

A Dictionary of European Baptist Life and Thought

General Editor John H. Y. Briggs

Milton Keynes: Paternoster, 2009 xxiii + 541, £45, pb.
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SUMMARY

This is a dictionary containing entries on subjects from Abortion to Zwingli. The editors' purpose in compiling this reference work was to provide European Baptists with 'an authoritative reference work to assist them to nourish their own constituencies in Baptist identity'. From its beginnings in the sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe, Baptist identity has included three main groupings; Anabaptists, General or Arminian Baptists and Particular or Calvinistic Baptists. The dictionary's attempt to reflect this diversity means that it will not satisfy everyone. Categories covered include Baptist Theology, Ecclesiology, Mission, Ethics and History.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Dieses Lexikon enthält Artikel zu Themen von Abtreibung bis Zwingli. Die Absicht der Verfasser bei diesem Nachschlagewerk war es, europäische Baptisten 'mit einem vertrauenswürdigen Nachschlagewerk zu versorgen, um ihren Gemeinden zu helfen, ihre baptistische Identität zu pflegen.' Von ihren Anfängen im Europa des 16. und 17. Jahrhunderts an hat baptistische Identität drei Hauptströme umfasst: Anabaptisten, arminianische Baptisten sowie calvinistische Baptisten. Die Absicht des Lexikons, diese Vielfalt widerzuspiegeln, mag bedeuten, dass es nicht jedermann zufrieden stellt. Als Kategorien wurden baptistische Theologie, Ekklesiologie, Mission, Ethik und Geschichte abgedeckt.

RÉSUMÉ

Ce dictionnaire comporte des articles sur des sujets qui vont de l'avortement à Zwingli. Le but des éditeurs était de procurer aux baptistes européens « l'ouvrage de référence faisant autorité pour les aider à promouvoir l'identité baptiste parmi les membres de leurs Églises ». Dès les débuts de son existence, aux XVI^e et XVII^e siècles, le mouvement baptiste européen comportait trois branches principales: les anabaptistes, les baptistes arminiens et les baptistes calvinistes. Ce dictionnaire tente de refléter cette diversité, avec pour conséquence qu'il ne satisfera pas tout le monde. Parmi les grandes thématiques abordées figurent la théologie baptiste, l'ecclesiologie, la mission, l'éthique et l'histoire.

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This dictionary includes entries on subjects from Abortion to Zwingli. The editors' purpose in compiling this reference work was to provide European Baptists with 'an authoritative reference work to assist them to nourish their own constituencies in Baptist identity'. My assessment of this work is shaped by my convictions as a Reformed Baptist, that is a Baptist holding to the decid-

edly Calvinistic Second London Baptist Confession of 1689.

As is acknowledged throughout this work, Baptists do not speak with one voice on all theological matters. From its beginnings in the sixteenth and seventeenth century Europe, the Baptist family was divided into three main groupings; Anabaptists, General or Arminian Baptists and Particular or Calvinistic Baptists. What Particular Baptists think about predestination, for example, is quite different from their General Baptist cousins. Added to this, some Baptists have not always been keen on being tied to creeds or confessions of faith. This makes it difficult to say with certainty what Baptist thought might be on various theological matters. However, given this diversity of belief, the dictionary emphasises that most Baptists are broadly Evangelical in their doctrinal outlook.

From the reviewer's perspective the dictionary's theological entries are the least satisfactory aspect of this work. Every effort has been made to be fair to the Calvinistic and Arminian strands in Baptist theology. However, the fact that the Baptist movement is divided along these lines does not make for a coherent presentation of the doctrine of salvation. The article on *Sin* speaks in terms of 'total depravity' and the entry on *Regeneration* stresses that the new birth is a monergistic act of God, but the piece on *Humankind* makes the virtually Pelagian statement that, 'Humankind is able to follow the law of God, though recurrently fails to do so.'

It is repeatedly emphasised that Baptists hold to the final authority of Scripture, but the entry on *Infallibility and Inerrancy of the Bible* dismisses the traditional Evangelical position on biblical inerrancy, preferring to say that the Bible is 'entirely trustworthy' rather than without error. This represents a weakening of biblical authority. Also, little reference is made to Scripture in the dictionary's treatment of major theological subjects. A case in point is the entry on the *Trinity*. Mention is made of the unorthodox view that in the Trinity God is asexual, the Son male and the Spirit female, but the biblical basis of the doctrine of the Trinity is not even hinted at. Neither is an account given of the Church's historic confession of Trinitarian theology at the councils of Nicaea (325) and Constantinople (381). It might be objected that space constraints did not allow for more in-depth treatment of this doctrine. However, given the central importance of the Trinity for Christian theology, that is not a valid defence, especially when the ample space devoted to other subjects of lesser magnitude is taken into account. The entry on the *Trinity* amounts to approximately one half-page column, while just over four columns are devoted to *Social Class*. Similarly, the article on *Justification* includes no references to the text of Scripture. The entry sets out the elements of the traditional Protestant understanding of the doctrine and discusses the relationship between justification and sanctification. The reader, however, is not referred to the biblical basis for this truth in Romans and Galatians (or elsewhere in

Scripture for that matter). Part of the dictionary's stated aim was to provide a one-stop resource for Baptists in Eastern Europe, where theological literature is not so readily available. One fears that Eastern European Pastors looking for a deeper understanding of the biblical doctrine of the Trinity or justification will find little help here.

The atoning work of Christ is close to the heart of Evangelical theology. Yet this doctrine has recently been the subject of heated controversy, ranging around the teaching of penal substitutionary atonement. The article on *Atonement* mentions Steve Chalke's view that this understanding of the crucifixion amounts to 'cosmic child abuse'. It is suggested that Chalke had 'extreme versions' of penal substitutionary atonement in mind. (Incidentally, Chalke is on record as opposing the very idea that Christ bore the penalty of sin at the cross.) The entry fails to clearly handle this issue, saying that the controversy over Chalke's views shows that there is room for differences of opinion in Evangelicalism on penal substitutionary atonement. Chalke, a prominent Baptist Union Minister is later singled out as a paragon of Evangelicalism (*Evangelicalism, Baptists and*). Along similar lines, the issue of whether the Bible teaches the eternal, conscious punishment of the wicked or some form of annihilationism is left an open question. See *Annihilation and Universalism and Judgement*.

Some of the theological contributions are more helpful, but on the whole, the dictionary's treatment of Baptist theology leaves a lot to be desired. The reference work's treatment of the Baptist view of the Church is much better. There are solid entries on *Baptism*, *Believer's Church* and *Völkiskirche*, and *Separation of Church and State*. Pieces devoted to why Baptists reject Roman Catholic teaching on issues such as the *Infallibility of the Pope and Purgatory* are clear and incisive. This having been said, the dictionary is more open to Baptist involvement with ecumenical ventures such as the World Council of Churches than many Reformed Baptists would be prepared to tolerate. Articles on the pastoral *Ministry* imply that this form of Christian service is open to women as well as men. Many Baptists, arguing from Scripture, would not accept female pastors. In keeping with the Baptist tradition associated with pioneer missionary William Carey, the dictionary has a strong emphasis on *Mission*, both in terms of preaching the gospel and helping the poor.

Articles are also devoted to ethical concerns such as *Abortion* and *Euthanasia*, where the reference work's stance is in line with mainstream Christian thinking. Interestingly, the entry on *Just War Theory* opens up the differences between those in the pacifist Mennonite camp and most other Baptists. Sadly, the piece on *Sexual Orientation* contents itself with describing various attitudes towards homosexuality in the Baptist community rather than seeking to set out the authoritative biblical teaching.

The historical and biographical entries make for fascinating reading. It is moving to follow the story of the

growth of Baptist churches in Eastern Europe despite much persecution during the era of Soviet Communism. Articles are devoted the Reformers Martin Luther and John Calvin and key Baptist figures such as C. H. Spurgeon. In the interests of historical accuracy it should be pointed (contrary to what is said in *Images: Icons, Baptist use of*) that Welsh preacher Christmas Evans was only blind in one eye.

There are some good things here, but the dictionary's disappointing handling of important theological subjects means that it is unlikely to receive a ready welcome among all European Baptists.

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The Cambridge Companion to Orthodox Christian Theology

M. Cunningham and E. Theokritoff (ed.)

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hb. ISBN: 978-1-4094-0007-3

RÉSUMÉ

Cet ouvrage rassemble dix-huit articles d'auteurs contemporains qui présentent, dans un esprit d'unité, différents aspects de la théologie orthodoxe. Sa ligne principale vise à montrer l'articulation de la théologie orthodoxe avec l'Écriture, l'héritage des Pères, la tradition, ainsi que la vie sacramentelle et liturgique de l'Église. La fidélité aux doctrines traditionnelles doit être maintenue malgré les difficultés que cela pose dans le monde contemporain, et, en même temps, les réalités actuelles nous invitent à une nécessaire transformation dynamique.

SUMMARY

This publication contains eighteen articles from contemporary authors who reflect in a spirit of unity different aspects of orthodox theology. The main tendency is to show a mutual interaction of theology, the Holy Scripture, the heritage of the Fathers of the Church, tradition, the liturgical and sacramental life of the Church. The contemporary realities are considered as a challenge to the fidelity towards the traditional doctrines and at the same time as an urge to a necessary dynamic transformation.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Der vorliegende Band bemüht sich, in achtzehn Artikeln zeitgenössischer Autoren unterschiedliche Aspekte orthodoxer Theologie in einem Geist der Einheit zu präsentieren. Die hauptsächliche Tendenz besteht darin, die gesamte Interaktion zwischen der orthodoxen Theologie, der Schrift, dem Erbe der Kirchenväter, der Tradition, dem Leben der Kirche in Sakrament und Liturgie darzustellen. Die Realität der gegenwärtigen Situation wird als Herausforderung anerkannt zum einen an die Treue zur ursprünglichen Lehre und zum anderen an eine notwendige dynamische Veränderung.