thesis. He likens the ripples that extend outward from a stone cast into a river to the ongoing impact of Scripture upon its readers. While he acknowledges the need to acquire exegetical skills, Koptak's main concern is to train ministers to be excellent interpreters of both Scripture and peoples' lives. Koptak believes the text invariably connects to life; he writes, "Still, deep study of the text is akin to careful study of human relations, asking what brings joy or sorrow, confusion or conviction, despair or determination" (2). He goes on to state that "this book is more than a theory of interpreting texts; it is a practical literary-rhetorical-theological pathway that leads to those connections" (3). These "literary-rhetorical-theological" connections are determined through the following three steps: 1) Find the connections within a given passage by making an index; 2) Find the connection with the life issue by attending to identification; and 3) Find the connections between this text and the rest of the biblical canon by tracing intertexts (4). Koptak attributes this method to the insights of literary critic Kenneth Burke, who sought to identify the symbolic logics within literature and how they were adopted by readers. According to Koptak, it is Burke's process of identification that connects biblical interpretation to biblical proclamation. This move includes Koptak's addition of the step of Intertext, where based upon his commitment to a canonical and theological interpretation, he identifies relationships between texts within the biblical canon. Following the introduction, the book consists of three chapters, each explaining one step in his method, a commentary on a passage within Gen 37–50, and a sermon on the passage. Chapter one explores the step of Index through a study and exposition of the story of Judah and Tamar in Gen 38, chapter two addresses Identification and the story of Judah and Joseph in Gen 43–45, and chapter three explores Intertext through the story of Judah's blessing in Gen 48–49.

Circles in the Stream reflects the thought of a mature scholar and an experienced teacher. It is ambitious to address such a wide range of topics in a relatively short work, but Koptak successfully accomplishes this task and offers compelling instruction on how ministers can be better readers and preachers of Scripture. Students of Scripture often struggle to make the connections between hermeneutical theory, exegesis, and preaching, while books are typically written to address only one of these topics. In this work, Koptak pulls the curtain back to reveal a process that may appear a mystery to many. Those familiar with canonical and

theological interpretation will find Koptak's method runs parallel to theirs. Kenneth Burke's influence on Koptak's thinking is similar to the influence of Erich Auerbach, another literary critic, upon theologian Hans Frei. To Koptak's methodology with its focus on the "literary-rhetorical-theological," I would add "the contextual." Given the importance of personal and communal identity within Koptak's method, additional teaching on contextual hermeneutical and homiletical methods will be needed to supplement his work. Seminarians, pastors, and teachers will greatly benefit from this book. *Circles in the Stream* will certainly influence the manner I teach Old Testament courses to seminarians going forward.

BO H. LIM

Sarah Jean Barton, *Becoming the Baptized Body: Disability and the Practice of Christian Community* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2022), 252pp., \$45.

Baptism is one of the most significant milestones in the life of a Christian. Yet, in some churches, this sacrament is withheld from individuals who apparently lack the capacity to verbally repent of their sins and commit to Christ. This obstruction is a source of great pain and alienation. *Becoming the Baptized Body* helps to overcome this quandary by laying out biblical and theological reasons why people with intellectual disabilities may be baptized. Most important, the rationale comes from the very people affected: persons with disabilities and those who care for and about them.

Little has been written about baptism for people with disabilities, and none from their perspective. As a practical theologian and pediatric occupational therapist, Sarah Jean Barton amplifies the largely unheard voices of people with disabilities. *Becoming the Baptized Body* is an attempt to fill a gap in the field of disability theology by means of theological ethnography. Through interviews and participant observation, Barton assembles reflections of disabled Christians to challenge and expand existing understandings of baptism (44). The intent is to reshape the church's imagination about human identity so that all people can experience baptism into Christ-centered community (14).

The chapters are logically organized. Chapter 1 reviews the academic

discourse on baptizing individuals with disabilities. Chapter 2 inquires, what do people with disabilities and their caretakers say? Chapters 3 and 4 turn to the Bible. Chapters 5 and 6 ask, what do baptismal liturgies say? Finally, chapter 7 ponders, what are some practical ways to reimagine baptism as the expression of God's love for all?

Barton's thesis is that regardless of their capacities, each person is a conduit of the Holy Spirit's gift to the church. As such, the sacrament of water baptism can rightfully be administered to a person with disabilities. Distilled, there are at least five reasons to support this claim: 1) Through baptism, a person participates in Jesus's death and resurrection (66) and, consequently, joins the body of Christ (64); 2) Just as the Father pronounces Jesus as his beloved Son, the church can name and uphold a person's belovedness at baptism (89); The person's status as God's beloved, and their new identity in Christ, are radically dependent on Jesus rather than on personal merits or competencies (95); 3) Baptism is both the local church's public welcome of an individual into the Christian life and its commitment to provide a place of support, acceptance, and belonging (67); 4) In the body of Christ, human differences, such as advantages and abilities, are set aside for a radical inclusion of all people (100–01), marked by dependency (97); and 5) Therefore, the priesthood of all believers involves acknowledging that each person is a gift to the community (109). Taken together, these are good reasons to baptize individuals with disabilities.

One area deserves explication: How exactly does the person change by being baptized? Being baptized into Christ means that the old self was crucified with Christ, so now the new self is alive to God (Rom 6:1–14). One interviewee stated: "Baptism marks a turning point in someone's life.... They're transformed from being turned to self to turning now to Christ" (66). Had Barton included a brief study of church history, it would have shown that Christian baptism in the third and fourth centuries practiced a radical renunciation of much of one's prior life—what one has known and who one has been. At times, baptism in Christ risked the scorn of one's unchristian neighbors, or persecution from authorities. How, then, might a person with an intellectual disability severe enough to impair their sense of morality and, therefore, diminish their culpability, express the change they experience when they are baptized? What do they repent of? What have they given up? How will their lives look different? What did it cost them? How is baptism a turning point for them?

All that said, *Becoming the Baptized Body* is a recommended resource for pastors, church leaders, and the families and caretakers of individuals with disabilities who want to be agents of healing and hospitality. This simple yet profound claim will particularly challenge readers in the credobaptist tradition. Every person is God's beloved, and every person—including those with disabilities—is an irreplaceable member of the body of Christ.

”JOEY” ALAN LE

