

Title: Baptist Sacramental Theology: A Covenantal Framework for Believer Baptism

Author: Brandon C. Jones

Date: 2010 Degree: Ph. D., Calvin Theological Seminary

Supervisor: Ronald J. Feenstra

External Reader: Stanley K. Fowler

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ABSTRACT

A recent resurgence of Baptist works that defend sacramental theology has revived the mid-twentieth-century debate among Baptists over the meaning of baptism. Just as the mid-twentieth-century generation of Baptist sacramentalists struggled to get other Baptists to accept their views, the problem remains today that most Baptists do not and will not seriously consider Baptist sacramental theology. The purpose of this dissertation is to help solve this problem by presenting a historically informed systematic theological defense of covenantal sacramentalism, which uses covenant theology to enhance a sacramental theology of baptism.

This dissertation argues that the covenantal view of Baptist baptismal sacramentalism appeals to sacramentalists and ordinance-only Baptists alike, because it enhances Baptist theology of the meaning of baptism in helpful and unique ways. This dissertation demonstrates those ways by presenting the covenantal view's biblical grounding, systematic coherence, historical roots, and practical benefits, arguing that it meets Baptist objects to sacramental theology better than other sacramentalist views. After introducing the problem and the proposed solution to it in chapter 1, this dissertation builds its argument in three stages: first, it shows how the covenantal view complements both the strengths and weaknesses of mid-twentieth-century and contemporary Baptist sacramental theology in chapters 2 and 3 respectively. Second, in chapter 4, this dissertation argues for a recovery of seventeenth-century Baptist version of covenant theology and sacramentalism, because these historical positions not only make this dissertation's covenantal view of genuine Baptist view with roots in the Baptist tradition, but also provide helpful arguments for its biblical grounding, systematic coherence, and practical benefits. Third, in chapter 5, this dissertation draws from seventeenth-century Baptist position to formulate a contemporary covenantal view of sacramentalism. This view states that the Spirit graciously uses baptism as a confirming sign and seal of a believer's initiation into the new covenant, thereby strengthening his or her consciousness of salvation. Likewise, in baptism, the believer faithfully takes hold of God's covenant by

consciously receiving its blessings and by pledging to fulfill its duties—both of which are tied to God's new covenant community, the church.