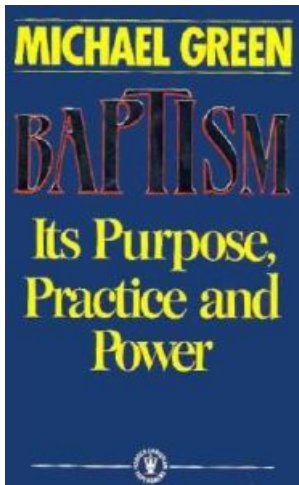


Review: Baptism – Its Purpose, Practice and Power



This is one of those “an oldy but a goody” books. It’s by Michael Green and was first published in 1987.

I had a reason for reading it. It was one of those awesome moments of messy missiology when gospel realities and ecclesiastical niceties don’t quite line up: My Bishop was leading a reaffirmation of baptism service for two refugees from a local immigration detention centre. And I was tasked with considering the liturgy, talking with the two men, unpacking what they meant by the ceremony, what we meant, what was meant to be meant etc. etc.

It reminded me of a number of occasions doing ministry at Somerset where people would join the church. Some were baptised as infants, some as adults, some as both, some not at all. How do we bring cohesion and coherency to all this without losing hold on the real meaning of baptism, its significance and value, and ultimately its contribution to the worship of our lives?

This book by Michael Green helps us wade through this sort of quagmire.

While Green clearly holds a paedobaptist (infant baptism) position, the framework of the book interacts with three streams of churchmanship – the Catholic, the Protestant and

the Charismatic.

The bulk of the book interacts between the Protestant and Catholic which, if you know the history of the debate, is understandable. I want recap it here, but the particularly insightful contributions that I came across included the best exposition yet of a correlation between circumcision and baptism as a covenantal sign (p25) and chapters five and six which give an excellent defense and apology for the validity and value of infant baptism.

Green does not ignore the need for constant reform, however.

Errors have been made on every side. This is where the practical usefulness of the book is apparent. We are given some key guiding principles (e.g. no liturgy can create reality p95, baptism is a witness to grace, not faith p114).

We are also given some help in applying these principles in the messy world of reality. The consideration of baptism reaffirmation spoke to my immediate need.

This is a short, sharp book which gives a thorough overview with the occasional gem that explores some depths. An excellent introduction to the subject and absolute must for those who truly want to genuinely wish to engage and understand his side of this particular debate.