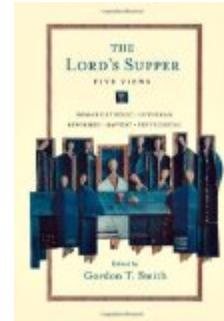


Gordon T. Smith, ed. *The Lord's Supper: Five Views*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2008. 157 pp. \$18.00 (paper), ISBN 978-0-8308-2884-5.

Reviewed by Wolfgang Vondey (Regent University)

Published on H-Pentecostalism (November, 2008)

Commissioned by Gene Mills



Beginning to View the Lord's Supper

Gordon T. Smith has brought together an illustrious group of scholars representing five views of the Lord's Supper. Contributions by Jeffrey Gros (Roman Catholic), John R. Stephenson (Lutheran), Leanne Van Dyk (Reformed), Roger E. Olson (Baptist), and Veli-Matti Kärkkäinen (Pentecostal) provide a concise summary of distinctive perspectives on the Eucharist, written by those who hold these views and complemented by responses of each scholar to the views of the other traditions. The book aims at a broad college audience that so far had to deal with a relative dearth of concise material on the sacrament. While the ecumenical debate on the meaning of the Lord's Supper has produced a number of significant documents, among them most prominently the consensus statement, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (BEM) (1982), this book is the first concise collection of selected perspectives.

The book begins with Gros's exposition of the Roman Catholic view, describing the Catholic faith, the notion of Christ's presence, and the concept of sacraments. Gros does not shy away from explaining the idea of transubstantiation, but he places the discussion in the context of the notion of Holy Communion, emphasizing the idea of Christ's presence as an aspect of hospitality and devotion rather than of metaphysical concepts. Gros provides not only a succinct view of the Roman Catholic tradition but also a contemporary and ecumenical perspective that is probably more informed than many others in his confession.

In contrast to Gros's clearly structured exposition, the next three essays offer their perspectives in a less systematic fashion. Stephenson begins his contribution of the Lutheran view with a reflection from the perspective of the Book of Concord and its critique of the low Christology of Paul of Samosata, taking the side of the Christological pattern developed by Cyril of Alexandria that formed the basis for Luther's Christology. From this perspective, Stephenson describes the Lord's Supper in terms of sacramental union, Holy Communion, and sacrificial banquet that form the hallmarks of the Lutheran view of the Lord's Supper today. In dialogue with the BEM document and Pope Benedict XVI, he illustrates the broad ecumenical implications of the Lutheran position.

Van Dyk begins her presentation of the Reformed perspective with an exposition of the deep differences in Reformed understandings of the Lord's Supper, tracing back the main characteristics to the three dominant perspectives of John Calvin, Ulrich Zwingli, and Heinrich Bullinger. The author continues to outline the central debate on the distinction of sign and reality or sign and signified, describing Zwingli's view as "memorialism," Bullinger's as "parallelism," and Calvin's as "instrumentalism." Other important voices are added to the global character of the Reformed doctrine and examined with regard to their pastoral, ethical, and liturgical implications for the celebration of the Lord's Supper.

Olson faces the difficult challenge of offering one representative perspective from the notoriously diverse Bap-

tist traditions. His essay approaches the task by clarifying that there exists no single Baptist view of the Lord's Supper, and that any characterization is necessarily shaped by the historical, cultural, and ecclesiastical history of Baptists. Olson examines the influential work of Balthasar Hubmaier and Menno Simmons as well as Baptist statements of faith from the sixteenth to the twentieth centuries to show a rough consensus that is clearer on what the Lord's Supper is not than on its precise, positive theological meaning. In this sense, the Baptist perspective is shaped by a critical engagement of ecumenical perspectives.

Kärkkäinen concludes the collection by offering again a more systematic treatment of the Lord's Supper. This is particularly surprising in light of the common perception that Pentecostals are neither systematic nor sacramental in their theology. He begins with an overview of understanding the Lord's Supper as ordinance rather than sacrament. Kärkkäinen then describes the understanding of the theological meaning of the Lord's Supper he finds reflected among most Pentecostals and which he attributes to a basically Zwinglian perspective. He continues by explaining the peculiarity of the Pentecostal connection between the celebration of the Lord's Supper and the notion of divine healing and outlines the Christological and ecclesiological ramifications of the Pentecostal view. The essay concludes with a discussion of the pneumatological orientation of Pentecostal theology and its implications for the formulation of a sacramental theology of the Lord's Supper.

Unfortunately, the preceding overview does not offer an accurate picture of the collection. The five views of the Lord's Supper do not follow each other in order. Instead, each view is followed by four responses from the other contributors. This editorial choice represents an unfor-

tunate weakness of the book in light of its intended audience. As a brief summary of different perspectives, the college reader is likely not familiar with each position. The responses, however, seem to take that familiarity for granted. Common to all responses is the idea that the audience seems to already be familiar with the different perspectives rather than finding in this collection a first exposure to the diverse views. A much clearer collection could have been achieved by dividing the book into two parts, offering the five views of the Lord's Supper in the first and the responses in the second section. Alternatively, the reader could be instructed to read the five views first before engaging the responses. Overall, the responses are too short to offer much substance to the collection.

For students and professors of theology, as well as for pastors and worship leaders, the collection of five views on the Lord's Supper is a welcome resource. The text offers at least two significant benefits: first, it offers clarity on the theological positions for many adherents of these traditions who likely have not formed a concrete theology of the Lord's Supper and who are not aware of a comprehensive understanding among their own churches; and second, the five views highlight significant points of convergence and divergence that invite the development of a common understanding of the Lord's Supper among the different traditions. The book may be faulted for its limitation to five views, and "five more views on the Lord's Supper" are both necessary and desirable. Nonetheless, it is precisely the concentrated effort of this collection that should motivate others to present their own views in an informed and ecumenical manner. A larger collection of views on the Lord's Supper, without responses, seems to be a logical task resulting from this very readable and informative work.

If there is additional discussion of this review, you may access it through the network, at:

<https://networks.h-net.org/h-pentecostalism>

Citation: Wolfgang Vondey. Review of Smith, Gordon T.; ed, *The Lord's Supper: Five Views*. H-Pentecostalism, H-Net Reviews. November, 2008.

URL: <http://www.h-net.org/reviews/showrev.php?id=15701>



This work is licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-No Derivative Works 3.0 United States License.