



Contesting Catholicity: Theology for Other Baptists

Curtis W. Freeman

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Baptists originated as a protest movement within the church but have developed over time into a distinct sect, one committed to preserving its place in the hierarchy of denominations. In today's postmodern, disestablished context, Baptists are in danger of becoming either a religious affinity group, a collection of individuals who share experiences and commitments to a set of principles, or a countercultural sect that retreats to early Enlightenment propositions for consolation and support.

In *Contesting Catholicity*, Curtis W. Freeman offers an alternative Baptist identity, an "Other" kind of Baptist, one that stands between the liberal and fundamentalist options. By discerning an elegant analogy among some late modern Baptist preachers, seventeenth- and eighteenth-century Baptist founders, and early patristic theologians, Freeman narrates the Baptist story as a community that grapples with the convictions of the church catholic.

Deep analogical conversation across the centuries enables Freeman to gain new leverage on all of the supposedly distinctive Baptist theological identifiers. From believer's baptism, the sacraments, and soul competency, to the Trinity, the priesthood of every believer, and local church autonomy, Freeman's historical reconstruction demonstrates that Baptists did and should understand themselves as a spiritual movement within the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church.

A "catholic Baptist" is fully participant in the historic church and at the very same time is fully Baptist. This radical Baptist catholicity is more than a quantitative sense of historical and ecumenical communion with the wider church. This Other Baptist identity envisions a qualitative catholicity that is centered on the confession of faith in Jesus Christ and historic Trinitarian orthodoxy enacted in the worship of the church in and through word and sacrament.

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