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Matthews's "Ministerial orders and sacramental authority in the united methodist church and its antecedents" (book review)

Daniel F. Flores
Texas Lutheran University

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Book Review



Matthews, R.D. (2018). *Ministerial orders and sacramental authority in the united methodist church and its antecedents 1784-2016*. Nashville: Wesley's Foundery Books. 137 pp. \$24.99. ISBN 9781945935190

Rex D. Matthews has gifted scholars of American Methodism with a brief but important book on the history of sacramental authority. *Ministerial Orders and Sacramental Authority in the United Methodist Church and its Antecedents 1784-2016* is one of the finest, yet most succinct, documentary analyses available on the topic of sacramental authority in the UMC and its antecedents. Not since Karen B. Westerfield Tucker's *American Methodist Worship* (2001) has there been such a sharply focused historical study on the sacraments in American Methodism. To be clear, Matthews is more concerned with authority than practice. As such, it is a much-needed follow-up to Tucker. Mathews skillfully guides the reader over two centuries of expertly selected documents and debates on sacramental authority without so much as a glance at the many tempting rabbit trails along the way. Staying true to his role as a seminary professor, his "observations and reflections" challenge the rationale for keeping the status quo of sacramental authority in a 21st-century church beset by aging clergy leadership and spiraling membership decline. For Matthews, the practical issue is the "fogginess" of investing sacramental authority in ordained Elders while the denomination is increasingly more dependent on un-ordained Local Pastors to administer the sacraments. While this book is written with United Methodists in mind, other scholars of American religious history will appreciate this book as an example of good, solid historiography.

Reviewer

Daniel F. Flores, Texas Lutheran University