

WE CALL OURSELVES DISCIPLES. Edited by Kamilah Hall Sharp and Joel Brown. St. Louis, MO: Chalice Press, 2023. 73 pages.

REVIEWED BY TRISTAN SPANGLER-DUNNING¹

We Call Ourselves Disciples consists of twelve short chapters, along with an introduction and a conclusion. The introduction is written by Kamilah Hall Sharp and Joel Brown. The introduction outlines the book's purpose and highlights the upcoming chapters and what they cover. The first chapter is titled "Disciples and the Bible," written by Ronald J. Allen. This chapter covers the relationship between Disciples and the biblical text through highlighting historical approaches that inform the present. The next chapter is "Social Justice as Embodied in Micah 6:8," by Kamilah Hall Sharp. This chapter highlights the importance of and scriptural justification for a disciple's commitment to social justice work. The next chapter is "Doing Theology," by José Francisco Morales Torres. This chapter discusses how Disciples approach doing theological work and the intricacies of that within the church's particularities. The following chapter is "Liturgy and Worship," by Nathan Russell. This chapter discusses the liturgical style of the church in the modern era and how that has been informed by its historical roots. The next chapter is "The Baptized Life," by Christopher Wilson. This chapter discusses baptism within the context of Disciples, how their understanding of baptism was formed, and how it has changed over time. The following chapter is "Communion," written by Terri Hord Owens. This chapter presents communion as one of the most important practices of the church and discusses the concept of an open table. The next chapter is "Christian Unity: Our Polar Star," written by Paul S. Tch  .

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This chapter discusses the importance of Christian unity to Disciples and grounds it within the movement's history. The following chapter is "Diversity and Inclusion," by Eli Rolón Jeong. This chapter presents diversity and inclusion as an important commitment of the church, one that is at times difficult but no less essential. The following chapter is "Turning Points in Disciples History," by Joel Brown. This chapter highlights some important moments within the history of the church that give account to the identity of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). The next chapter is "Global Ministries," written by LaMarco Cable. This chapter is a brief overview of the church's efforts across the world, its humanitarian efforts, and how they came to be. The next chapter is "Congregations and Their Pastors," by Katie Hays. This chapter discusses the nature of congregations within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and how the pastor's role fits within them. The final chapter is "A Brief Overview of Disciples Polity," by LaTaunya Bynum. This chapter discusses the church's governing structure and how it makes collective decisions for itself. The final additional sections are short biographies of the editors and contributors, as well as a recommended reading list.

This book comes to us at a time when the church is having serious conversations about its future and what it should look like. Many such discussions turn toward the future with little regard for what has come before, and they often struggle to form a vision. Envisioning a future for us as a church is difficult because few of us have had the opportunity to genuinely think in depth about who we are to begin with. *We Call Ourselves Disciples* is an excellent introduction to the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and, therefore, a starting point for those discussions about our shared future.

The theological world of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is a deceptively complicated notion. On the surface, the idea of an open table is simple. In fact, it's meant to be. However, one quickly realizes that inhabiting that simplicity is demanding and confusing. Our "simplicity" is not a convenience; it is a challenge and an opportunity to grow as a community. This book is a reminder that we are not alone in our wrestling with God, that perhaps our "simplicity" is, in fact, a divine complexity, and within that divine complexity, a coherent identity for the church is created. Despite our complexity and uncanny ability to defy static definition, as a community, we can know what it means to call ourselves Disciples, a task that this book helps us name, so we may take it with us into the future.

The structure of the book is clear and compelling in making distinct notions within the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) legible to the reader. What makes this compelling is twofold. First, the authors of each section have expertise in their respective fields.

Each brings a deep understanding of Discipleship, gained from spending significant time in and around our wider community. The second compelling aspect is that many of these distinct notions are often obscured by our desire to avoid inadvertent dogma. The last thing we want is to be put in a box. However, this can leave our communities struggling to know themselves because we no longer understand what is specific to our tradition. By naming distinct things like diversity, baptism, communion, etc., the book reintroduces long-standing yet underdiscussed footholds for people to engage with as starting points for better understanding the church and its claims. Each topic is carefully chosen, avoids being too prescriptive, and acknowledges the diverse ways of being within our communities. The book is not a definitive description and leaves plenty of room for dialogue and debate, which is, in itself, a very Disciples thing to do. However, it provides enough for both new and old church members to find it engaging and substantive in its naming of what makes Disciples who we are.

To gain a better understanding of Disciples identity and thought requires going deeper with our faith and our community. *We Call Ourselves Disciples* serves as an excellent meditation on exactly what makes the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) and on what it means to be part of a movement for wholeness in a fragmented world. Our movement needs more books like this to promote in-depth reflection on who we are and what we want our shared future to look like.