This book continues in the vein of contemporary religious education scholars, such as John Westerhoff, Debra Dean Murphy, Mary Elizabeth Moore and Fred Edie, who avow a central role for liturgical practice in the church’s ministry of education. Specifically, Gordon Mikoski seeks to re-establish the ancient nexus of Baptism, the Trinity, and ecclesial pedagogy, as crucial for forming Christian disciples. The author argues that “Contemporary rethinking about the educational ministry of the churches in relation to the doctrine of the Trinity will need to treat the sacrament of baptism as the starting point and orienting center for dynamic conversations about the faith formation of individuals and communities in relation to local church practitioners, systematic theologians, practical theologians, and Christian educators...” (p. 67). According to Mikoski, baptism is central because it is a core, constituting practice of the Christian life, affording entrance into the church through an ongoing process of dying and rising with Jesus Christ into newness of life. By characterizing baptism as the paradigm for the entirety of the Christian life, baptism confers Christian identity and vocation, and suggests a lifelong educational process. Baptism is also inescapably Trinitarian in character, requiring a dynamic Trinitarian grammar as the content of education. In this book, Mikoski reveals, through the writings of Gregory Nyssa and John Calvin, the interrelated character of baptism, the Trinity and ecclesial pedagogy; brings these two figures into conversation with contemporary Trinitarian theologians such as Jurgen Moltmann; evaluates the significance of their respective ideas in light of contemporary cultural diversity; and makes general suggestions about contemporary educational practice.

Mikoski examines the thought and practice of Gregory Nyssa and John Calvin in revealing how these theologians prioritized baptism in developing their Trinitarian thought, and as a means of religious formation. He argues that we must not read Gregory or Calvin as Trinitarian theologians apart from primary concerns of catechesis, since they seem to have been “thoroughgoing practical Trinitarian(s)” in which notions of the Trinity emerged from practices of and preparation for baptism—from teaching. Both Gregory and Calvin understood doctrine as deeply intertwined with baptism and the teaching of the church. Both held the doctrine as inherently rooted in the life...
and practices of the church, particularly the practice of baptism. Gregory and Calvin demonstrated how the complex interplay of the baptismal rite and the doctrine of the Trinity can give rise to an unmistakably pedagogical emphasis. Being baptized in the Triune name entails a lifetime of learning and growth, reflecting ever more deeply on baptism as the paradigm for Christian life, virtue and understanding, toward the telos of worshipping the Triune God.

Mikoski is not content to merely adopt the orthodoxy of Calvin or Gregory, but he also embraces their practical reasoning in updating the context and concept of Trinitarian thought. Restoring this tripartite nexus is timely, since, as Moltmann insists, Christian faith suffers from loss of identity and relevance. Specifically, baptism into Trinitarian identity can be a crucial resource for the church as it encounters the increasing racial, ethnic, economic, cultural and religious diversity in today’s public realm. Mikoski pointedly rejects the parochial homogeneity of Hauerwas and Milbank, and instead follows Jeffrey Stout in understanding “the plenitude of God’s triune life shining forth in all of creation...in democratic community...” (p. xv). Mikoski views the Trinity as a doctrine that is inherently useful in articulating Christian norms of unity and diversity; identity and relevance; cataphatic and apophatic mysticism. In other words, educating people in Trinitarian thought, central to baptismal life, helps to restore Christian faith and practice to its ground in the narrative of the cross, and hence establish it in humble and open love. The project of restoring the practical nature of the Trinity emerges from recent Trinitarian theology of Catherine LaCugna, Jurgen Moltmann, Colin Gunton, and T.F. Torrence.

Finally, drawing on the various insights about the baptism-Trinity-pedagogy nexus, Mikoski suggests concrete ways to deepen the church’s baptismal and Trinitarian teaching. He recommends such liturgical adjustments as making the font more prominent in the sanctuary; beginning the celebration of Eucharist with remembrances of baptism; incorporating baptismal language into prayers and benedictions; making the baptismal liturgy more intentionally pedagogical; anointing with oil in the sign of the cross following baptism, and reconnecting confirmation to baptism as the beginning of lifelong mystagogy. Regarding the intentional educational ministry of the church, Mikoski suggests expanding options for teaching as well as informal cultural/linguistic practices of the church; reconnecting the church school aims, curriculum, methods and role of the teacher to the liturgy of Trinitarian baptism. Mikoski states that “All activities related to the intentional pedagogy of (the) congregation should be organized