

Christ, Baptism, and the Lord's Supper: Recovering the Sacraments for Evangelical Worship
by Leonard J. Vander Zee
A Book Review

Taji R. Duncombe
CD 701 Worship Arts and Disciplines
Spring 2021

Overview

Christ, Baptism and the Lord's Supper: Recovering the Sacraments for Evangelical Worship was written by Leonard J. Vander Zee and published by InterVarsity Press in 2004. In this volume Vander Zee notes "that the sacraments derive their meaning from Christ and that it is Christ who through them, but the Holy Spirit, unites us to himself" (p. 11). His hope is that the Body of Christ, particularly, evangelicals can fully absorb and appreciate the spiritual nature of the sacraments, that we might shed ourselves of a "dualistic worldview of the sacraments" (p. 10). For far to long Vander Zee notes that the "Western world has a disease of compartmentalization" and we have problems uniting the things that are seen with the things that are unseen. Vander Zee argues that "all created things are sacramental in the sense" that they point us to God (p. 23). He notes that "we need more than just words...we need things" (p. 24). As Romans 1:20 reads, "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made, so that people are without excuse." God's hand can be seen in and through all because all was created by Him. Vander Zee wants believers to begin to see and appreciate this union. The union of Baptism with Christ and The Lord's Supper with Christ. He writes this "unity" would be "a place where God meets us and where the spiritual and physical come together for our wholeness and our healing" (p. 28). These sacraments are "signs... [that]...points to the sacred reality" – that points us to Christ, who Vander Zee notes is the "quintessential sacrament" (pp. 31, 45). Christ is God in the flesh; Emmanuel, God with us. Not only does Christ point us to God, but by His very nature is God. Vander Zee writes, "Since Christ is the word made flesh, true God and

true man, as he is confessed by the church, Christ is the meeting place of God and humanity, spirit and matter, invisible and visible...Christ is the visible 'icon' of the invisible God" (p. 45).

Takeaways

This volume has helped to alleviate some of my own "mistrust" in the things of God (p. 16). Recently, meditation has become a part of my way of communing with God. Meditation, mind you, has been something I have shied away from due to America's idea that this practice is steeped in Mid-Eastern religion and to do so would be considered, at least in my Christian circles, demonic. One cannot mix deep breathing with the Word of God, that is sacrilegious. Likewise, I have always admired architecture, beautiful structures, buildings, and landscapes. Somehow, I could always see the power of God within these edifices. But, again, because of the upbringing within evangelicalism, I have not necessarily taken the time to admire symbols within the church. These have been deemed separate from God. Vander Zee notes that within evangelicalism we have "mistrusted" the very things that God has wanted us to take a hold of (p. 16). I have as Vander Zee writes been "afflicted by the disease of compartmentalization in which the realm of God and the realm of the everyday real are too often separated" (p. 20). I have decided I am not longer willing to live a segregated life. I will engage my full body, mind, soul, and spirit in my walk with God. God gave us five senses and wants that they all be used in fellowship with Him.

The sacraments have always been important to me. I thoroughly enjoy and value communion in a corporate setting and within my own home, with the Father, Son, Holy Spirit, and me. I have also been baptized on several occasions. Each time was meaningful for me for different reasons. My church even provides a Baptism class that one must take prior to being baptized. Yet, as I have read Vander Zee's book, I feel that I have missed out on true

understanding and appreciation of the sacraments. Vander Zee reminds us that Jesus is “the bread of life” and “whoever comes to [Him] will never be hungry” (p. 142). As Jesus “fed the famished multitudes, he feeds our hungry souls” (p. 141). This is a feast of “thanksgiving” (p. 141). We are giving thanks to God for allowing us to fellowship with Him. He reminds us that we have a part in Him, we are not alone. No, never alone. Thank you for allowing us to sup with You, oh God. Thank you for reminding us of our inheritance, our power, our strength, our victory through You! Thank you, God, for the “new identity” that through our baptism we were buried and raised to life a new in Christ Jesus (p. 109).

Conclusion

Believers must let God be God. We must begin to take the limits off how God presents Himself and choses to move. God instituted the sacraments and as such they are sacred and holy. As Vander Zee reminds us, “Christ is the Quintessential Sacrament” (p. 45).