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Editor

Dr Myk Habets
Carey Baptist College,
PO Box 12149,
Auckland, New Zealand
myk.habets@carey.ac.nz

Associate Editors

Rev Andrew Picard
Dr John Tucker

Book Reviews Editor

Dr Sarah Harris
Carey Baptist College,
PO Box 12149,
Auckland, New Zealand
sarah.harris@carey.ac.nz

Editorial Board

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All business communications

Dr John Tucker

Carey Baptist College

PO BOX 12149

Auckland

New Zealand

Fax: +64 9 525 4096

Email: john.tucker@carey.ac.nz

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EDITORIAL

ADAM C. ENGLISH

Campbell University

North Carolina, USA

In the spring of 2016, Dr. Steven R. Harmon, Visiting Associate Professor of Historical Theology, Gardner-Webb University School of Divinity, released the latest installment in his ecumenical pilgrimage, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future: Story, Tradition, and the Recovery of Community* (Baylor University Press). Author of numerous scholarly articles and books such as *Ecumenism Means You, Too* (2010) and *Towards Baptist Catholicity: Essays on Tradition and the Baptist Vision* (2006), Professor Harmon has invested a substantial portion of his career and life's energy on the ecumenical question and the relationship of Baptists to the broader Christian tradition. I have known Steve personally for many years now, and one thing I have come to respect and admire about him is his careful, conscientious, even meticulous attention to detail—and this book is no exception. It is a true labour of love.

Because Harmon's new book spans the interests of the National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion and the Baptist History & Heritage Society, and because the two groups convened simultaneously on the campus of Baylor University's Truett Theological Seminary in May of 2016, the conference organisers were presented with a timely opportunity to hold a joint panel discussion on the topic of *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*. Courtney Pace, Assistant Professor of Church History, Memphis Theological Seminary, represented the Baptist History & Heritage Society alongside Andrew Smith, Assistant Professor of Religion, Carson-Newman University. Amy L. Chilton Thompson, Adjunct Professor, Fuller Theological Seminary and Azusa Pacific University, and David Wilhite, Associate Professor of Christian Theology, George W. Truett Theological Seminary, represented the National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion. Each panelist was allotted twelve minutes to offer comments, after which time Steve Harmon had a chance to respond. The review essays included in this volume have retained the spoken, live-event character of the panel discussion in the hopes that the reader will catch the sounds and cadences of the lively conversation that took place.

The National Association of Baptist Professors of Religion and the Baptist History & Heritage Society extend their gratitude to the *Pacific Journal of Baptist Research* for the opportunity to showcase the scholarly work of their respective members and extend the conversation.

BAPTISTS, CATHOLICITY, AND VISIBLE UNITY: A RESPONSE TO STEVEN HARMON

DAVID E. WILHITE

Truett Theological Seminary

Texas, USA

In his latest book, Steven Harmon offers what I believe to be a promising way forward for Baptists.¹ The old denominationalism of the past is dead, and Baptists today find that some of the best aspects of their denominational identity—such as cooperation for missional and educational programs—can be undertaken together with many non-Baptists. Furthermore, while few would explicitly deny the importance of Baptist distinctives, the “Seeker-Friendly” movement has caused many, if not most, Baptists to downplay the centrality of doctrines and practices which once functioned as Shibboleths—such as closed communion and closed membership. The future for Baptists will inevitably be more ecumenical (albeit perhaps not by that name), since so many Baptists have relegated many more items to the “non-essentials” category. While in general I think these developments are positive, one need not be a prophet nor the son of a prophet to foresee potential problems with this shift: if doctrine takes a back seat to pragmatism, then Baptist churches will at best be rudderless ships and at worst be easily coopted by un-Baptist and even un-Christian ideologies (yes, I’m thinking of the many Baptists and Evangelicals in the U.S. supporting Donald Trump as but the latest example). How can Baptists retain their newfound “generous orthodoxy” without devolving into a “thin ecumenism” or even a “cultural Christianity”? I believe that Harmon’s *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future* (henceforth *BIEF*) offers a compelling road map.

For those wondering how Harmon situates Baptists within ecumenical dialogue, I would first recommend his earlier book, *Towards Baptist Catholicity* (Paternoster Press, 2006). Therein, Harmon boldly argues that Baptists should embrace “catholicity,” by which he means the universally shared tradition of the church throughout time. To be sure, he must address the many fears raised by the term “catholic” (even with the lower-case ‘c’), and he must carefully explain how an accommodation of tradition (in any form) is not a betrayal of the Protestant principle of *sola scriptura*. For the sake of full disclosure, I teach Patristics at a Baptist seminary, and so I am a fan of any attempt to get Baptists interested in the early church. Furthermore, Harmon’s book is so compelling in this task that I assign it every semester for a required course I teach in early Christian studies. Therein, I perennially observe my students’ knee-jerk reactions to Harmon’s agenda, and I then watch how these reactions are masterfully and kindly assuaged by Harmon’s arguments. Once Harmon has convinced his audience of the importance of “the Great Tradition” for Baptist theology, he now logically should move from the x-axis of history and tradition to the y-axis of contemporary practice and ecumenism. How might Baptists be able to engage this ecumenical future in our

¹ Steven Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future: Story, Tradition, and the Recovery of Community* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016).

present post-modern and post-denominational condition? Harmon points out a viable path forward in *BIEF*.

Harmon opens with a “Radical Baptist Proposal” (chapter one), which is to ask Baptists to engage in the ecumenical movement—a task which is certainly radical for many if not most Baptists in the pew, and yet a proposal which is also specifically *Baptist*. He proposes that the wider “catholicity” of the church be embraced as a pilgrimage, a “Pilgrim Catholicity.” Next, Harmon asks Baptists to embark on said pilgrimage by interacting with the main items outlined in the World Council of Churches’ statement, *Baptism, Eucharist, and Ministry* (1982). Harmon’s proposals for these items offer Baptists various ways of “Seizing the Ecumenical Moment” (chapter two). In fact, if Baptists were to do so, they could breathe new life into the ecumenical movement which “is experiencing a season of winter.”² Despite the obvious differences between Baptists and other Christian traditions, Harmon builds off of the work of John Donahue and William Hendricks—a Roman Catholic and Baptist, respectively—to show the many ways in which the Baptist path merges with that of the wider Christian tradition, something that can be told as “One Sacred Story” (chapter three). Of course, this shared story may only go so far, since Baptists and Roman Catholics in particular have opposing views of how Scripture and tradition relate. Or do they? In his fourth chapter, entitled “One Contested Tradition,” Harmon attempts to demonstrate how much Scripture and tradition in fact function much the same in Baptist and Roman Catholic theology. This brings Harmon to the point of saying that “Baptists are dissenting catholic Christians,”³ and so he then points to ways in which the Baptist journey can be both “Radically Biblical, [and] Radically Catholic” (chapter five). This chapter is where Harmon offers some of his main contributions, and so I will return to the content of this chapter in particular below, but suffice it to say that he qualifies and parses “Catholicity” in various ways which provide insightful clarity for Baptists. Next, in his chapter entitled “The End of Denominationalism,” Harmon grabs the bull by the horns and insists that despite the ostensible death of most denominations, such ecclesiastical structures are a good thing and should be harnessed for the purpose of furthering the cause of ecumenism. The primary case study is Harmon’s own denomi-network (as it is often called by its adherents), the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship, which he claims should be considered a proper denomination (despite the misgivings this concept harbours for some of the adherents who use neologistic euphemisms instead), so that it can provide an avenue for inter-denominational dialogue—the true end (*telos*) of denominations. Then, in what is his most challenging chapter, Harmon attempts to talk Baptists into “Receiving the Gift of Magisterium.” His argument carefully traces the various kinds of magisteria throughout the many branches of Christianity. In this way, the question is no longer *whether* Baptists will accept a magisterium, but *which* form of the Church’s magisterium will they accept. After this, Harmon offers “The Ecumenical Task of Theology” (chapter eight), which is to say that theologians of all kinds—from the pews to the professors’ desks—should engage in ecumenism as a proper form of theology itself, and not simply a subset of ecclesiology. This would manifest in various ways in which ecumenism takes centre stage in Baptist teaching. In so doing, Baptists will also

² Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 21.

³ Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 112. Throughout the book, Harmon acknowledges the contribution of Curtis W. Freeman, *Contesting Catholicity: Theology for Other Baptists* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014).

be able to offer other Christian traditions “The Theology of a Pilgrim Church” (chapter nine), which is where Harmon provides specific ways in which Baptists can make contributions to other Christian groups. In his final chapter, Harmon describes “The Baptist Eschatological Vision and the Ecumenical Future,” in which Christian bodies at all levels engage in dialogue and share their gifts with one another.

At this point, I would like to express just how grateful I am to Steve Harmon for his body of work, including this most recent book. I applaud Harmon’s call for Baptists to embrace the Christian tradition of the past as well as the ecumenical breadth of Christian resources in the present. Now, in what remains of this essay I would like to shift to an engagement with Harmon’s book in what I hope is a constructive critical approach. In this book, I find Harmon using the two related concepts “catholic” and “visible unity” in such a way that potentially concedes too much to a non-congregationalist ecclesiology, and so I will briefly address each in turn.

CATHOLICITY

As for the term “catholic,” I would first note how Harmon has shifted from his older practice of referring to the *Roman* Catholic Church⁴ and now simply speaks of the (capital ‘C’) Catholic Church.⁵ I realize that Harmon likely uses such nomenclature out of a concern for ecumenical dialogue and for charitable relations with Roman Catholics, who officially understand their communion as transcending Rome and being the one true, visible Catholic Church. I can concede such a posture in general, but it appears to me that such categorization either corresponds to or causes a shift in Harmon’s theological framework (at least as articulated in this book).

In response to Richard Crane, Harmon readily admits that the goal of his call for “Baptist [little ‘c’] catholicity” is ultimately a call for “Baptist [capital ‘C’] Catholicity,” defined as “entry of Baptists into communion with the bishop of Rome.”⁶ He stipulates, however, that his thought has further developed on this point, so that his aim is to move “the whole church [both Baptists and Roman Catholics and others] toward the ecumenical future.”⁷ Therefore, rather than a myopic focus on communion with Rome, he calls for an unrelenting quest to attain “visible unity of the church” (to which I will turn in a moment).⁸ Harmon then addresses how Baptists have “deficiencies in catholicity.”⁹ Here it is worth pausing to ask: Do not Roman Catholics also have deficiencies in catholicity? While the answer to that question may lay beyond the parameters of a book written by a Baptist for Baptists (which Harmon does address¹⁰), I find that

⁴ cf. Steven Harmon, *Towards Baptist Catholicity: Essays on Tradition and the Baptist Vision* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2006), 2 and passim.

⁵ cf. *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 3 and passim.

⁶ Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 9. Something he briefly addressed in his earlier work: *TBC*, 199.

⁷ Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 9.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁰ “While Baptists can easily point to aspects of the current faith and practice of the Catholic Church and other Christian communions as grounds for rejecting such a goal [i.e. visible communion], Baptists are not responsible for the reformation of Catholic magisterial teaching of the transformation of that which they find objectionable in other

Harmon inescapably constructs the argument so that he undermines his claim that all communions should move toward catholicity. For example, he speaks of “a mutual sharing of the gifts of [little ‘c’] catholicity and Baptistness.”¹¹ Here, Harmon has distinguished “Baptistness” from “the gifts of catholicity.” Shouldn’t Baptistness be seen as one of the gifts of catholicity? Or, if not a gift per se, shouldn’t Baptistness be understood as one of the many valid expressions of the one true Church? Surely, Baptistness is more a dialect of Pentecost than of Babel. It should be noted that the rest of Harmon’s statement on this matter is in fact one with great potential which should be considered further by readers as a promising way forward for Baptists in dialogue with Roman Catholics: this mutual sharing should be “... facilitated by a recognition by Baptists and [capital ‘C’] Catholics alike that being Baptist is a distinctive way of being [capital ‘C’] Catholic, in communion with the bishop of Rome, comparable to the manner in which being a Benedictine is currently a distinct way of living together as an ecclesial community that is in communion with Rome.” My only concern with this statement is that identifying Baptist churches as “ecclesial communities” fails to represent free church ecclesiology adequately: Benedictine monasteries are not churches; nor are Baptist churches merely ecclesial communities.¹² To be sure, Harmon goes to great length to affirm his belief in the validity of Baptist ecclesiology—and space permitting, I would have quoted Harmon’s statement in full so that we could all see his unequivocal affirmation of free church ecclesiology and his insistence that Roman Catholics should recognize Baptist churches as true churches.¹³ However, my point here is that any Baptist engagement in ecumenical dialogue will have to be a “thick ecumenism” where Baptists hold unapologetically to their convictions.¹⁴ It seems to me that there are moments in this book when Harmon opposes Baptistness to (little ‘c’) catholicity and therefore concedes too much to a Roman Catholic position.¹⁵

That having been said, Harmon attempts to offset this opposition between Baptistness and catholicity by differentiating “quantitative catholicity,” in which Baptists do participate, from “qualitative catholicity,” which Baptists lack.¹⁶ Quantitative catholicity consists of five items: Trinity, Tradition, Baptism, the Eucharist, and Church Order, all of which Baptists have, but which Baptists should embrace “more fully.”¹⁷ Later, Harmon lists four marks of qualitative catholicity: incarnational Christology, sacramental realism, visible unity, and the ministry of oversight.¹⁸ Harmon, it seems to me, should have offered more on how Baptists do in fact have even this qualitative catholicity. After all, Baptists at least in nascent form have each of these five items and four marks.

churches. But Baptists can address the insufficiently catholic character of their own communities” (Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 10).

¹¹ Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 16.

¹² Cf. *ibid.*, 271, where he again calls Baptist congregations “ecclesial communities.”

¹³ *Ibid.*, 16–17.

¹⁴ Something Harmon himself welcomes in his *TBC*, 16–17.

¹⁵ E.g. Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 49, where Harmon rejects the goal of “Protestantization of Catholicism” in favour of “re-catholicization of the Protestant traditions.” Note that Protestant is structurally opposed to both “Catholic” and catholic. Should there be a catholicization of Catholicism? (cf. Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 10, cited above in note 8).

¹⁶ Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 29–30.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 30–45 (quote from 45).

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 120.

Harmon ended his 2006 book, *Towards Baptist Catholicity*, with a question posed to him by a former student, “Dr. Harmon, what keeps you from becoming Catholic?” In that chapter, Harmon offers a very sophisticated and nuanced answer, and his discussion of the issues involved with such a question is one I very much appreciate.¹⁹ However, whenever I look back over that chapter, I’m still somewhat dissatisfied. Instead of conceding too much to a question that assumes his project inevitably leads towards *Roman Catholicism*, I wish Harmon had simply answered his student’s question in a way that coheres with the previous nine chapters of his book (*TBC*). In those chapters, Harmon repeatedly insisted that the concept (little ‘c’) “catholic” does not mean Roman Catholic. When his student asked, “What keeps you from becoming Catholic?” I wished he had simply answered, “I am catholic.” The catholicity towards which Harmon points us belongs to the whole of Christian tradition and to the worldwide church. This brings me to the second and related concept that I think needs nuancing in Harmon’s latest book, the concept of the visible unity of the church.

VISIBLE UNITY

In his opening chapter, Harmon calls us to a “quest for visible unity” and in the same sentence refers to “the churches from which [the Baptists] are separated.”²⁰ However, I could not help but asking at this initial statement a question that I never found addressed in the book. It should be asked for the sake of precision: In what way are Baptists “separated” from these other churches? Harmon’s statement seems to assume a top-down ecclesiology.

In chapter six Harmon defines a denomination—even a Baptist one—as “an entity between the (visible) local church and the (invisible) universal church.”²¹ I do not necessarily disagree with this definition, until it is applied in such a way that Baptists are separated from other churches (meaning other denominations). From a free church perspective Baptist congregations are no more separated from congregations of other denominations than they are from each other. The distinction is simply that we do associate and cooperate with other Baptists.²² That having been said, it must also be recognized that no

¹⁹ Admittedly, Harmon is faced with a Gordian knot, for Rome is central to any consideration of these matters, as I myself have argued (with Matt R. Jenson, *The Doctrine of the Church: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), 82–90.

²⁰ Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 18; cf. p. 271, “. . . Baptists remain separated ecclesial communities . . .”

²¹ *Ibid.*, 144. Harmon also criticizes making Baptist identity “an end in itself” since that would short-circuit the pilgrimage toward “full visible unity of the universal church.” I would concur with Harmon, but I would not want to equate Baptists’ convictions about free church ecclesiology with making Baptist identity an end in itself. Also, Harmon is correct when he says (*Ibid.*, 147) that Baptists can “grant a substantial degree of ecclesiality” to various forms of denominational bodies (cf. *ibid.*, 148 for further elaboration). However, these ecclesial/denominational bodies would not, in free church thinking, function in any way as higher than and over local churches.

²² Harmon offers a more promising suggestion when (*Ibid.*, 145) he suggests that the “associational principle” should nuance the Baptist notion of an autonomous congregation so that we instead think of “interdependent congregationalism.” I have elsewhere argued that the autonomy of the local congregation is not so much a doctrine we defend, but a sin we confess; see Wilhite, “A Congregational Dream: A Sermon on the Baptist Distinctive of the Autonomy of the Local Congregation,” in *Distinctly Baptist: Proclaiming Identity in a New Generation*, ed. B. C. Brewer (Valley Forge, PA: Judson Press, 2010), 110–122.

Baptist church associates with all other Baptist churches and virtually all Baptist churches cooperate in various ways with non-Baptist churches. The notion of separated churches is simply foreign to free church ecclesiology. The question is not about separateness or visible togetherness or unity, but about affiliation and cooperation.

Later, Harmon says Baptists “belong to the whole church, even if points of their dissent preclude for the time being their full visible unity with large segments of the whole church.”²³ But again, I question what this statement assumes about visible unity: Are Baptists excluded? At least some Baptists, such as those who practise open membership and open communion, implicitly include non-Baptists in the catholic church. The lack of visible unity is not the fault of Baptists or free church ecclesiology or even their dissent, but it is a problem when defined from a top-down ecclesiology that places those outside of a hierarchy of bishops or not belonging to a certain denomination as less in visible unity than those within said hierarchy or corporation. It seems to me that no church is in visible union within such a framework, and so this high church ecclesiology in effect makes visible unity either reduced to one’s denomination or a reality only in the eschaton—something it claims to preclude (see below).

Harmon’s paradigm, to be sure, fits nicely with his call for “receptive ecumenism”—which I should note is another one of the strong points of the book.²⁴ On the one hand, Harmon’s proposals work when thinking in terms of “denominations,” and so there is much we can learn from his book. On the other hand, his proposals become much more problematic when thinking about “churches.” I am thinking here specifically in regard to dialogue between *the* Roman Catholic Church and Baptist churches. Historically, Baptists have denied the Roman Catholic Church to be the true church,²⁵ and theologically, the Roman Catholic Church still does not consider Baptist churches to be true churches.²⁶

At one point, Harmon defines the “goal of visible unity” as “the socially embodied realization of the *notae ecclesiae*.”²⁷ Here again, I can’t help but question just how visible these marks of the church really are in practice. I have argued at length elsewhere that the visibility of the church universal is in fact defined as only quasi-visible (a matter of becoming visible, until the full eschatological visibility), and this is so even in the theological declarations of high church Mainline Protestants, Eastern Orthodox teachers, and Roman Catholics.²⁸ The visible unity of the church is not a problem particular to Baptists and other congregationalists. It is an as yet unrealized element for all Christian traditions—which Harmon knows, but which is not always clear from the way Harmon frames the problem.

²³ Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 112.

²⁴ See especially *ibid.*, 149, for the relevance to this immediate point. Otherwise, his discussion of “receptive ecumenism” is one of his greatest contributions in this book (see *ibid.*, 160 and 262–72).

²⁵ See *ibid.*, 243.

²⁶ see *Lumen Gentium*.

²⁷ Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 51.

²⁸ With Matt R. Jenson, *The Doctrine of the Church: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), esp. 74–75 (where we also distinguish qualitative and quantitative catholicity, only with different definitions), 79–81 (on the non-visible aspect of the *notae ecclesiae*), 90–95 (on the Protestant definitions of “true” church), and 101 (on contextual and missional understandings of visibility).

So then, what would I suggest as an alternative? Harmon reports how he was asked at one dialogue, “What might it mean for the Baptists to speak with one voice in these talks?”²⁹ I wish Harmon would have answered this question with a question, “What might it mean for Roman Catholics to speak with one voice?” (many Roman Catholics will tell you that they do not). Likewise, what might it mean for Eastern Orthodox Christians to speak with one voice? (the recent failed attempt at a pan-Orthodox council indicates that they do not).³⁰ Similarly, what might it mean for those committed to the Magisterial Reformers to speak with one voice? (they do not do so, which seems to have driven some, like Rienhard Hütter, out of Protestantism altogether).³¹ To be clear, I do not raise these points with any sense of satisfaction or triumphalism. This state of things for any tradition is saddening to all who care about the church’s unity. My point is simply to clarify what should be expected of Baptists. It is true that there is a lack of unanimity among Baptist voices, but Baptists can hardly be blamed for failing to attain a standard found in no other Christian communion. Moreover, Baptist theology has always celebrated such as polyphonic expressions as more harmonic than discordant.³² Even if we must admit that pride and sin often result in dissonance, we should again note that this is not a problem particular to Baptists or Congregationalists: it is a problem for *the* Church which is filled with individuals who are *simul justus et peccator*.

Elsewhere in this book, Harmon stipulates that ecumenism should not resort “to the reduction of catholicity to something primarily invisible and deferred to its visible realization until the eschaton.”³³ While I agree in principle, I think that in order to be faithful to our free church ecclesiology, we must ask: What other type of visibility is there? Communion with Rome is not the defining mechanism of visible union, according to Eastern Orthodoxy, and the apostolic succession of the episcopacy has not established visible unity with the various Oriental Orthodox churches.³⁴ Harmon, in fact, in his last chapter admits that Baptists and other Protestants have historically understood the *notae ecclesiae* as eschatological.³⁵ He nevertheless insists that such a stance does not preclude working toward said marks in the here and now (just as the quest for holiness should be an ongoing journey in the life of a believer, even if it will not be realized fully until the next life). Here is where Harmon offers a more promising approach. The notion of visible unity is eschatological, and to say so does not cause a detour on the *pilgrimage* toward said unity. A lack of what John Wesley called a “catholic spirit” is not due to the proper theological delineation about visible unity as an

²⁹ Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 15.

³⁰ See the statement by the Patriarchate of Antioch explaining its decision not to attend the Pan-Orthodox council in Crete (available on its website: <http://www.antiochpatriarchate.org/en/page/1436/> – last retrieved June 6, 2016).

³¹ In *Suffering Divine Things: Theology as Church Practice*, trans. Doug Stott (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 2000), Hütter called for Protestants to reclaim one “public” voice. The impossibility of such a call seems to have contributed to his conversion to Roman Catholicism in 2004.

³² It is noteworthy that “harmony” is a primary metaphor used by Ignatius of Antioch to describe the churches which he is striving to bring into unity through his letters (e.g. *Ign. Phil.* 1.2; cf. *1 Clem.* passim). For Harmon’s use of Ignatius, see *TBC*, 91–100, 204–205; and Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 10, 29–30, 42, 116–31.

³³ Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 28.

³⁴ Cf. *ibid.*, 166, where Dennis Martin is cited to ask about how Protestant/Evangelical retrieval of tradition can avoid “private” and individual interpretations—as opposed to a tradition that has a magisterium. I again would have liked to hear more about how the same problem inevitably occurs in every tradition, even those with a magisterium. At least we Baptists are honest about it.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 261.

eschatological goal, but it is due to an improper application of an ecclesiology that should be eschatologically oriented.³⁶

Along these lines, Harmon cites Paul Fiddes' suggestion that Baptists think in terms of "a constant *becoming* visible of the whole catholic church."³⁷ I agree with Fiddes and Harmon that such a concept is more helpful, especially for Baptists. I simply wonder if we are not still somehow hindered by the notion of visible unity. Perhaps it is the wrong category. It too often assumes an institutional model of the Body of Christ to the exclusion of any Spiritual ecclesiology. The Eucharistic body—to return to Fiddes' point—*becomes* the visible sign of Christ's body and so manifests Christ's presence. Isn't "manifestation" a better category than visibility?³⁸ (After all, even Thomas Aquinas denies that Christ is "visibly" present in the Eucharist).³⁹ Perhaps one of the gifts we Baptists can offer to the ecumenical dialogue is to correct this notion of visibility with the notion of manifestation.⁴⁰ Or, if "visible unity" is already too entrenched in the discourse of ecumenism, then perhaps we can at least call for its redefinition and reorientation along more promising lines. After all, Jesus prayed (in John 17:21) that the Father would make his disciples "one." How are they to be "one"? Visibly? Jesus' answer is that they are to be one as he and the Father are one: John 17:21 reads, "that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us . . ." Are the Father and the Son visibly one in John 17? I do not see how they could be. This is no prayer for *visible* unity, instead it is a kind of spiritual unity. To be sure, Harmon is right: this oneness should become manifest.⁴¹ After all, the purpose of this oneness is, as Jesus prayed, ". . . so that the world may know . . ." This oneness, therefore, is already a reality—albeit not visibly, and simultaneously Christ's disciples are called to be disciples in such a way that their oneness becomes manifested to the world (cf. John 13:35).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, let me repeat my aim with these critiques. I hope to have engaged Harmon's truly constructive and promising proposals in such a way as to nuance and refine exactly how Baptists can contribute to a

³⁶ *The Catholic Spirit* (Sermon #39 in Albert C. Outler and Richard P. Heitzenrater, eds., *John Wesley's Sermons: An Anthology* [Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1991], 300–309).

³⁷ Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 161–62.

³⁸ Cf. *The Nature and Mission of the Church* (WCC Faith and Order Paper #198; 2005), para. 32: "Visible and tangible signs of the new life of communion are expressed in receiving and sharing the faith of the apostles; breaking and sharing the Eucharistic bread; praying with and for one another and for the needs of the world; serving one another in love; participating in each other's joys and sorrows; giving material aid; proclaiming and witnessing to the good news in mission and working together for justice and peace." Also, cf. Vatican II's *Sacrosanctum Concilium* §7: "Christ is always present in His Church, especially in her liturgical celebrations. He is present in the sacrifice of the Mass, not only in the person of His minister, 'the same now offering, through the ministry of priests, who formerly offered himself on the cross', but especially under the Eucharistic species. By His power He is present in the sacraments, so that when a man baptizes it is really Christ Himself who baptizes. He is present in His word, since it is He Himself who speaks when the holy scriptures are read in the Church. He is present, lastly, when the Church prays and sings, for He promised: 'Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.' (Matt 18.20)"

³⁹ *Summa Theologica* part 3.Q76.art.7; nor sensibly/empirically in any way (cf. part 3.Q75.art.5).

⁴⁰ As I have argued elsewhere, with Matt R. Jenson, *The Doctrine of the Church* (London: T&T Clark, 2010), referenced above.

⁴¹ Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 213.

pilgrim ecumenism. Within such a brief space, I have inevitably failed to represent Harmon's views adequately, for which I must beg his forgiveness.

To be sure, if I were speaking with Baptists who resisted Jesus' ecumenical call for the church to be one, then I would be arguing in the same vein as Harmon, insisting that a receptive ecumenism is part and parcel to being Christian, and therefore he is to be thanked for his contribution. But just between us "theological educators," who Harmon says bear the responsibility to move this conversation forward,⁴² I am simply trying to ask how we can do so with theological precision and ecclesiological faithfulness. What I want is to find a synthesis where we can embrace both the ecumenical pilgrimage and the congregationalists' gifts. In my mind, that is one of the many areas where we can applaud Harmon: he has helped us see the need to champion both a Baptist identity and the ecumenical future.

⁴² Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 191–212 (chapter 8, "The Ecumenical Task of Theology") and 264–65.

RESPONSE TO STEVEN R. HARMON'S *BAPTIST IDENTITY AND THE ECUMENICAL FUTURE: STORY, TRADITION, AND THE RECOVERY OF COMMUNITY*

AMY L. CHILTON THOMPSON

Fuller Theological Seminary and Azusa Pacific University
California, USA

The inside dust jacket of Steve Harmon's book sums up well my own experience as a life-long "little 'b'" Baptist and a ten-year "big 'B'" Baptist "convert," declaring that "Baptists tend to be the 'problem children' of the ecumenical movement." Having come to the American Baptist Churches as a seminary student disenchanted with my experiences as a woman pastor in the "non-denominational" Christian Churches/Churches of Christ, but still hopeful that local church polity (albeit, now, in tension with trans-local associationalism) could be fertile ground to join the Spirit's movements, I quickly found myself mired in the unsettling tension of a local church caught between ideologically-opposed regional associations. Having sat through fiery ordination councils (my own included), fight-to-the-death congregational meetings, regional association realignment, and the everyday "Baptist" battles over who is allowed to set foot in the church kitchen, I nod my head in agreement with the label of "problem child"—yet affirm the deep need for Baptists to find in our own narratives the impetus for pursuing this "receptive ecumenism" for which Harmon so eloquently and astutely advocates.

In the basic theology course I teach at Azusa Pacific University in Azusa, California, comprised mostly of "non-denominational" evangelical and Roman Catholic non-majors, I begin each class period with the communal praying of the Apostles' Creed. Then, being the "problem child," I take distinct pleasure during the second week of class of asking my students to raise their hands if they are uncomfortable with praying "the holy catholic church." Evangelical hands around the room sheepishly rise, opening what will become a semester-long conversation about what it means to be the church together.

Harmon's opening question, concerning the "why" of Baptist catholicity, lies at the heart of my students' discomfort: "why should Baptists embrace catholicity as essential to their identity? And by what authority would they do so?" (7). For Baptists in the "trenches," *contesting* catholicity is the *modus operandi*—or, more accurately, contesting "big 'C'" Catholicity. It is Harmon's distinction between *quantitative* and *qualitative* catholicity that, I believe, paves a productive way past this negative self-identification, particularly if Baptists can take seriously the task of *traditioning* ourselves along McClendonion/MacIntyrian lines. It is the distinction between quantitative catholicity (the easy sort for Baptists to swallow, given its *invisibility*) and qualitative catholicity that makes actual demands on Baptist practices of ecumenical engagement, liturgical life, trans-local associationalism, and more. It is precisely in this challenging distinction that Harmon's call for *receptive catholicity*, in which "dialogue is always an 'exchange of gifts,'" brings to light not only the deficiencies of Baptist ecumenical engagement, but also the opportunities for Baptists to more richly and

honestly locate ourselves in our own tradition as we bring our particular ecclesiological gifts to the ecumenical table.¹

Indeed, it is exactly this image of ecumenical table fellowship on which I want to draw: not an image of the academic conference room table, but rather the more familiar image of a Baptist potluck—with tables groaning under heaping bowls of strange salads (crushed ramen on cabbage?), Jell-O of every colour with vegetables disconcertingly suspended in its gelatinous depths, the ever-giving pot of spaghetti, and the one lone box of KFC chicken supplied by the resident bachelor. Harmon has done a more than adequate job exploring Baptist practices of “denominationalism” (shedding helpful light for this American Baptist on the origins of the Cooperative Baptist Fellowship), the Baptist “magisterium,” and those aspects of our tradition that explicitly draw on the “great story” (most notably our hymnals and confessions); he reveals both the creative tension of Baptist ecumenism but also the Baptist traditions’ many gifts to the “little ‘c’” catholic, and specifically “big ‘C’” Catholic, church. *Receptive ecumenism*, the give and take of ecclesial gifts, cannot move forward without creatively accounting for the Baptist potluck—the spaces and places in which the community table-fellowships and, notably, in which the women and bachelors who may have been kept off the stage and out of the council chambers are the members who nourish the bodies and souls of the community. While celery-imbued Jell-O has questionable nourishing or pleasing qualities, its preparation and contribution is indeed sacramental in nature.

It is precisely here that I wish to affirm Harmon’s astute assessment of the “insufficiently catholic character of [our] own communities” (10) and to expand his insightful and necessary engagement of the Baptist “magisterium” (“pastors, teachers, authors, and confessions”) (14). While Courtney Pace asked for a deeper engagement of “contextual” sources, I would like to ask for a deeper engagement of catholic faith stories. Harmon’s discussion of McClendon’s “two-narrative christology” provides six insightful theses for the church’s way forward, one of which is that “the church’s identity is the identity of Christ, which is the story of Christ, which is the story of all the members of Christ’s body” (242).² It is this emphasis on the stories of the church, our “potluck sacramentalism,” that I believe provides a real way for local congregations to enter into the gift-giving of receptive ecumenism—not only to embracing our own stories, but also embracing the stories of the little *and* big ‘C’ catholic church. This is a mutually constitutive understanding of the pot-luck table and the communion table, a table at which Baptists bring the ecumenical gift of “unfencing.”

Loida Martell-Otero, constructive Baptist theologian at Palmer Seminary, defines the *charisms* in her co-authored book *Latina Evangelicas*, as the Spirit “going native” in the quotidian of the Latina faithful.³ This “going native,” which encapsulates the movements of the Spirit outside of the magisterial approved gifts

¹ Steven R. Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future: Story, Tradition, and the Recover of Community* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 150. Quoting John Paul II, *On Commitment to Ecumenism* (*Ut Unum Sint*, May 25, 1995), § 28.

² For McClendon’s development of “two narrative Christology,” see James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Doctrine: Systematic Theology, Volume 2* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 165–79.

³ Zaida Maldonado Pérez, Loida I. Martell-Otero, and Elizabeth Conde-Frazier, *Latina Evangelicas: A Theological Survey from the Margins* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2013). For the discussion on the Holy Spirit “going native,” see chapter 2, “Dancing with the Wild Child: *Evangelicas* and the Holy Spirit.”

and in everyday of life, when held in tension with James Wm. McClendon, Jr.'s, systemic use of biography as a richly MacIntyrian understanding of tradition, perhaps encapsulates Harmon's assessment that one key Baptist gift is the "insistence that God's freedom to be God in the life of church not be constrained" (16).

So what is this *traditioning*, this "distinctive way of being Catholic" that locates us in our narratives? Let us briefly visit McClendon's early *Biography as Theology*, a book about which I have long been in friendly disagreement with McClendon's widow, the philosopher Nancey Murphy, concerning its value in his wider corpus. Despite Murphy's insistence that McClendon moved past *Biography*, a quick survey of the table of contents of his three-volume *Systematic Theology* shows McClendon alternating between doctrinal and biographical chapters—essentially, applying to theology the method of *Biography*. *Biography*, assigned to my undergrad students to be read during our opening week on theological methods and sources, causes them great consternation because they initially believe that McClendon leaves Scripture behind entirely, sourcing theology only in *individual experience*. While their quiz grades show that I have not entirely convinced them, McClendon's actual argument is that if the church is to do theology faithfully, it must do theology *communally*, deeply rooted in the ongoing and living tradition of the narrative community; namely, doing "Bible study in reading communities" (180). McClendon shows how the examination of "singular or striking lives . . . may serve as data for a Christian thinker," holding the church accountable to its living tradition in which Scripture can always give more of itself.⁴ McClendon challenges his readers by showing that the "the only relevant critical examination of Christian beliefs may be one that begins by attending to lived lives."⁵ Not only does McClendon's "own theological career [have] the character of pilgrim journey" (231), but his choice of biographies reflects this as well: Martin Luther King, Jr., Clarence Jordan, Dorothy Day, Jonathan and Sarah Edwards, and such oddities as Dag Hammarskjold and Ludwig Wittgenstein.

It is this this move toward the ecumenical future that Harmon and I believe Baptists must and can contribute. We Baptists ought to take seriously Harmon's closing statement that in this future Baptists and Catholics will be "strangers no longer but pilgrims together on the way to [God's] kingdom" (272). What Martell-Otero and McClendon show us is that this movement must include the charisms of the everyday, the biographies of "singular lives"; theology "must continually find fresh exemplars."⁶ Perhaps one gift that Baptists bring to the table is the insistence that the stories of faith lives matter, that the story behind Grandma Lin's top ramen salad, despite the oddity of the dish, warrants its asked-for inclusion at the next pot-luck. But, beyond recounting our own stories, Harmon issues an important injunction, exemplified in McClendon's work: *the stories of the faith lives of Catholics must matter to Baptists as well*. Certainly Catholics bring to the table a rich hagiography that we Baptists lack, and from which we can learn, but they also bring the faith stories of the *quotidian* Catholic—the Catholic in the trenches of everyday life.

⁴ James Wm. McClendon, Jr., *Biography as Theology: How Life Stories Can Remake Today's Theology*, 2nd ed. (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1990), 22.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ *Ibid.*, 23.

The Los Angeles Roman Catholic cathedral, Our Lady of the Angels, completed in 2002, boasts a contemporary sanctuary whose walls are lined with intricately woven tapestries depicting 135 life-sized saints and blessed, men and women, spanning the last two millennia.⁷ While these tapestries incorporate the expected (Mary, Augustine, Anselm), they also incorporate the lesser-known (Felicitas and Perpetua, Philomena), as well as twelve unnamed faithful (many of whom are children), dressed in everyday garb, representing the unnamed faithful of the global Catholic Church. It is the stories of those unnamed Catholics, as well as the Catholics who live next door to us or who worship down the street, that we Baptists must invite to the pot-luck of receptive ecumenism. Not the Catholic-in-theory, but my Polish Catholic grandmother who proudly bedecked her picture of John Paul II with her yearly Palm Sunday frond, or the Catholic nun who taught my father and his brothers in elementary school in their poor North Portland neighborhood of Saint Johns, or the many Catholic faithful who practise their Christian faith in the *quotidian* of their days. In this way, we can help our own faith communities enter into the gift exchange of receptive ecumenism in a way that not only draws on our own strengths as a richly-storied and traditioned people, but also engaging our Catholic brothers and sisters in witnessing to the movement of the Spirit in their own everyday. The blessing of this is that it expands our pot-luck table in new and definitely catholic ways, enriching our own quotidian faith.

⁷ For a description of the tapestries as well as a picture gallery go to <http://www.olacathedral.org/cathedral/art/tapestries.html>.

**BAPTISTS, CATHOLICITY, AND MISSING VOICES: A RESPONSE TO STEVEN
HARMON**

COURTNEY PACE

Memphis Theological Seminary
Tennessee, USA

I am grateful for the invitation to this plenary panel, which is considering Steve Harmon's challenge to Baptists toward ecumenical fellowship across the body of Christ. For context and to situate my remarks, let me offer a snapshot of my Baptist upbringings. I was raised in a fundamentalist Southern Baptist church, unbeknownst to me until I started exploring seminaries. My feminist awakening began at George W. Truett Theological Seminary, thanks to an exceptional professor who challenged me to see the Bible with fresh eyes. In the first year of my PhD program at Baylor, I was ordained in a Cooperative Baptist Fellowship church. I currently belong to a fully inclusive CBF church (one which could just as easily be in the Alliance) and serve on the faculty of an ecumenical seminary. Coming up as a Baptist minister, I found Baptist pulpits mostly closed to me, and UCC pulpits wide open. As a church historian and as a woman called to ministry, I have had to wander beyond the Baptist fold to negotiate my own identity, and was delighted to take part in Harmon's exploration of this path for Baptists in general.

A number of aspects of Harmon's project are commendable. His inquiry originated from both scholarly research and personal experiences in international and ecumenical dialogues. His work rests on the genuine hope of finding common ground across the body of Christ, ideally even the recovery of a cooperative Christian community that could see itself as part of one body, even as many denominations.

Harmon also offered some important nuances of the eccentricities of Baptist life, the kinds of things you can only know by living within a tradition: (1) Baptists tend to honour an unofficial magisterium of voices most trusted, such as denominational leaders, officers of the church, and seminary professors; (2) Baptists tend to be most afraid of the imposition of others on individual conscience; and (3) Baptists tend to be most motivated and inspired by fresh revelation bringing us back to the heart of the text. It is important that Harmon acknowledged that these things work in Baptist life because they are voluntary. Just because they tend to be the case does not mean they can be taken for granted.

Having sat through my fair share of Sunday school chit chat, I have heard plenty of laity engagement with "What them folks is sayin'" versus "What the Bible says." I have heard dialogue, nuance, support, and disavowal. I have served in churches with a near 1:1 deacon to non-deacon ratio, and in churches with two deacons—one for each of the two ruling families. I have seen every single decision be vetted through and domineered by the deacons. I have seen deacons that do absolutely nothing but meet regularly. I have seen deacon recommendations defeated by a popular dissenting vote. I have seen people stay in churches which voted for something they opposed, and I have seen people leave churches that passed votes they supported. So, yes, there is an unofficial magisterium in Baptist life, but it is voluntary. Even using "the M word" feels inappropriate because it only has authority if people want it to.

Harmon was also right that increased attention to political and social changes has led to increased divisions, though I would counter that this is but one way to view this. People at both ends of the spectrum have united across denominational lines in support of common values. Denominational loyalty has declined in value, and I have found people are more likely to collaborate if they have similar views on abortion, homosexuality, and social services, than if they are of the same denomination. I'll confess that I often feel more comfortable talking to progressive people of other faiths than I do talking to some Baptists.

My understanding of Harmon's ideal is as a tree of fellowship, in which each branch offers gifts to and receives gifts from the others. For instance, Baptists are strong in prioritizing scripture and rejecting overly realized eschatologies, but can learn from other traditions. He likens this model to brands of monasticism within Catholicism, that Benedictines or Franciscans or Jesuits are various ways of being Catholic.

While the analogy does clarify his intention neatly, I struggle with the possible result of such a model. Monasticism began on the margins of Catholicism, in some sense seeking imitation of Christ, and in another as a protest movement against the institutionalization of the church. And as its popularity increased, there was a concerted effort to bring monasticism under the authority of Catholicism, which happened with tremendous success. And with that came all of the trappings of that institution, namely patriarchy. Women pursued monasticism in obedience to God's call, since they had been marginalized from leadership during institutionalization, but as Catholicism tackled anti-clericalism and medieval political chaos, it became unapologetically patriarchal, bringing respected abbesses under male authority without due cause and forcing other female orders to close altogether. While I understand what Harmon is getting at, this analogy leads me to my primary critique of Harmon's work.

It does not address race or gender. This is a book about Western men and the institutions they've built arguing with each other across time and space. This book is privilege talking to privilege, with very little concentration on the people of faith. Women are the backbone of every church, and that is certainly the case for Baptists. You cannot discuss Baptist faith without discussing laity, and you cannot discuss Baptist laity without discussing women. Out of 272 pages, this book devotes one paragraph to the "experiential theologies" that are supposed to represent liberation theologies, feminisms, womanisms, mujerista theologies, and other theologies of the people. What is Baptist faith if not hermeneutics by the people? It is inappropriate in the twenty-first century to publish on this subject without giving *significant* consideration to race and gender.

Harmon has responded to my critique of his work's centre-focus by mentioning that the Faith and Order gatherings which are so prominently featured in his work were interracial. This fact is important, but why was this detail not included in the manuscript? If diversity is important, the author should have demonstrated diverse voices in his methodology and research. I know Steve Harmon to be a strong supporter of women in ministry. I am not accusing the author of not being concerned for these issues. But his concern for these issues is not a prominent part of his quest for Baptist catholicity, and it should be.

One of the reasons why most churches are in decline is because the most visible aspects of the church in society have tended toward respectability politics and institutional stability rather than openness to the

biblical text or the voices of the people. The most visible elements of the church tend to be belligerent against what specialists have learned about things like sexuality, the environment, and family dynamics. In some cases, that reflects a particular hermeneutical commitment, but in most cases, it has indicated a focus on maintaining the authority and coffers of our institutions instead of humble discernment between holiness and profanity.

As we think about needed renewal in Baptist life or Catholic life or Christian life in general, it is critical that we include discussion of why churches have been declining, why churches have separated and turned against each other, why people seek peace and justice outside of the church. Our discussion of possible interchurch reconciliation cannot succeed without this perspective, or without the humility to genuinely listen in these conversations, even and especially, when what we hear might make us uncomfortable or compel us to change.

Harmon positioned his work as part of a historic tradition of seeking unity across theological divides. But as I have understood these historic conversations, as much as they have been about reaching consensus, they have also been about maintaining authority and institutional stability. These councils and meetings tend to be called in response to crises, and the quest for institutional stability undermines relationships every time, as we have clearly seen in Baptist life.

Catholicism is not without its internal drama. Some organize to ordain women, knowing they will surely be excommunicated, while others genuinely believe that women are made for breeding only. Some reject women in ministry because women insufficiently resemble Christ, yet turn the other cheek when male clergy abuse innocents. I could say the same thing about Baptists.

Some moderates seek unity with both poles, but those who have been victimized by the far right—women, people of colour, people who are LGBTQ—may reasonably hope for repentance to accompany any suggested reconciliation with their oppressors. As a survivor of domestic and spiritual abuse, I mean this sincerely. Justice issues matter. When we gloss over issues of justice, we beat the battered again and again with our complacent silence. Those on the right might respond that morality matters and that we cannot gloss over issues of piety. One at the expense of the other is *not* a unified body.

I appreciated Harmon's analysis of post-Vatican II Catholicism, specifically ways that Catholics have sought to be more inclusive in their decision making, such as creating a kind of clergy-laity collaboration in discernment. Maybe we can say they learned from Baptists. But ultimately, the power structures have maintained their virtually unchecked power. There may well be strong numbers among Catholics who want to affirm the priesthood of women, but what hearing do women receive when all of the deciding voices are men? This reminds me of a recent Amy Schumer sketch about the congressional committee for women's health, comprised exclusively of men who were ignorant of and repulsed by women's health issues.

There are a number of external Catholic groups that have retained the name Catholic and are “smells, bells, and whistles” Catholic, but are fully inclusive of women and LGBTQ persons in membership and leadership. Baptists know that road as well. Honestly, if I am thinking of reconciling across the Reformation divides, I am more inclined to begin conversations with some of these marginal groups rather than the official institutions. The Alliance of Baptists has made some progress in this regard in its relationship with

the UCC and Disciples of Christ. CBF Georgia and a branch of the Progressive National Baptists reached a covenant of action modeled after Dr. King's beloved community. This kind of progress tends to happen among those on the margins, not starting from the centre.

Baptists have always been a people of the margins. Our prophetic strength is in our marginality, our freedom to hear the word and proclaim it, our detachment from formal institutions that might interfere with individual conscience. I understand Harmon has gone to great lengths to argue that seeking communion with catholicity does not diminish Baptistness, and I was greatly moved by the vision he has for human harmony. Oh that we could all sit at one table, many yet one. But what he wants cannot be found in the centre. It can only be found on the margins.

Pope Francis has taken action for those on the margins, namely the poor. His efforts are noble and commendable. But what has he done for women, except tell them to bear their cross silently and be thankful? He made a statement recently about being more hospitable to divorced and LGBTQ people, but it was little more than "hate the sin, love the sinner." This way of thinking still separates as 'other' and 'broken' what is neither other nor broken. When churches tell battered wives to stay with their husbands, to pray that God will make it better, we give these sisters an impossible choice. Every time the church tells an LGBTQ person to deny their very DNA and just not be sexual at all, we give that dear soul an impossible choice.

Until our dialogue about reconciliation gives those ideas full hearing, until our dialogue is *as* concerned about women, people of colour, poor people, and LGBTQ people, among others, as we have previously been about institutions and creeds, we are failing to be people of the biblical text. Those on the margins of society are at the centre of the biblical text. And they should be at the centre of our conversation.

**DESCRIPTION, PRESCRIPTION, AND THE ECUMENICAL POSSIBILITIES OF
BAPTIST IDENTITY: READING STEVEN HARMON'S *BAPTIST IDENTITY AND THE
ECUMENICAL FUTURE***

ANDREW SMITH

Carson-Newman University
Tennessee, USA

I have been interested in Dr. Harmon's proposals since I first encountered his work in 2007, when I read *Towards Baptist Catholicity* for review in the *Review and Expositor*. I write, first, as a person who is, in the main, "on board" with Harmon's proposals as they were laid out in that first book and with more specificity in this one. Dr. Harmon and I share a concern for moderate Baptists' relative inattention to ecumenical matters, and I accept his basic contention that the only way for us to meaningfully encounter the ecumenical movement is through the kind of catholicity he lays out here. By training, I am a historian and not a theologian; my questions about the book grow out of my training in that field.

First, I'll offer my impression of the book's basic contentions. As he did in *Towards Baptist Catholicity*, Harmon here asserts that while Baptists contend that the Bible is their only authority in matters of faith and practice, Baptists actually do attend to tradition as a sort of secondary authority; Harmon is still asserting that without the guidance of tradition in some form, it would be impossible for Baptists to derive some of their typical ideas from Scripture. In this volume, Harmon leverages this assertion about Baptists' implicit acceptance of tradition as a source of authority as a point of contact with other Christians, particularly Roman Catholics. Pointing to the results of years of dialogue between the Baptist World Alliance and the Roman Catholic Church, Harmon asserts that significant common ground between these two groups does exist and that Baptists must make a commitment to engage these kinds of ecumenical dialogues in order to be the people that they must be to be faithful to the call of Christ.¹ In fact, Harmon comes right out and tells us that the *only* reason for a Baptist denomination to exist *at all* is to offer an institutional, ecclesial dimension to the tradition that in turn makes ecumenical dialogue possible.²

In response to this, I want to offer two thoughts. First, Harmon has done something in this book that he did not do in *Towards Baptist Catholicity*, and that is give us a positive reason to be Baptist. This book is rich and thick, but I believe this may be the most important contribution of the book. In *Towards Baptist Catholicity*, Harmon explains that despite his commitment to the Great Tradition, he will remain a Baptist because he grew up a Baptist, because they nurtured him as he trained for ministry, and because the cause of ecumenism is not served by Christians running to-and-fro seeking a more congenial fellowship.³ Instead,

¹ Steven R. Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future: Story, Tradition and the Recovery of Community* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), ch. 3 passim.

² *Ibid.*, 149.

³ Steven R. Harmon, *Towards Baptist Catholicity: Essays on Tradition and the Baptist Vision* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2006), 201–202.

Harmon notes that Christians seeking to serve the cause of ecumenism “must first go deep within their own traditions in order to recover elements of catholicity that once characterized their own churches but have been subsequently neglected and in order to identify the sources of the present barriers to a mutually realized catholicity.”⁴

Ten years later, Harmon shows that he has done just this; in fact, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future* could be read as a working out of this form of Baptist ecumenism. For Harmon, ecumenism proceeds as communions enter dialogue with each other and offer each other “gifts” growing from their own traditions; this “receptive ecumenism” is the means by which various bodies offer their own understandings of Christian faith and practice to other groups while accepting gifts that other groups bring, all undergirded by the understanding that communions that lack these gifts lack something in their own catholicity.⁵ In other words, Roman Catholics, no less than Baptists, are less than fully catholic to the extent that they lack the insights that Baptists and others bring to them. For Harmon, Baptists and other free church Christians offer to the wider church a resistance to “overly realized eschatologies of the church,” instead seeing themselves as a “pilgrim people” who know that they are not yet what they should be.⁶ In other words, Baptists do have a distinctive identity, and their ecumenical involvement is an embrace and offering of that identity, rather than an abandonment of it. This is a new turn in Harmon’s work, and one that benefits his agenda, if I may call it that, because it tacitly rejects the nineteenth century idea that Baptists best serve the cause of Christian unity by standing pat and waiting for the rest of Christendom to come around to the Baptist way of thinking and doing. Instead, Harmon stresses that the heart of Baptist identity is our very unwillingness to claim that we have it all right, even as we can rest assured that the Baptist tradition holds in trust insights that the church needs. In other words, Harmon articulates a vision of Baptist identity that makes ecumenical involvement the only legitimate outworking of that identity. This is subtle, quietly resting on an assumption that lists of “Baptist distinctives” that feature in classroom treatments of Baptist history, such as adult believers’ baptism and congregational autonomy, are actually just secondary issues growing out of a primary resistance to “overly realized eschatologies of the church” and our commitment to being a pilgrim people. Some of us will accept this assertion more easily than others, but it must be granted that Harmon has articulated in this volume a positive identity for the Baptist tradition which also leaves the door for ecumenical engagement wide open.

Second, when Harmon notes that ecumenical engagement is the only reason for Baptists to have Baptist denominations, I immediately remember that most Baptists say that their denominations are about cooperative efforts and, especially, missions. Local churches are too small to send missionaries or build colleges and seminaries or do so many needful things, so Baptists set up denominations to cooperate. Is this legitimate? I hope it is, since Dr. Harmon is very explicit about putting responsibility for developing Baptists’ ecumenical conscience directly upon theological educators. For Harmon, these are the people responsible for inculcating young ministers-in-training with a sense that ecumenical involvement is important, leading

⁴ Ibid., 202.

⁵ Harmon, *Baptist Identity*, 150.

⁶ Ibid., 16.

them to encourage their future congregations to study ecumenical documents congregationally, as this is the *only* way that they can have any meaning at the local level. It may be that Harmon can articulate everything that our denominations do, including church planting, general benevolence, and education, as moving us either forwards or backwards in terms of our ecumenical awareness and engagement, but he has not articulated this in his book. Perhaps it's unfair for me to think that he should have.

I do have some further questions for Dr. Harmon—friendly questions that grow from my fiduciary concern with his theological project. First, and this is the part where I believe I may be a naïve historian, doesn't this whole book slide imperceptibly between descriptive and prescriptive claims, often without really being clear about which is being made at any particular time? For instance, Harmon notes that "Baptists . . . locate the communal interpretation of scripture in the ecclesial community, but primarily in the form of the gathered local congregation."⁷ The footnote here points us to Philip Thompson's dissertation and to the Baptist Manifesto. My point is not that these are things that shouldn't be in a footnote, but that these are sources that still remain hotly contested among the theological educators that are the target audience of this book. Harmon makes this statement like it is settled, when, in fact, it is not.

Has Dr. Harmon resigned himself to the fact that some Baptists will never get on board with post-liberalism? Maybe he is writing to an audience that can accept this claim as settled and therefore as descriptive; but I doubt that this is the case. How am I supposed to read these numerous claims that are stated as fact when I know that many readers will contest them robustly?

Second, Harmon notes that in the posture of "receptive ecumenism," Baptists give of themselves to other communions who need our insights in order to more fully realize their own catholicity, while we receive insights from other communions for the same reason. This is welcome and a point well-taken, but I find that it sparks a nagging question. What if the Baptists, throughout their first difficult decades and centuries, were right about their unqualified rejection of infant baptism? What if, at least on this one point, our job is to give this gift to the rest of the church, and the job of the rest of the church is to receive it? The clear trajectory of the Faith and Order stream of the ecumenical movement (and thanks be to Dr. Harmon for defending and vindicating Faith and Order ecumenism during its darkest hour) is towards mutual recognition of believers' baptism and infant baptism. Is there room in Dr. Harmon's proposal for more conservative Baptists that are interested in a broad reception of the Great Tradition but still think that we have it right on baptism or perhaps on some other key contested issues?

Third, Baptists are diverse. To paraphrase George Orwell, some Baptists are more diverse than others. There are, for instance, Baptists that affirm that only Baptists will be a part of the Bride of Christ at the eschaton; these Baptists assert that other Christians, while saved, will occupy some lesser, subservient position at the wedding supper of the lamb throughout eternity. In other words, these Baptists identify their own churches completely and uncritically with Christ's inner circle to be revealed at the end of time.⁸ If that is not an "overly realized eschatology," I don't know what is. What am I to do with these people? Should I

⁷ Ibid., 87.

⁸ For instance, see Roy Mason, *The Myth of the Universal Invisible Church Theory Exploded*, ch. 12 passim, <http://www.pbcofdecalabama.org/RMason/myth8.htm#Chapter%2012>

write them off as “not really Baptist?” I find that distasteful. Should we condescend to them and tell them that we know better than they what constitutes their *true* theological identity? I have to admit that at times, in reading Harmon’s book, I felt like Dr. Harmon was telling Baptists who they really are, as if Baptists need professional theologians to articulate their identity not only for them, but *to* them.

This leads to one final observation about a point that is rather central to Harmon’s argument. Again and again, Harmon reminds the reader, quoting Alasdair MacIntyre, that a “living tradition is an historically extended, socially embodied argument, and an argument precisely in part about the goods which constitute that tradition.”⁹ Harmon uses this assertion to remind Baptists that an emphasis on tradition necessarily includes the kind of contestation that leads to better ecumenical understanding, but what he never asserts and may not realize is the extent to which this definition may well position Baptists as the most “traditional” of all American Protestant denominations. In his seminal *Religion in the Old South*, now almost forty years old, Donald Mathews noted that when Regular and Separate Baptists confronted each other in the backwoods of North Carolina and Virginia in the 1760s, the ensuing doctrinal debate was conducted on a “solid theological platform”; Baptists preferred to define themselves using “theological symbols” refined through “prolonged theological discussion,” as Regulars finally accepted the Separates’ rather rigid definition of what constituted proper baptism. The onlooking Methodists, on the other hand, “seemed to have . . . found the endless controversy over who we are, what we shall be, and what we believe a lot of nonsense.”¹⁰ For Mathews, early Methodists were people who couldn’t stomach Baptists’ constant bickering “about the goods which constitute that tradition.” Harmon has done Baptists a service in offering us an understanding of tradition which frames it as an invitation to conversation and an opportunity to grow. If we are to believe Donald Mathews’ account of what made frontier Baptists unique among their evangelical competitors, the ideas in Harmon’s book build a sturdy bridge between Baptists’ fractious past and an ecumenical future.

⁹ Ibid., 49–50.

¹⁰ Donald G. Mathews, *Religion in the Old South* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 32.

**LOCATING THE UNITY OF CHRIST'S RULE: A RESPONSE TO RESPONDENTS TO
*BAPTIST IDENTITY AND THE ECUMENICAL FUTURE***

STEVEN R. HARMON

Gardner-Webb University School of Divinity
North Carolina, USA

I'm pleased that my respondents haven't shrunk from challenging me. They've embodied well the contestation of what it means to be Baptist and Christian that I've argued is indispensable for our pilgrim journey toward the ecumenical future. Before responding to the questions they've posed, I want to engage broadly and somewhat indirectly their perceptions of my agenda.

The book's cover image has become symbolic to me in this connection. The dust jacket art isn't the first cover Baylor University Press submitted for my consideration. The first proposed cover featured a Russian Orthodox icon of the Council of Nicaea in AD 325.¹ "It looks good," I thought, and the choice of an image of the first ecumenical council, which belongs to the heritage of the whole church, made sense in relation to the book's theme. So I replied that I liked the cover, but to myself I worried that it might communicate something I didn't intend: that the book was about recovering some idealized past expression of Christian community. Later I received a message soliciting my thoughts on another cover, which ended up being the final choice.² It looked like another icon of one of the ecumenical councils, but I had no idea which one. A Google image search revealed it as a sixteenth-century wall fresco of the Council of Ephesus in AD 431 from the Church of St. Sozomenos in Galata, Cyprus painted by Orthodox iconographer Symeon Axenti.³ "This is aesthetically pleasing," I thought, "but what an odd choice of a council." Yet as I learned more about the image, I came to regard it as exceedingly appropriate for this book. The final cover image is only a portion of the fresco, from its upper left quadrant. The full fresco illustrates well the pilgrim character of the quest for unity—not the restoration of some idealized past unity, but movement toward a future unity that will mark a church fully under the rule of Christ. The fresco and its context are in tension with unity and suggest some of the reasons Baptists, as I've characterized them, contest realized eschatologies of the church. We have the machinations of the messiest of the seven ecumenical councils: on the left are Cyril and the Egyptian bishops, and on the right are John and the Antiochene bishops who arrived late and, incensed that the Council had been essentially decided in their absence, convened their own council and excommunicated the other bishops. There's the intertwining of church and imperial power:

¹ The image, which may be viewed online at <https://www.superstock.com/stock-photos-images/4069-5167> is from a mid-eighteenth-century icon calendar for the month of October by the Novgorod School of Russian Orthodox iconographers.

² For the final front cover image on the dust jacket of *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, see the book's page on the Baylor University Press site at http://www.baylorpress.com/Book/470/Baptist_Identity_and_the_Ecumenical_Future.html.

³ Symeon Axenti's 1513 wall fresco of the Council of Ephesus in the Church of St. Sozomenos in Galata, Cyprus may be viewed online at <http://www.katapi.org.uk/ChristianFaith/StSozomenos.htm>; the image posted online is credited to Henry Chadwick and Gillian Rosemary Evans, eds., *Atlas of the Christian Church* (London: Macmillan, 1987).

emperor Theodosius II wasn't actually present at the council but is prominently portrayed in the centre of the fresco, between the two factions, as the council's presiding authority. There's the silencing of the voices of theological dissent, represented by Macedonius and Nestorius, anathematized as heretics *in absentia* and depicted as cowering beneath the feet of the council fathers. And then there's the context of the painter and the church for which the fresco was painted in 1513—Orthodox, almost five centuries after 1054 Great Schism and on the eve of the further divisions of the church in the sixteenth century (the fresco dates to 1513). This is not the church fully under the rule of Christ; thus the book's summons to ecumenical pilgrimage.

Andrew Smith wonders if the cooperative impetus for Baptist denominational structures has a place in my ecumenical rationale for their continuation (offered in chapter six, "The End of Baptist Denominationalism"). Yes—in light of the coinherence of ecumenism and mission,⁴ and to the degree that such intra-denominational cooperation takes seriously the "Lund Principle" voiced at the Third World Conference on Faith and Order in 1953: "the churches should act together in all matters except those in which deep differences of conviction compel them to act separately."⁵ In other words, what the churches *can* do together, they *should* do together. Denominational structures can be the means by which interdenominational cooperation can be coordinated. In that connection the Baptist impetus for translocal denominational structures would indeed join the way in which translocal denominational structures serve as the bearers of the traditions that facilitate receptive ecumenical learning as that which legitimates the continued separate ecclesial existence of Baptist denominational identity—for the time being.

He asks also about what seems to be my lack of distinction between description and prescription. I grant that we theologians don't always signpost that move, but I should hasten to add that historians too narrate the Christian past in subtly prescriptive ways—and I don't think that's a bad thing for either of us to do. The example Smith offers is what I would call "prescriptive re-description," a complexifying of the received description that raises questions about its prescriptive adequacy and suggests the possibility of a differently nuanced prescription. I note three things about this example. First, what he quotes continues,

⁴ The coinherence of unity and mission, evident in the roots of the modern ecumenical movement in the modern missions movement, has been re-emphasized in recent ecumenical theology. If one compares World Council of Churches, *Baptism, Eucharist and Ministry* (Faith and Order Paper no. 111; Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1982), with World Council of Churches, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* (Faith and Order Paper no. 214; Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2013), one feature of *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* that seems most obviously an advance beyond *BEM* is the way it reengages the roots of the modern ecumenical movement in the modern missions movement. *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* frames the quest for Christian unity as a participation in God's mission in the world in its opening chapter, titled "God's Mission and the Unity of the Church." The opening paragraph ends with these two sentences: "The Church, as the body of Christ, acts by the power of the Holy Spirit *to continue his life-giving mission in prophetic and compassionate ministry and so participates in God's work of healing a broken world*" [emphasis added] (§ 1 [p. 5]). This first chapter sees the *missio dei*, "God's plan to save the world," as carried out in the sending of the Son, defined by the earthly ministry of Jesus, extended in the church as the body of Christ that continues his mission, and empowered by the Holy Spirit sent upon the church and into the world (§ 3 [p. 6]). In the next chapter on "The Church of the Triune God," the church "is by its very nature missionary, called and sent to witness in its own life to that communion which God intends for all humanity and for all creation in the kingdom" [§ 13 (p. 10)].

⁵ World Council of Churches, *The Third World Conference on Faith and Order, Lund 1952*, ed. Oliver S. Tomkins (London: SCM Press, 1953), 15–16.

“even while they affirm and encourage the individual reading of Scripture.”⁶ Second, this isn’t a description of Baptists in their distinctiveness, but rather my articulation of a basic consensus between Baptists and Catholics that’s also significantly differentiated in the remainder of the paragraph. Third, the “Baptist Manifesto”⁷ and Philip Thompson’s dissertation⁸ are footnoted there not as sources that substantiate bare description, but as examples of this differently nuanced way of reading the early Baptist insistence that the Bible be read for oneself in light of the early Baptist insistence that those who read the Bible for themselves should read it as a community that confers regularly upon its sense.⁹ Thompson calls attention to Thomas Helwys’ critique of a kind of individual interpretation practised by Anglican bishops, who interpreted Scripture arbitrarily and coercively apart from the community of the faithful.¹⁰

Is there room in my proposal for Baptists who still think we have it right on some issues like baptism? Yes—I’m one of those. But as I noted with regard to baptism, there’s a sense in which the ecumenical movement, and even the Catholic Church within it, has converged toward our position; yet we can continue to offer believers’ baptism as a gift to the whole church while recognizing parallel essentials in the differently ordered “journey of Christian beginnings” that starts with infant baptism.¹¹

Should Baptists who don’t fit my ecumenical re-description of Baptist identity be written off as not really Baptist? No—for Baptists are diverse. But this diversity should contribute to a living Baptist tradition—a socially-embodied, historically extended argument about what it means to be Baptist in relation to the larger Christian tradition (hat tip to MacIntyre¹²). Living traditions can be killed off when diversity is

⁶ Steven R. Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future: Story, Tradition, and the Recovery of Community* (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2016), 87.

⁷ Mikael Broadway, Curtis W. Freeman, Barry Harvey, James Wm. McClendon, Jr., Elizabeth Newman, and Philip E. Thompson, “Re-envisioning Baptist Identity: A Manifesto for Baptist Communities in North America,” published initially in *Baptists Today* (June 1997): 8–10, and *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 24, no. 3 (Fall 1997): 303–10.

⁸ Philip E. Thompson, “Toward Baptist Ecclesiology in Pneumatological Perspective” (Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 1995).

⁹ Cf. the description of worship in the Smyth-Helwys congregation in Amsterdam in 1609 in a letter from two of its members, Hugh and Anne Broadheade, quoted in Champlin Burrage, *The Early English Dissenters in the Light of Recent Research* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1912), 2:176–77: “The order of the worship and government of our church is [this]: we begin with a prayer, [and] after reading some one or two chapters of the Bible give the sense thereof, and confer upon the same; that done we lay aside our books, and after a solemn prayer [is] made by the speaker, he propounds some text out of the Scripture, and prophecies out of the same, by the space of one hour, or three-quarters of an hour” [spelling and punctuation modernized].

¹⁰ Here is the quotation in question: “It was . . . primarily in the community that Baptists believed that Scripture bore the Word of God. In earliest Baptist worship, after the Scripture was read, the whole congregation conferred upon the sense of the passage prior to any of the day’s four or five expositions. Interpretation of Scripture which was private and dissociated from the community was frowned upon by the Baptists. [Thomas] Helwys excoriated the Church of England for limiting the acceptable interpreters of Holy Writ to the bishops, for such private interpretation kept the Spirit in bondage and made the Word to no effect” (Philip E. Thompson, “Toward Baptist Ecclesiology in Pneumatological Perspective” [Ph.D. dissertation, Emory University, 1995], 65–66). Thompson cites in this connection Thomas Helwys, *A Short Declaration of the Mystery of Iniquity* (London: Thomas Helwys, 1611), 55, and *The Orthodox Creed* (1678), § 37, “Of the Sacred Scripture” (*Baptist Confessions of Faith*, ed. Lumpkin, rev. Leonard, 335–37).

¹¹ E.g., Anglican Consultative Council and Baptist World Alliance, *Conversations Around the World: The Report of the International Conversations between the Anglican Communion and the Baptist World Alliance 2000-2005* (London: Anglican Communion Office, 2005), §§ 42–52 (pages 46–52).

¹² Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theory*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN.: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 222.

merely acknowledged and not constructively contested. I want to be able to ask whether Westboro Baptist Church is really Baptist, or really a church for that matter.¹³

Courtney Pace presses me on the adequacy of religious orders as an analogy for the place of denominational traditions in a united church of the future. All analogies break down at some point, and this one breaks down at several points in the historical development of the relationship of these orders with the institutional church (though the contrast between early monastic communities and “institutional” church is often overdrawn). But in monasticism are antecedents of something like a believer’s church community, whose members are covenanting to bring their life together more fully under the rule of Christ. Others have envisioned an ecumenical future in which denominational traditions function as distinctive religious orders within a united church; for example, the earliest round of the Methodist-Catholic international dialogue creatively re-imagined John Wesley as the founder of a religious order within the one church.¹⁴

I didn’t address gender and race as explicit motifs, but I differ with Pace’s characterization of their place in the book. The point of the paragraph in which I mention several theologies rooted in experience and social location wasn’t to marginalize these voices, but precisely the opposite: to include them squarely *within* this configuration of free church magisterium as voices that must be heard and weighed and not silenced—they are not marginalized, but “magisterialized” in my treatment of them.¹⁵ Another of my respondents in this panel, Amy Chilton Thompson, has exemplified what it might mean for Baptists to do what I have proposed—to invite into Baptists’ practice of congregational magisterium such voices as expressions of Latin American liberation theology, hearing and weighing and not silencing these voices—in her own work engaging the Christology of Catholic Jesuit theologian Jon Sobrino as a paradigm for how Baptist communities might do their own theological work.¹⁶

Pace’s criticism that these voices “on the margins” are missing might hold more water if my primary dialogue partners were individual theologians. But my primary dialogue partners are the expressions of church that are bilateral and multilateral ecumenical dialogue commissions. In the Baptist-Catholic international bilateral in which I participated, eight of the twenty-four members of the joint commission were women, and the most prominent and influential theological voice on the Catholic delegation was easily

¹³ Readers outside of the United States who may not be familiar with the community in Topeka, Kansas that calls itself “Westboro Baptist Church” may gain a sense of the significance of my reference to it from the group’s web site (<http://www.godhatesfags.com/>), the Wikipedia entry for “Westboro Baptist Church” (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Westboro_Baptist_Church), and the collection of text and video stories referencing Westboro Baptist Church on the Huffington Post site (<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/news/westboro-baptist-church/>).

¹⁴ World Methodist Council and Catholic Church, “Denver Report” (1971), in *Growth in Agreement: Reports and Agreed Statements of Ecumenical Conversations on a World Level*, ed. Harding Meyer and Lukas Vischer (Faith and Order Paper no. 108; New York: Paulist Press and Geneva: World Council of Churches, 1984), 308–39.

¹⁵ Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 185–86.

¹⁶ See Amy L. Chilton Thompson, “Unsettling Conversations: Jon Sobrino’s Christo-Praxis as a Baptist Theological Method?” *Perspectives in Religious Studies* 40, 3 (Fall 2013): 235–50; idem, “Practiced Theological Diversity: Jon Sobrino and James Wm. McClendon, Jr., on Theology as a Particular, Christological, Holistically Self-Involving Practice of the Church” (Ph.D. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2015).

Susan Wood, chair of the theology department at Marquette.¹⁷ The commission included representatives from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America, as well as Europe and North America. In the World Council of Churches Commission on Faith and Order, forty percent of the members are female, and forty percent are from Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and Latin America.¹⁸ When I represented the BWA to the plenary meeting of the WCC Faith and Order Commission in 2009, we worked on a draft text of what ultimately became the 2012 convergence text *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*. One member of the commission from India, Syrian Orthodox Metropolitan Geevarghese Mar Coorilos, critiqued the way the draft text on *The Nature and Mission of the Church* treated biblical images of the church in purely doctrinal terms without sufficient attention to their sociological dimensions and implications for the liberation of the dispossessed and the disempowered, what Metropolitan Coorilos called “the actual church amongst communities of people in their struggle for the fullness of life.” He said,

In India, for Dalits who form the majority of the Indian church, the body of Christ is a Dalit body, a ‘broken body’ (the word Dalit literally means “broken” and “torn asunder”). Jesus Christ became a Dalit because he was torn-asunder and mutilated on the cross. The Church as “body of Christ,” in the Indian context, therefore, has profound theological and sociological implications for a Dalit ecclesiology. . . . [*The Nature and Mission of the Church*], however, fails to strike chords and resonate with such contextual theological challenges In other words, the text fails to encounter the real *ecclesia* among communities of people in pain and suffering.¹⁹

As a corrective Metropolitan Coorilos outlined a contextual Christology in which the solidarity of the incarnation is with the Dalit, the untouchable caste, with profound implications for what it means for the church to be the body of this Christ. The Commission heard that voice, and it is discernable in the final text of the document. These theological voices are attentive to gender and race, to experience and social location, as integral to the quest for unity, and they’re my primary dialogue partners—even if my focus on the Faith and Order stream of the ecumenical movement rather than its Life and Work stream, where the ecumenical quest for racial and gender justice has tended to be focused at the international level (and which I also affirm as indispensable for the church’s pilgrimage to the ecumenical future), has meant that I’ve not highlighted these themes in this book in ways that correspond to their importance. The subject of the book is the whole church, and not only Western men—but Pace is right to remind us that the divisions we must overcome to get to the ecumenical future are not only between denominations.

¹⁷ Baptist World Alliance and Catholic Church, “The Word of God in the Life of the Church: A Report of International Conversations between the Catholic Church and the Baptist World Alliance 2006-2010,” Appendix II, “List of Participants in the Joint International Commission,” in *American Baptist Quarterly* 31, 1 (Spring 2012): 112 (28–122).

¹⁸ World Council of Churches Central Committee, “Report of the Governance and Nominations Committee” (July 2-8, 2014), Appendix III, “Membership of Governing Bodies Revised,” 10–11. Online: file:///C:/Users/sharm_000/Downloads/GEN_NOM06_APPROVED_ReportGovernanceNominationsCommittee_rev11Nov2014.pdf.

¹⁹ Geevarghese Mar Coorilos, “The Nature and Mission of the Church: An Indian Perspective,” in *Called to Be the One Church: Faith and Order at Crete*, ed. John Gibaut (Faith and Order Paper no. 212; Geneva: World Council of Churches, 2012), 190–91 (188–92).

She's also right to insist that the maintenance of ecumenical relationships not be prioritized over the prophetic call for just relationships, for ecumenism ought to entail speaking truth in love. The WCC Programme to Combat Racism did this: it spoke truth to a member church, the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa, at great institutional cost to the WCC. But the outcome was repentance and reconciliation, and today the Dutch Reformed Church in South Africa is once again a member church of the WCC that it left in 1961 (readmitted in 2016) and of the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (now known as the World Communion of Reformed Churches) from which it was expelled in 1982 (readmitted in 1998).

David Wilhite, whose response opens with a splendid summary of the agenda of my book in relation to that of my earlier book *Towards Baptist Catholicity*, notes my seeming contrast between the gifts of baptistness and the gifts of catholicity. I don't intend this to be mutually exclusive; it might be better to say that there are gifts of catholicity that have *tended* to be neglected by Baptists, with the result that some of these gifts may have been better stewarded in some other streams of the Christian tradition than ours, even while Baptists may have better stewarded some other gifts of catholicity that other streams of the Christian tradition have tended to neglect. Wilhite correctly perceives the factor behind my shift from references to the Roman Catholic Church in *Towards Baptist Catholicity* to the Catholic Church in *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future* as my sensitivity to the designation preferred by my ecumenical dialogue partners and employed throughout the agreed report issued by the second series of international Baptist-Catholic conversations.²⁰ Yet I do not intend that language to suggest that Catholics have a corner on catholicity, nor for that matter do I intend the occasional use of "ecclesial communities" with reference to Baptist churches to suggest that I think their status is less than fully church. (It should be noted that Catholic documents referring to the "ecclesial communities" of the Protestant Reformation as distinguished from what constitutes a "church" in the proper sense in Catholic understanding—i.e., the Orthodox churches—is at least affirming their ecclesiality, for the application of "ecclesial" to them means that they are regarded as partaking of important qualities of what it means to be church in Catholic understanding, but elaboration of the implications of noting this is beyond the scope of this response.)

I appreciate Wilhite's call for clarification regarding the nature of ecclesial "separation" and "visible unity." I envision visible unity not as structural merger but in terms of the WCC "New Delhi" definition, according to which unity is visibly happening if "all in each place" at the grassroots are mutually engaging in baptismal recognition, Eucharistic hospitality, confession and recognition in one another of the essence of the apostolic faith, recognition of members and ordained ministers, mission and service and work for the liberation of the oppressed, and prophetic engagement when occasion requires.²¹ To the degree that we are unable to do any of these things with full mutuality, separation is happening.

²⁰ Baptist World Alliance and Catholic Church, "The Word of God in the Life of the Church: A Report of International Conversations between the Catholic Church and the Baptist World Alliance 2006-2010," Appendix II, "List of Participants in the Joint International Commission," in *American Baptist Quarterly* 31, 1 (Spring 2012): 28-122.

²¹ World Council of Churches, "Report of the Section on Unity," in *The New Delhi Report: The Third Assembly of the World Council of Churches, 1961* (New York: Association Press, 1962), 116 (116-35): "We believe that the unity which is both God's will and his gift to his Church is being made visible as all in each place who are baptized into Jesus Christ and confess him as Lord and Savior are brought by the Holy Spirit into one fully-committed fellowship, holding the one apostolic faith, preaching the one Gospel, breaking the one bread, joining in common prayer, and having a corporate

I applaud Amy Chilton Thompson's call to extend my emphases on receptive ecumenism and "the story of all the members of Christ's body" as essential to the church's identity in the direction of a more intentional exchange of the gifts of individual faith stories dispersed throughout our churches. She connects this with one of the theses of the McClendon-inspired narrative-christological ecclesiology I outline in chapter nine, but that is not the only location of my suggestion that these gifts be offered and received in the practice of receptive ecumenism. In chapter seven, lived Christian lives were the final example I offered of the voices that should be heard and weighed without being silenced in the congregational practice of "Free Church magisterium."²² Chilton Thompson rightly relates the embrace of these lived embodiments of the Christian narrative to what I framed much earlier in the book as the Baptist gift of the "insistence that God's freedom to be God in the life of the church not be constrained." The McClendon quote that ends the section on the magisterial function of lived Christian lives makes such a connection: "If we remember, and relive, and so tell the stories that great Christians are discovered among us again in our own day, then the saints are alive *and the Spirit again informs the people of God.*"²³ How can these stories be incorporated more intentionally into the fabric of Baptist congregational life? In my earlier book *Towards Baptist Catholicity* I suggested that these formative stories of lived Christian lives become a primary means of illustration in preaching;²⁴ I would add to this suggestion Christian education in its various forms and settings as another congregational locus for this reception.

In conclusion: Jürgen Moltmann served as a member of the WCC Faith and Order Commission for two decades, from 1963 until 1983. In his autobiography he lamented that the paradigm of "unity in reconciled difference" that emerged during the 1970s had become "the sleeping pill of the ecumenical movement," so that "we all stay as we are and are nice to each other."²⁵ I do think we should be nice to each other, but I don't think we can insist that the precondition of Baptist participation in the ecumenical movement be a guarantee that Baptists may stay as we are. Baptist identity is not an end in itself, but a means toward the end of the church fully under the rule of Christ, with unity as one of the marks of that rule. But Christian unity is also not an end in itself; it's a means toward the end of God's intentions for the world. God's goal for the world is community. The church's recovery of community is a means toward that ultimate goal. *The Church: Towards a Common Vision* puts it this way: "Communion, whose source is the very life of the Holy Trinity, is both the gift by which the Church lives and, at the same time, the gift that God calls the

life reaching out in witness and service to all and who at the same time are united with the whole Christian fellowship in all places and all ages, in such wise that ministry and members are accepted by all, and that all can act and speak together as occasion requires for the tasks to which God calls his people."

²² Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 186–88.

²³ Harmon, *Baptist Identity and the Ecumenical Future*, 187–88, quoting James Wm. McClendon, Jr., "Do We Need Saints Today? (1986)," in *The Collected Works of James Wm. McClendon, Jr.*, 2 vols., ed. Ryan Andrew Newson and Andrew C. Wright (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2014), 2:285–94.

²⁴ Steven R. Harmon, *Towards Baptist Catholicity: Essays on Tradition and the Baptist Vision*, Studies in Baptist History and Thought, vol. 27 (Milton Keynes, U.K.: Paternoster, 2006), 170. On the possibility that Baptists might produce their own calendar of saints, including Baptist saints as well as saints from the whole church, see Andrew Goodliff, "Towards a Baptist Sanctoral?" *Journal of European Baptist Studies* 13, 3 (May 2013): 24–30.

²⁵ Jürgen Moltmann, *A Broad Place: An Autobiography*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2008), 86.

Church to offer to a wounded and divided humanity in hope of reconciliation and healing.”²⁶ I hope my book can make some small contribution to helping Baptists heed that call.

²⁶ World Council of Churches, *The Church: Towards a Common Vision*, § 1 (p. 5).