

More than Just a Name: Preserving our Baptist Identity. By R. Stanton Norman, with a foreword by R. Albert Mohler, Jr. Nashville: Broadman and Holman, 2001, 198 pp., \$16.99 paper.

What is it that makes a Baptist a Baptist? Stan Norman, Assistant Professor of Theology and McFarland Chair of Theology at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, addresses this crucial issue in this excellent volume. To answer this question, Norman investigates the genre of Baptist literature known as Baptist distinctives, which consciously sought to distinguish Baptist beliefs from those of other denominations. By utilizing this methodology, Norman focuses on those doctrinal issues that are distinctive to Baptists.

Norman contends that there are two main traditions of Baptist thought, which he identifies as the Reformation tradition and the Enlightenment tradition. Although these two traditions were in substantial agreement on many issues, Norman documents a clear distinction between the two traditions, particularly in their epistemology. The Reformation tradition emphasizes biblical truth as the foundation for all doctrines, whereas the Enlightenment tradition gives greater emphasis to personal religious experience. In delineating these two traditions, Norman provides an insightful architectonic that will be propaedeutic to future discussions about Baptist distinctives.

Norman asserts that there are four key components to each of these two traditions – the epistemological, polemical, ecclesiological, and volitional components. The epistemological component is foundational to the other components because it identifies the primary authority utilized by the tradition. The polemic component is inherent in the intent of the Baptist distinctives genre to distinguish Baptist beliefs from those of other religious traditions. The ecclesiological component includes the three key issues of baptism by immersion, the regenerate church, and congregational church governance. The volitional component includes the two key issues of soul competency and religious liberty. In each of these five theological issues, Norman documents subtle but significant differences between theologians in the Reformation and Enlightenment traditions.

Norman contends that the Reformation (biblicist) tradition is the primary tradition of Baptist distinctives. He notes that the strong emphasis in the Enlightenment tradition on individual religious experience may lose something of the corporate dimension of church life. The Enlightenment tradition may confuse temporal experiential priority with ultimate authority. Although it is normally through religious experience that we come to believe in the authority of Scripture, this temporal priority should not be the pattern for Christian discipleship. Having come into the family of faith, we should evaluate our experience by Scripture, not Scripture by our experience.

Norman rightly contends that Baptists cannot turn their backs on essential core beliefs and retain the name Baptist in any meaningful sense. Baptists historically have known who they were and what they believed. But a new generation has arisen that has little appreciation for Baptist traditions. Some churches have removed the word “Baptist” from their church name in order to avoid any negative perceptions associated with the name “Baptist.” As Al Mohler notes in his perceptive and insightful foreword, Baptists are confronting an identity crisis because a myopic focus on activism and pragmatism has led to the neglect of theological and doctrinal foundations

that would have been unthinkable in previous generations. Even outwardly successful churches will inevitably crumble if their doctrinal foundation is not firm.

While some may turn their backs on traditional Baptist beliefs and doctrines, many of us are still proud to be Baptists. We believe these distinctive beliefs not because they are in vogue or the production of some human council, but because they arise from the teachings of Scripture. *More than Just a Name* provides contemporary Baptists with a clarion call to rediscover our Baptist heritage and reclaim our distinctive Baptist doctrinal beliefs.

Since *More than Just a Name* is written at a popular level, footnote references are kept to a minimum. Scholars seeking more detailed references may want to investigate Norman's doctoral dissertation, which has more specific documentation. However, this edition has adequate examples and references to confirm Norman's major theses. Lay readers will find it quite readable. It would make an excellent resource for a church doctrinal study. At the same time, it is scholarly enough to be a useful text in a course on Baptist history and heritage. Some doctoral students may even take up Norman's invitation to extend the research of these two traditions into other genres of Baptist theology. *More than Just a Name* is a crucial book that should be read by all those who love the Baptist tradition.

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